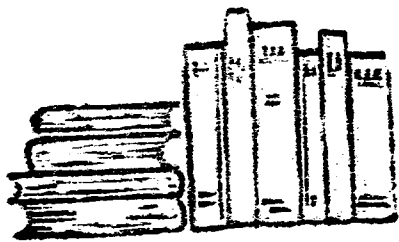


The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

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Post-War Paris

"That remote and historical post-war period (1918-1930) has slipped from the pack of time and lies face downward on the floor. For when the 1920's collapsed and fell, they took with them all that was worth while in the nineteenth century."

On a page about half way through Elliot Paul's "The Last Time I Saw Paris", I vividly recall this quotation. It seems to be imprinted upon my mind; and as I sit at my trusty Royal to write the above paragraph, I turn to the book merely to see if I worded it correctly. Curiously enough, I discover that I did. Of course there is no reason why I should not have remembered it; it is one of the outstanding paragraphs in the book, and all that goes before and follows it, is nothing more than an explanation of the statement itself.

"The Last Time I Saw Paris" makes some of the most enjoyable reading that has been published for many a moon. I do not believe it necessary to have known Paris to enjoy this volume. It holds your interest even if you know nothing of the city. Naturally, if you have seen for yourself that Paris is the city where all good Americans go when they die, you will enjoy it all the more. But Mr. Paul knows his Paris thoroughly, and writes about it with a glowing intimacy that lends color and flavor to the account.

Mr. Paul's book is actually a case history of a street, the rue de la Huchette, a little crooked alley on the Left Bank in the very shadow of Notre Dame cathedral. There live a varied assortment of people, laughing, crying, eating, drinking, working, and playing their way through life. There stands the Hotel de Caveau with its bar, the cross roads of daily life. There is located the Hotel Normandie run by Sara, the Jewess, and her worthless gentile husband; there is Cafe de St. Michel with the old drudge, Eugenie, who meekly suffers all the insulting remarks of its drunken patrons. There are found Noel, the taxidermist, and Dorlan, the book binder, little Colette, the delivery girl in the dairy shop, and Mariette, the mistress of the bordel. Some eighty humans inhabit the century-old houses in rue de la Huchette and each one in the eyes of Mr. Paul is an individual.

Let him tell you of Hyacinthe Goujon, in 1918 a

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beautiful child of eight years; then let him read to you the letters which she wrote him when he was away in Spain. Also, let him conclude his story of Hyacinthe on the very last page of the book:

"Mlle. ————— (Hyacinthe's screen name) was found dead in her bedroom, and in the adjoining chambers of her apartment, 32 rue de la Huchette, her mother, Anne Goujon, and her grandfather, formerly a judge, were also asphyxiated by the fumes of a charcoal brazier. The windows were tightly closed and the doors were sealed with old theatre programs."

This was the notice that appeared in *Les Dernieres Nouvelles*, four months after the Nazi came to Paris in June 1940.

Let Mr. Paul take you before dawn to the early morning market on the Place, when the peasants are driving in from the surrounding country with their thousands of small baskets of fresh strawberries, each beautifully edged with leaves from the plant. Let Mr. Paul tell you of the Black Rain that descended on Paris on the morning of June 15, 1940 when Hitler's roaring legions thundered down the "Boul Mich," into rue de la Huchette, over the bridges of the Seine, and then to the Place de la Concorde.

This is not a story of the Paris you have heard about. No one in the street ever drops in for a drink at the Ritz bar; no one ever buys a gown at the fashionable shops in the rue de la Paix. Rather, you find the Huchette dwellers sipping their wine at the Hotel de Caveau discussing Proust and Debussy, Rodin and Cezanne. You will find Robert the pimp and Corre the bug-eyed grocer discussing Plato; you will find Maurice the gold-fish man weekly visiting the Louvre to see his favorite painting. You will find the strength and weakness of a people told so humanly that you will know they are not only the dwellers of Huchette, but also the people of all Paris, yes, citizens of all France. Then you will know, and then only, why Paris fell.

Listen to these lines about the Huchettiers:

"An American with a nostalgia for the efficiency of his homeland might indeed nourish a feeling of resentment over minor inconveniences. Here he would search in vain for the well-ordered streets of his own country. Shaded lights and gadgets, modern and in-

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fallible, belonged to another world. Telephones and ice-boxes and sound-proof bath-rooms were far, far away from the rue de la Huchette.

"But it had the finest and bravest and most companionable of men and women! It had two duck-faring bats and mound upon mound of fresh vegetables that glowed on the pushcarts, and the haunting cries of itinerant vendors. It had life that streamed like the rays of warming sunshine. It had, above all, men and women of warmth and compassion, and also some of the lowest types extant. It had a scholar who read Plato by the light of a street lamp through his dusty window and an old harlot who knitted for her nieces in the country. Behind the facades of its houses and shops were to be found the treasures of tradition and the fine or ignoble predicaments of living in the present. Love and hunger and hope and kindness and fear and humor and the struggle to survive on the rue de la Huchette, as elsewhere in France and the world, were the components of the drama frequently called human and now and then divine."

Who is that man Paul, you ask. Elliot Paul is a native of Massachusetts who was discharged from the U. S. Army in 1918 in Paris. He was a member of that group of expatriates who stayed in Paris, worshipped at the feet of Gertrude Stein, and wandered from bar to bar. Between drinks he managed to edit the Paris edition of the Chicago Tribune. In December 1918 he went to live in rue de la Huchette, and with the exception of the few years he spent in Spain during the Civil War, he remained a charming bon vivant on the Left Bank. He knows Paris, knows it better than any one particular writer I have ever read, knows it and weeps for it during its present tragic status under Nazi rule. "The Last Time I Saw Paris," indeed, is a history of France during the 20's and 30's . . . an extremely readable volume.