

THE YANKEE IN PARIS

BY VINCENT O'SULLIVAN

COMING back from the Olympic football game, after the American players and the American flag too had been plentifully hissed and howled down by a crowd of about twenty-five thousand Parisians, while some Americans on the bleachers who had ventured to cheer their own side had been knocked senseless by infuriated Frenchmen and the police refused to interfere—on that subdued and dusty return, and for some days after, what struck me above all was the bewilderment of the Americans. They were like a man who suddenly learns that his wife has betrayed him. A cherished dream had been shattered. "We thought the French *liked us!*"

Yes, the half-and-halves who pursue beer and sentiment and "Trilby" atmospheres in Montparnasse, as well as those who distribute money with a free hand to the hotels in the Rue de Rivoli, to the dress-makers in the Rue de la Paix, and to restaurants and backside shows all over the place, actually thought the French liked them!

"They are always so polite to us. They say they just love Americans."

"Who?"

"Why, the people in the stores and in the hotels."

"That is, the people who make money out of the Americans!"

There are three American daily newspapers in Paris. They were evidently as much taken aback by the demonstration on the football ground as their readers. But after a momentary and undecided revolt they soon began to print apologies and explanations. These did not come from

any French source: the French did not apologize at all. It was said that the demonstration was the natural outburst of a patriotic crowd when they saw their countrymen going down to defeat. But the Americans were likewise insulted when they were playing against the Rumanians and the Esthonians by a mob who couldn't have told you in what part of the world those countries are to be found. A lady near me who was particularly violent against "the dirty Americans" confessed that she thought the Esthonians were Negroes. Then, the American newspapers laid stress on the assertion that the action of the crowd was condemned by the entire Paris press. That is far from being the case. The New York *Herald* (Paris edition) came out with the surprising statement that the anti-American demonstrations were staged by a bunch of communists and anarchists—of all people on earth to be accused of nationalism!

Ere many days the word of command went round to drop the subject. Commercial interests came into play. The American tourists must not be discouraged. The editors of the *Herald* and the *Chicago Tribune* (Paris edition) were given the Legion of Honor by the French Government not long ago.

II

One reason why the Americans in Paris were so taken aback by the hostility of the crowd that Sunday is that they live among themselves and have only superficial relations with the French. The French they come into contact with are some few who frequent Americans and talk English,

or shopkeepers, dressmakers, etc., whose interest it is to be polite. Paris is for them like a big seaside resort: "The Americans' Playground." The French are there as scene-shifters to keep the show running. As most of the Americans know the language very imperfectly many serious and disagreeable things escape their notice. Last May I was taking tea with a young man and a girl who had been for several months in Paris. The young man was obliged to return to America; he was rather downhearted about it and hoped to be able to come back soon. They both "just loved Paris." It was the day before the French national election. Neither of them knew an election was on, still less the very important questions which depended on it.

No foreigners are really liked by the French, but the Americans and English are hated. For months the most virulent articles have been appearing in the French newspapers, but you would never guess this state of affairs by reading the American newspapers. From them you would infer that Americans in Paris were quite at home and in the middle of things. They may be quite at home, but in the middle of things they are not, and the French take good care that they shall not be. But the French have their work cut out. Sometimes one has the uncanny impression that it is the foreigners who are in the middle of things and the Parisians who are the outsiders.

That is a delusion, of course. But it is a delusion with enough reality to make the French jealous and on their guard. As the North Americans and the English are by far the most in evidence, the attack is massed against them. If a French man or woman or child is knocked down by a big, expensive car, the reporter will see to it that the driver is American, or for a second bet, English. If a man behaves arrogantly and brutally in a public place, he is an American for sure. The other day I was on a tramcar when the conductor was extremely uncivil to a young man who

finally hit him on the jaw. There was a scuffle, the car stopped, and a crowd gathered which, as soon as it perceived that the young man was a foreigner, took sides with the conductor. "A filthy American brute!" they said in the crowd. "Why don't the police arrest him? Are Americans to be allowed to knock down Frenchmen in Paris?" As a matter of fact, the passenger was a Rumanian.

There are many excuses for the French attitude. Really, when you see the insolence with which foreigners—not only English and Americans, but South Americans, Spaniards, Italians, Russians, Levantines, etc.—take possession of Paris, it justifies the worst xenophobia. The British and American colonization of Paris is a reality, and it is done without tact. In Berlin and Munich foreigners are not precisely loved just now, but the Germans have nothing to complain of in this respect compared with the French. The French have had to bow before the invasion. You are confronted everywhere by signs in the two languages. In sections of Paris where before the war you never heard a word of anything but French, you now hear American, English and Scotch aplenty. Everybody knows the respect which the French have for money. Among the populace, and others too who ought to know better, the high cost of living is blamed on the foreigners, particularly on the English and Americans, who are now decidedly more unpopular than the Germans. It is said that these people come to France to benefit by the rate of exchange and outbid the French for everything. That the French themselves poured in droves into Southern Germany a few years ago to benefit by the fall of the mark and there behaved far worse than any kind of foreigner in Paris or on the Riviera does not alter their point of view. Paris is not at all a cheap city for those who live there, but for Americans on a vacation who reckon in terms of dollars it seems cheap, and unfortunately they say so out loud. The French make no differ-

ence between those Americans who have money and those who have not—or rather they make this difference: they hate the spenders, but they hate and despise the non-spenders and think they have no business in France.

Two examples of lack of tact on the part of Americans who might be expected to know better recently came to my notice. The other month at the Quatz-Arts ball, which is the annual festival of the art students, while most of them arrived piled on taxis, or by the busses and street-cars, or even on foot, some Americans, who must also have been students, as they had invitations, drove up accompanied by French girls in automobiles of a kind which no French student could hope to acquire before many years, even if he chanced to be a successful painter, and if he chanced to be an original genius, probably never. And at a recent exposition of American paintings the catalogue was printed in English. All this in a nation the hardest and most practical, but also the most irritable, jealous and sensitive in Europe.

III

One of the greatest changes in Paris since the war, and a regrettable change from considerations of good taste and tact, is the retirement into the background of the genuine French aristocracy. Think of the importance, the prestige, of a member of the Jockey Club twenty years ago and to what a petty measure he is sunk now in the eyes of the crowd! Now

any Peruvian woman, provided she have enough money, cuts as good a figure for all but a few in Paris as a French countess descended from the Crusaders. Rich Americans satisfy their taste for dinner-guests with titles by inviting some of the innumerable Russian nobility who are glad to go anywhere where there are light and noise, who are more facile than the French, and with whom, to tell the truth, the Americans feel more at home for many reasons more or less subtle on which perhaps it were more tactful to keep silence.

The worst of the American and English invasions—what is called the Anglo-Saxon invasion—not only of France but of other countries, is that they add nothing of interest except a few material comforts. Barber shops and bathrooms are no doubt better in France, or at least in Paris and on the Riviera, since the Americans began coming in droves; but neither the Americans nor the English bring any single thing that is beautiful and picturesque. On the contrary, their very presence tends to destroy the beautiful and picturesque where it is found. And they have a talent for introducing the inappropriate. They establish a golf club at Syracuse, and a horse show at Florence, and Primitive Methodism under the shadow of the Caesars. Ruskin has been accused of mingling the notions of the British middle class, and even of British Nonconformity, with considerations on the Italian Renaissance, but Ruskin never thought that Venice would be improved if a Wesleyan conventicle were set up there!