

Monsieur Paravicini and memoirs of the "Nineties"

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MONSIEUR PARAVICINI
and
MEMOIRS OF THE "NINETIES."
(*"The Observer,"* 14.1.40.)

M. Paravicini has had an opportunity of seeing London life since he was a very young man, and it seemed interesting to gain some idea of his impressions on the march of time and its effects.

A talk with a diplomat who has had occasion personally to witness and assess the life and progress in this country for fully forty years is nowadays a very rare experience, especially when, as in the present case, the three interruptions seem to have been particularly propitious complements to his study of British politics.

M. Paravicini's first impressions date from 1893, when he stayed in London for the month of July as a young sight-seer, and when he did in fact see Hyde Park in the full glory of its Victorian splendour, heard a speech by the Prime Minister (Lord Rosebery) in the House of Lords, went to Aldershot for the Military Review, and became acquainted with the now more or less discontinued life on the Thames.

He came back two years later for a similar stay, to pay short visits to student friends at Oxford and Cambridge, and to enrich his outlook on English life in general.

"In 1899," he said, "I then came over to work seriously at improving my English and stayed as paying guest with an English country squire in Sussex, where I made my first acquaintance with the English conception of hunting.

"I well remember with what feelings of trepidation at the end of that year the morning papers were opened at breakfast time, for it was the black period of the Boer War. The British reverses were reported with remarkable frankness. I distinctly recollect such headings as 'British reverse at Colenso; Boers capture twelve guns.'

"At the end of that year I went to London and entered the Swiss Legation as attaché. During the

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four years I was in that position I made the best of the opportunities I had to study the political aspect of world affairs. For such a study I could not have found a better situated place.

"There was still the best part left of the Victorian brilliancy. All the great figures of that now famous period were either still there themselves or were replaced by their own kinsmen in full keeping with established traditions.

"I had the good fortune to be on very friendly terms with the family of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, and I remember being the guest of one of his brothers on the night when he made his famous 'two loaves' speech, which I was thrilled to hear in Birmingham Town Hall.

"That was the time when I first made the acquaintance of Sir Austen Chamberlain and his family — a friendship which I am happy to have kept up till to-day, and which has, quite naturally, provided some particularly interesting recollections in later years.

"In January, 1901, I watched Queen Victoria's funeral procession from the balcony of St. James's Palace, when King Edward, in Field-Marshal's uniform and mounted on a black charger, headed the group of Kings and Emperors who have long since disappeared.

"I saw King Edward crowned at Westminster from a seat in the gallery above the very stalls in the Apsis where I have since sat on so many memorable occasions.

"A young diplomat in those days had greater possibilities than he has now to make good use of his leisure.

"One of my most pleasant memories comes from the 'three days a fortnight' hunting when I went down to the shires, and I remember how proud I was when one Christmas that great and popular M.F.H., Lord Annaly, sent me the set of Pytchley buttons.

"It was the time when motoring just began to fascinate the young people of my age; but for myself I could not get up any interest in it, and I have ever since considered the car merely as an object of con-

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veyance. I have never learned to drive, and I must confess I am now rather sorry for it.

"But at that time I stuck to the old sport, and drove a road coach in summer once a week from Northumberland Avenue to its pleasant destination in the country.

"I left London in May, 1904, when public opinion was much occupied with the Russo-Japanese war in the East, an event which, as foreseen by British statesmen, showed Japan for the first time definitely as a coming Great Power.

"I then had a very interesting year in Rome, and in 1905 a further year in Paris.

"In 1906 I went to Petersburg, where I saw what can be considered as a well-preserved old Russia in spite of the shocks of the defeat by the Japanese and the first revolutionary outbreaks that followed.

"At the beginning of 1912 I returned to London as Counsellor, the Legation then having been transferred to Portland-place from its old quarters.

"The outstanding impressions of my second stay are the sinking of the Titanic, which gave the country a sad and severe shock; Mr. Lloyd George's famous Budget of £200,000,000, which was then thought to be the end of all things; the deterioration of Anglo-German relations; and finally the Serajevo murder and the July crisis leading Europe towards Armageddon.

"At 2 a.m. on August 4th, 1914, I met my old friend van Svinderen, then Netherlands Minister, in Piccadilly Circus; we stood and gazed on the mafficking of a delirious crowd, and neither of us has ever forgotten the amazing spectacle.

"In the summer of 1917 I left for Berne, where I had been called to take the post of Political Director at the Swiss Foreign Office. I came back to London in 1920 as Swiss Minister to Great Britain in time to be present at the first meeting of the Council of the League of Nations in St. James's Palace, when Switzerland was granted permission to enter whilst keeping her policy of neutrality.

"It is only natural that my familiarity with English life and my friendly connections should have proved to be an invaluable help to me during the last twenty years, and no one can vouch better than I for the truth of the saying so often applied to your countrymen: 'Once a friend; always a friend'."

REARMING SWITZERLAND.

(*The Times*, 9.1.40.)

Our Swiss Correspondent tells us that Switzerland, like every other neighbour of Nazi Germany, is busily engaged in turning her man-power and resources to the uses of war. It is fantastic that German propagandists should be continually exhorting the neutral countries to remain absolutely impartial in the present war, whereas it is the policy and methods of their own Government, and of that of Soviet Russia, which compel these countries to rearm even beyond their means, and which make public opinion in them overwhelmingly anti-Nazi. Switzerland, while remaining honourably and strictly neutral, is perfecting her defences; and, if the lines she is reinforcing or building face north and north-east, the Nazis have only themselves to thank for it. It is certain that the Swiss troops would render an excellent account of themselves against any army that tried to force its way through their territory. All able-bodied men are individually trained to be defenders of their native mountains. Like the Finns, they are a nation of marksmen and of skiers; and they can put about the same number of men into the field. Small though the number is — something around half a million in either case — the terrain on which they would have to fight favours the mobility of small bodies. The narrow roads and mountain tracks, the lakes, the rushing rivers, and the defiles would all be intimately known to the defenders; while the larger armies, as in Finland, would find the deployment space insufficient to give them the full advantage of their numbers.

The Swiss people are also animated by a tradition of independence which has hardly a parallel in Europe. They have had to fight for their freedom from the earliest days of modern history, and finally threw off the rule of the German Empire three hundred years ago. The whole population is completely freedom-loving and democratic. Great Britain has been evolving the same ideals over the same long period of time as Switzerland; and there exists between the two countries a natural sympathy which no amount of propaganda can destroy. The war has of course brought special problems of its own, notably those connected with the blockade. During this period they have been fortunate to have in Berne and London respectively such competent representatives as Sir

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