

New York Tribune
September 15, 1914

Paris Standing Strain of War Complacently

Paris, Sept. 14. – Those who fled from Paris described it as a city doomed as a waste place, desolate as a graveyard. Those who run away always are alarmists. They are defensive. They must explain why they ran away.

Paris is like one of those Newport palaces out of season. The owners have temporarily closed it; the windows are barred, the furniture and paintings draped in linen, a caretaker and a night watchman are in possession. It is an old saying that all good Americans go to Paris when they die. Most of them take no chances and prefer to visit it while they are alive.

Before this war, if the visitor was disappointed, it was the fault of the visitor, not of Paris. She was all things to all men. To some she offered triumphal arches, statues, paintings; to others by day racing and by night Maxims and the Rat Mort. Some loved her for the bookstalls along the Seine and ateliers of the Latin Quarter; some for her parks, forest, gardens and boulevards; some because of the Luxembourg; some only as a place where everybody was smiling, happy and polite, where they were never bored, where they were always young, where the lights never went out and there was no early call. Should they today revisit her they would find her grown grave and decorous and going to bed at sundown, but still smiling bravely, still polite.

Great Emptiness in Streets

You cannot wipe out Paris by removing even two million people and closing Cartiers and the Café de Paris. There still remain some hundred miles of boulevards, the Seine and her bridges, the Arc de Triomphe, with the sun setting behind it and the Gardens of the Tuileries. You cannot send them to the storehouse or wrap them in linen. And the spirit of the people of Paris you cannot crush nor stampede.

Between Paris two months since and Paris today the most striking difference is lack of population. Idle rich, the employees of the government and tourists of all countries are missing. They leave a great emptiness when you walk the streets. You feel either that you are up very early before any one is awake or that you are in boom town from which the boom had departed. Rue de la Paix and the boulevards are as empty as Wall Street on a legal holiday.

On almost every one of the noted shops “Ferme” is written large or it has been turned over to the use of the Red Cross. Of the smaller shops that remain open are chiefly bakeshops and chemists, but no man need go naked or hungry. In every block he will find at least one place where he can be clothed and fed. But the theatres are all closed. No one is in a mood to laugh, and certainly no one wishes to consider anything more serious than the present crisis. So there are no revues, operas or comedies.

The Theatre Francais, which in the war of 1870 remained open, is closed, and the Nouveau Cirque, where “Chocolat,” the black “Marceline” of Paris used to disport in the water, is now a hospital.

Chicken Dinners Come High

There is just enough of everything, as the English say, to go on with. There are just enough taxicabs and fiacres, just enough restaurants, three in all; just enough hotels. In my hotel I am a solitary guest. I know of two others where American friends each occupy the same enviable position. The proprietors are glad to have even one patron. I occupy a suite in the Hotel de l’Empire from which Eugenie, when she became an empress, moved to the Tuileries.

It costs eight francs a day. But should I want chicken for dinner it would cost me 12 francs. If I wanted rolls I could not have them, for petitpains consumes too much flour, and so all bread is now baked in large loaves. Everywhere possible the service is rendered by women. When yesterday I arrived at 4 o’clock in the morning women were acting as street cleaners, dragging across the boulevards the snake-like hose on wheels. There are women even on the tram cars as conductors. Men not strong enough for the campaign are in the civil government in every capacity. A man not in uniform wears a brassard on his arm, which shows he is a postman, fireman or messenger.

As in Brussels and London, Boy Scouts are filling positions as messengers, clerks and watchmen once held by their seniors. To offset the empty streets there is the splendid color in thousands of flags. For miles you see from every house a flag of France or the grouped flags of the Allies. They give to the city a brilliant holiday air, as though for some great procession she had decked herself.

Of all the many uniforms the most picturesque are those of the native soldiers of Algiers and Morocco, the Turcos and Zoaves, swaggering in red fez and baggy breeches. They are splendid and soldierly looking. It is no wonder the Germans object to them in this war. I would want the kept out of any war in which they are not on my side. They and the English in khaki always are surrounded by crowds, and when they move on to tell their tale to a fresh audience the crowd cheers them.

Also it cheered this morning when a motorcar slowly rolled down the Boulevard Capucines, bearing aloft two German standards. The soldier who had single-handedly captured one of them was given the Medaille Militaire, the highest military honor. But an hour later, when two wounded men raced by in an automobile, each wearing a German spiked helmet, people only smiled.

They know that to own a helmet you do not necessarily have to fight for it, and that as souvenirs they command a high price. On the contrary, owing to the scarcity of money, in order to get it people ask less than usual. As, for example, my imperial suite at \$1.60 a day. In days of peace it would be many times that.

The Great Change is at Night

The great change that has come over Paris is wrought at 8 o’clock each night. Then, at the hour when once she began to blaze forth in all her brilliancy, she goes to sleep, or, if she does not sleep, she lies awake in the darkness. It is darkness so profound that on the Avenue Champs Elysees you feel as though lost in a great forest. It is not a pleasant sensation. It is not that you

are afraid you will be waylaid and robbed, but rather that you yourself are intent upon some burglary. The lamps of your cab are the only ones in sight, and the sound of your footsteps echo loudly. You feel like an “Apache” bent upon a predatory errand.

So, finding not after 9 o’clock a single light burning in a café and those of the street lamps only at great distances like lighthouses, you are forced indoors. And so is everyone else, and by 10 o’clock Paris, the gay, wicked and beautiful, is as dark as a fishing village on Cape Cod and asleep. And as she sleeps, like the arms of a mother over a cradle, above her rooftops the great searchlights pass in slow, protecting, majestic gestures.