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Impressions Gathered During Summer's Visit Made To France And Germany

Some French Battlefields—Germans' Style of Living Is Very Much What It Was Before the Great War.
By Edward J. Williamson, M.A., Ph.D.

The following article on his impressions gathered during his visit to France and Germany, this summer was written in Berlin for the Whig by Edward J. Williamson, M.A., Ph.D., of Hobart College, Geneva, N.Y.:

With the exception of a week spent in the Loire country, viewing many castles, my stay in France was limited largely to Paris where I settled down for about one month, making, however, many interesting day-trips to points of interest in the vicinity. Of these, I shall mention only Senlis, a town whose origin goes back to Gallo-Roman times and which figured rather prominently in the early days of the Great War. Senlis has preserved very well its medieval character, in fact some traces of Gallo-Roman walls may still be seen in the ruins of its castle, which served as a royal residence from the time of Clovis down to the reign of Henry IV (4th to 16th century). The ruins are interesting, not only on account of their historic traditions, but because they record most eloquently the changes of fashion in architecture during a period covering many centuries. Each royal resident seemed to make changes to suit the taste of his time, but these changes were often made without destroying the older forms. Thus a door with an original Roman arch may be seen with a Gothic arch built in right under it and this filled in later on to conform to the straight lines of a later Renaissance fashion. Since the days of the war, Senlis has acquired a new interest. It was one of the places nearest to Paris which the Germans reached in their first great rush in 1914. The town which can be reached from Paris is about half an hour, was occupied by the Germans for several days in August, 1914, and still bears some of the marks of their advance. The railroad station, which was burned down at that time, has been replaced by a very attractive looking modern structure, and the tall, graceful spire of the cathedral still shows some effects of shell fire. However the damage done was not great as fighting in this district was of very short duration. One thing which reminded me of recent practice in America was the sight of two dismantled churches which are being used for secular purposes—one as a market and the other as a carpenter's shop. The "garage-church" evidently has its counterpart in Europe.

The Germans and Rheims.
The only other place in France visited by me, which shows the direct effects of the war was Rheims. Rheims was one of those unfortunate French cities which were constantly exposed to bombardment during the whole period of the war. The Germans occupied the city for ten days in 1914 (Sept. 3rd to Sept. 13th). After they were driven out, they entrenched themselves along what came to be known as the Hindenburg Line, including Fort Brimont, Hill 108 and the Chemin des Dames. From these positions they dominated the city, which disappeared almost entirely under their bombardment. The cathedral which had witnessed the coronation of so many French kings and which was in many respects the most beautiful of Gothic structures also suffered considerably. At the same time when one considers that out of the fourteen thousand houses which composed the city twelve thousand were entirely destroyed and only sixteen remained uninjured, one is rather surprised that the cathedral escaped as well as it did. Certainly the Germans could not have deliberately tried to destroy it. Had they done so they could easily have reduced it to the state of the Cloth Hall at Ypres, of which only an unsightly mass of stone and mortar remains. However, the damage done is bad enough. Part of the roof has been demolished, but the facade, one of the most ornate in Europe, is fortunately intact for the most part, although some of the statues and fine carvings have been injured by the shock of shell fire. The archbishop's palace on the right of the cathedral was destroyed by fire in September, 1914.

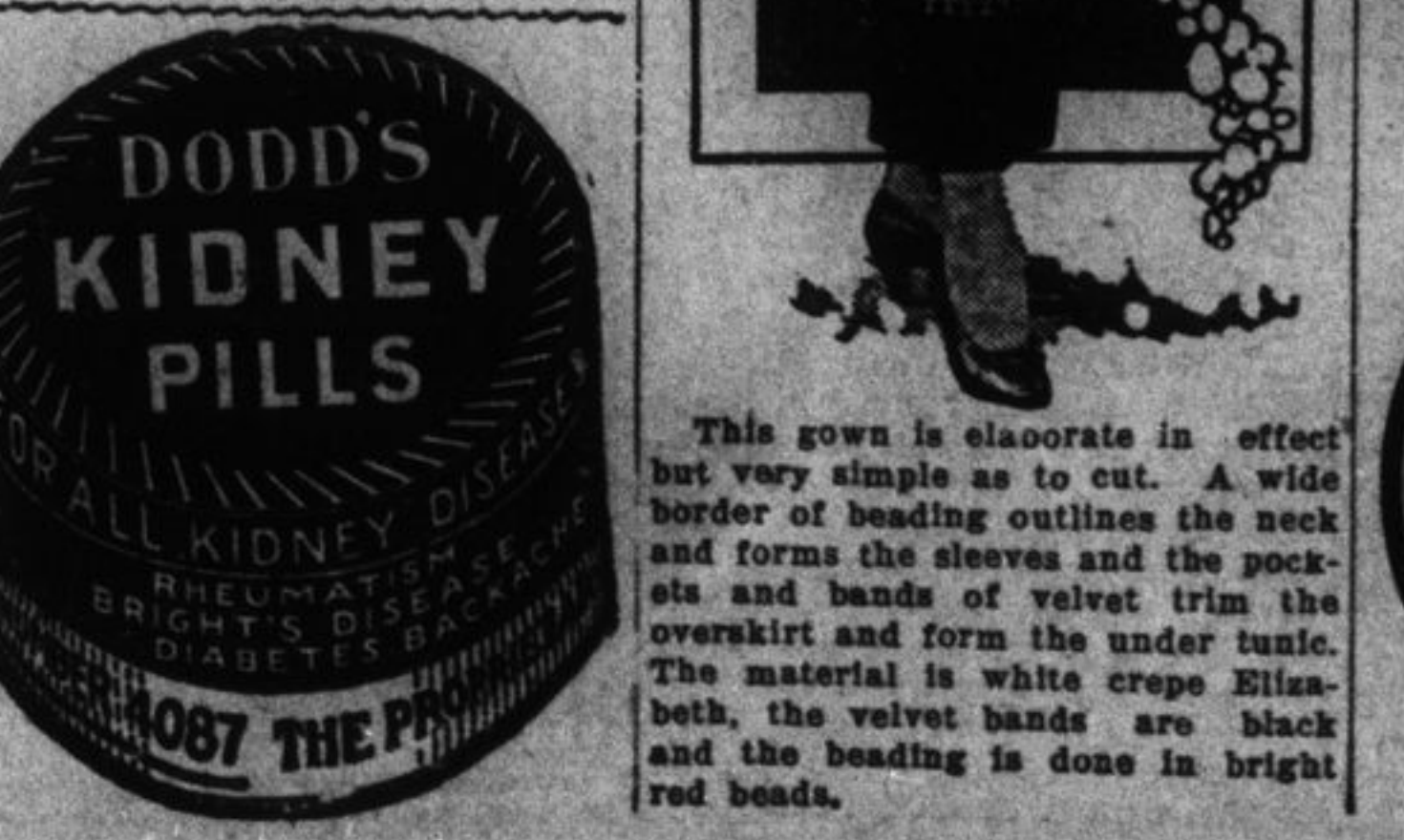
Although the work of restoration is being pushed as rapidly as possible, large sections of Rheims still lie in ruins. Work on the cathedral is progressing slowly. Only the north transept is being used for worship at present and it will probably take several years before the whole edifice can be restored to anything like its former state.

Battlefields Around Rheims.
While in Rheims I took the opportunity of seeing the battlefields in the immediate vicinity. The regular sight-seeing car happened to be filled, so that two persons and myself made the tour in a taxi. I was very glad that such an arrangement was necessary because I had a seat beside the chauffeur, a Frenchman who had fought in this district during many months of the war. Through him I learned a number of things which I probably would not have learned had I been with the larger crowd with its official interpreter. We started out along the line of Fort Brimont and Hill 108, passing over country which is producing its first crop in ten years. Some of the fields indeed have not yet been cultivated sufficiently for sowing. We stopped to examine Hill 108 where the Germans had stored most of the ammunition used in this whole section. The French and German lines were here within a few hundred yards of each other with the Aisne canal separating them. It took the French a year and a half to get across the canal and entrench themselves in the low-lying land on the other side. Their trenches here were much lower than the canal level, the result being that when the German bombardment broke through the canal wall, the French trenches were flooded and a considerable number of soldiers were drowned. The Germans were finally compelled to evacuate Hill 108, but before they retired they blew up all their munitions and incidentally seven hundred Frenchmen who were advancing up the hill. The craters formed by the explosions must be at least sixty feet deep and one hundred yards in circumference.

Village Built Anew.
From Hill 108 we proceeded to Berry-au-Bac, an entirely new village in the Aisne valley (the old village had been completely destroyed). A little further on we stopped to view one of the German underground emplacements for large guns along the famous Hindenburg line. These emplacements were connected with living quarters and supply stations by subterranean passages and one could not help admiring the ingenuity of the Germans in all these arrangements. From Berry-au-Bac we went on to Craonne at the eastern extremity of the Chemin des Dames, a line of hills extending westward to Soissons, Craonne was situated about half way up the hillside and was, therefore, between the German and French lines. Of the village hardly a vestige remains, and our guide informed us that the hill in this vicinity had been so undermined in military operations that it was decided not to rebuild the village on its old site. At all events the present Craonne is situated about three quarters of a mile away down in the valley. Another place which we passed and, of which only the name survives was Chevreux—the large boiler of a canning factory is all that remains to mark the place where the village once stood. All through this district the orchards and forests had been so torn to pieces by shell fire that they will practically have to be replanted. Heaps of rusted barbed wire and other rubbish still litter some of the fields, and numerous cemeteries recall the dark years of 1914-18.

Work of Restoration.
Comparing the battlefields which I saw near Rheims with those which I saw two years ago one can see that considerable work of restoration had been going on. The gaping shell holes have been filled up, the fields to a large extent cleared and ploughed. The first work is done by government agents who remove unexploded shells and put the fields in order for reforestation and planting. In many cases the farmer must find his work exceedingly difficult for generally a new surface soil has to be created before crops can be grown.

Besides being a cathedral city, Rheims is also a city of industry. It is an **ELABORATE, SIMPLY CUT.**



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possible, and also in order that the work of education should not be neglected, the Inspector of Schools had the happy idea of organizing schools in some of the wine cellars. This the Joffre School was established in the Mumm cellars, the Manvury and the Albert I Schools in the cellars of Pommeroy and Krug. Just imagine being graduated from Pommeroy's or Mumm's—the class secretary should have a fairly easy time in getting all the members back for class reunions.

Schools in Champagne Cellars.
During the occupation of Rheims in September, 1914, the wine cellars were pillaged by the Germans. However these were not the only soldiers who liked to help themselves to champagne. I have this on the authority of the headwaiter at the hotel where I stayed while in Rheims. He was himself a "croix de guerre" man, but one who condemned in no uncertain terms the militaristic tendencies of his own and other lands. After the Germans were driven out of the city, the wine cellars proved to be of considerable value as places of shelter during bombardments. A considerable number of families, including several thousand children refused to leave the city in spite of the dangers to which they were constantly exposed. In order that the children might be kept under cover as much as

possible, and also in order that the work of education should not be neglected, the Inspector of Schools had the happy idea of organizing schools in some of the wine cellars. This the Joffre School was established in the Mumm cellars, the Manvury and the Albert I Schools in the cellars of Pommeroy and Krug. Just imagine being graduated from Pommeroy's or Mumm's—the class secretary should have a fairly easy time in getting all the members back for class reunions.

Visit to Germany.
After visiting Rheims and its vicinity I decided to proceed to Germany, via Strasbourg. Before the war the language generally heard in Strasbourg was German, but the people were to a large extent bi-lingual. This condition still prevails, for although French is now the official language, I heard about as much German spoken as French during the time I spent in the city. To enter Germany from Strasbourg I had to cross the Rhine in a taxi, my passports being examined by a German official at the French end of the bridge and the examination for customs taking place at the German end. From Kehl, the town on the German side of the river, I caught a train for Frankfurt and from there proceeded to Leipzig. Later on I visited Dresden and then Berlin.

I found Germany a very different country from what it was when I visited it two years ago. At that time it was crowded from one end to the other by tourists from every land which had favorable exchange. This year tourists will be found in greatest numbers in France, Italy and Belgium where exchange is still very favorable for those who are spending dollars or pounds. In Germany, on the other hand, since the introduction of the Rentenmark, which puts the "mark" back on the old gold basis (25 1/2 cents) there is no longer the same attraction. This is quite evident from the ease with which one can secure hotel accommodation in the summer of 1923 it was almost impossible to get a room in a German hotel without having made a reservation days in advance. This summer one can walk into almost any German hotel and pick the room he wants at a moment's notice.

The introduction of the Rentenmark has probably made very little difference to the German in the matter of the cost of living. Instead of saying "one trillion," he now says "one"; but one mark buys what a short time ago cost one trillion. As in most countries everything costs more than double what it cost before the war, although the prices in Berlin are not as high absolutely as they are in one of the larger American cities. A single room with a private bath in a good hotel costs from \$2.50 to \$3.50 a day;

a good seat at the opera about \$3; it did in 1914 and other articles of general use, as far as my observations went, showed a similar increase.

People Seem Prosperous.
The Germans, however, do not seem to be suffering under high prices any more than the rest of us. Theatres and operas are crowded as usual, the restaurants and cafes are well patronized; the people are well-dressed, well-fed—in short as far as the ordinary visitor can observe their style of living is very much what it was before the war.

There probably is a certain amount of poverty and suffering but it is no more evident that it was in 1914 when I spent the summer in Germany. On the other hand public utilities have greatly improved during the past two years, which seems to suggest that a great deal of money has been spent. Traveling conditions which were pretty bad in 1923 have been vastly improved. There are better trains with fine new cars. In the dining cars (this part of the service is well organized) there are printed signs requesting passengers not to offer tips to the waiters as they are adequately paid. (America with all its wealth cannot boast of such a rate of perfection). A few months ago a new, up-to-date telephone system was inaugurated in several of the larger cities, such as Leipzig, Dresden, Berlin. It is the dial system by which you ring up "your party" without the help or interference of a telephone operator. Much time and patience is saved by this system, but it costs a great deal of money to install it as the machinery required is very delicate and complicated. I went through our exchange in Geneva, N.Y., where the system has been in use for a couple of years so I know something about it. New York City is introducing it as rapidly as possible, but Berlin and the other German cities have got ahead of it.

When Germany can afford to make such outlays, conditions cannot be so very bad there.

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