

THE
PARIS THAT IS PARIS

BY
WATSON WHITE

*Il y a des lieux où il faut appeler Paris,
Paris, et d'autres où il la faut appeler
capitale du royaume.*

PASCAL.

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of "L'Eglise Dorée." When Germain, Bishop of Paris, died, he was canonized and was buried in the church of the Holy Cross and Saint Vincent. His tomb was much visited and effected many miraculous cures. "And in this place were performed fine miracles," writes Du Breul in his *Théâtre des Antiquitez de Paris*. Among others, a paralytic was entirely cured there." And Du Breul goes on to relate that Chilperic, having heard of the marvelous cure, came the next day to the said tomb and composed an epigram in honor of the saint. So it came about, in course of time, that the fame of Saint Germain eclipsed the memory of Saint Vincent and the Holy Cross and the church came to be known as Saint Germain des Prés, Saint Germain of the Meadows.

The abbey waxed rich in books, in learning and in land. It possessed ninety thousand acres of land in France, the greater part of which was arable, and ruled over more than ten thousand serfs. Until the foundation of the abbey of Saint Denis by Dagobert, the abbey of Saint Germain was the burial place of the Merovingian kings, most of whom were there interred. The great wealth of the abbey offered a tempting booty to the Norman invaders and the basilica suffered severely at their hands. It was rebuilt about the year 1000 (990-1014) in the reign of Robert the Pious but the choir was not dedicated until 1163. The church is the oldest in Paris.

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One of the most ancient and most important of the Parisian fairs existed as early as 1176 on ground ceded by Louis VII to the Abbey of Saint Germain in return for half the revenues of the fair. As the meeting place of those traditional enemies, the scholars of the University and the henchmen of the Abbey, the Foire Saint Germain grew so riotous that a century later, on the complaint of both parties, Philippe le Bel ordered its

suppression. It was reestablished by Louis XI in 1482 in the gardens of the Hôtel de Navarre, now occupied by the *Marché Saint Germain*. Closed a second time, while Leaguers and Huguenots were battling beneath the walls of Paris, the fair blossomed out again in the piping times of peace and Henri IV. When the *Foire Saint Germain* was visited by that monarch he is said to have advised the merchants in advance that his pockets were well lined with the dowry of his recent bride, Marie de Medici. The dealers rubbed their hands in glee but the Gascon made the rounds of the Fair and departed without leaving a sou behind him. Until as late as the Revolution, the *Foire Saint Germain* was the most fashionable fair of Paris, but it did not long outlive the cataclysm of 1789 and its place was taken by the present market.

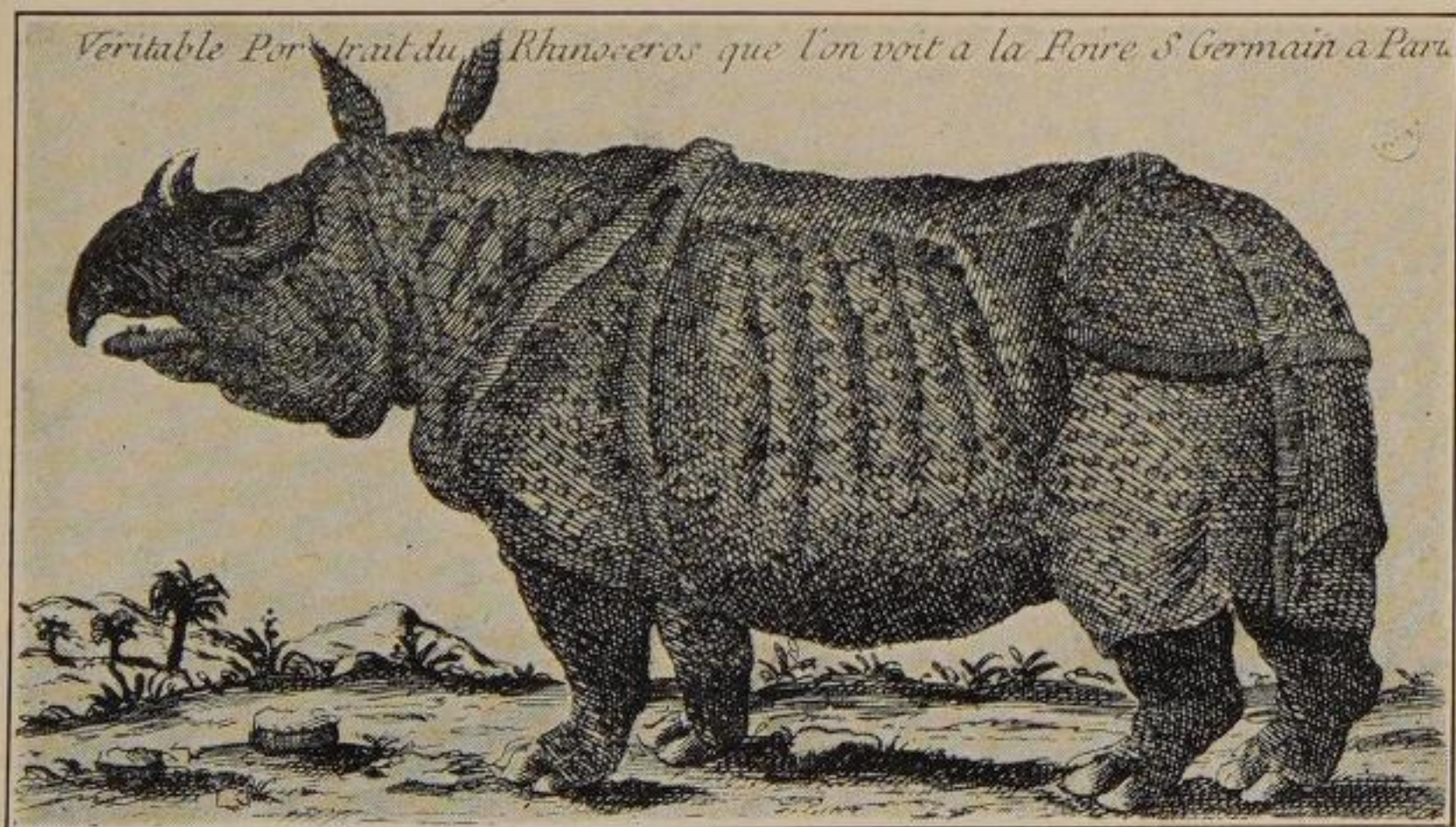
The latter-day Fair consisted of rows of booths formed into little streets like a miniature town. Art objects and precious materials were sold here—"All the artizans of the kingdom come with their wares," writes Sterne—and foreign artists, especially the Flemings, sold their pictures. Frequented particularly in the evening as a place of amusement, the *Foire Saint Germain* witnessed the origins of the *Opéra Comique*, the *Ambigu* and the *Variétés*. An Armenian named Pascal established at the Fair a coffee stall similar to those in Constantinople, which was the forerunner of the Parisian *maison de café*, or *café*, as we know it now. His boys peddled throughout the city this new drink which Madame de Sévigné found so distasteful but which caught on, nevertheless, and became the fashion. At the *Foire Saint Germain* a Sicilian, whose gallicized name was Procope, sold the first ices. An upholsterer's stall was conducted by one Jean Poquelin who was to have a famous grandson in Molière.

Many and varied were the sights to be seen at the fair, ranging from rats, who danced on a rope to the sound of music, to the rhinoceros whose veritable por-



VAUX HALL.

The ballroom of the Foire Saint Germain.



AN ATTRACTION AT THE FAIR.

trait is shown opposite this page. A trained monkey named Fagotin, who used to perform on the Pont Neuf when the fair was not in session, came to an untimely end at the hands of Cyrano de Bergerac. Some valets were making fun of Cyrano's enormous nose, which was no nose to make fun of, and the Parisian (for he was not a Gascon, despite his name, despite his temperament, despite Rostand)—the Parisian (if you will yield the point), drew his sword to chastize his tormentors. Fagotin, who had been trained to fence, followed suit and, in the confusion, Cyrano mistook the red-coated animal for a hostile valet and ran him through. Another attraction was a water drinker who absorbed one hundred pints of water and spurted it forth again in the form of wine and various liquids. The learned doctors of Paris—the Paris of Molière's day—devoted a conference to this phenomenon and decided that the performer must be possessed of several stomachs, but that shrewd English traveler, John Evelyn, was not so easily deceived. Under the date of the 24th February, 1651, he writes, "I went to see a Dromedarie, a very monstrous beaste, much like the Camel but larger. There was also dauncing on the rope; but above all surprising to those who were ignorant of the adresse, was the water-spouter, who drinking only fountaine water, rendred out of his mouth in severall glasses all sorts of wine and sweete waters, &c. For a piece of money he discover'd the secret to me." But the secret was not confided to his diary.

Fake wonders were the rule and Mercier tells of men in Turkish headdress, mounted on stilts, passing themselves off as giants, and a shaven bear, dressed up in men's clothes, exhibited as "un animal unique, extraordinaire"; the Parisians, he finds, are no less pleased with a false marvel than with a real one. An organist from Troyes, named Raisin, was the proprietor of a spinet of complicated appearance, which would start to play when its owner commanded "Play, spinet," and at the command, "Stop, spinet," would immediately cease

playing. It would resume playing when so ordered and would oblige with the tune desired. There was serious talk of trying Raisin as a sorcerer and the matter reached the ears of Louis XIV, who commanded that the magic spinet be brought to Versailles. Having admired its mechanism, the King sent it to the apartment of Maria Teresa but when the command "Play, spinet" was given and the instrument started to play, the Queen gave a cry of fright. The Sun King thereupon decreed that the spinet be opened and out popped a small child "beautiful as an angel, who was caressed by all the court."

A delightful revival of the Foire Saint Germain was inaugurated in 1922 and is now held annually, every May, on the Place Saint Sulpice in conjunction with the Fête Jeanne d'Arc. There are antique shops, book shops and music, mediaeval costumes and mediaeval farces.

II. From Meadows to Faubourg.

When Charles V built his wall on the Right Bank to protect an expanded Paris from English invasion, on the Left Bank, where the city had not grown, he contented himself with strengthening the wall of Philip Augustus but decreed that the Abbey of Saint Germain des Prés, which lay just outside the walls, should be fortified. A high wall, with towers, was erected to enclose the abbey grounds and a moat was dug outside the wall. A canal from the Seine, called the Petite Seine, which followed the course of the present rue Bonaparte, was utilized to bring water to this moat, but the Petite Seine was not constructed for this purpose since it antedated the moat. Our interest in the Petite Seine lies in the fact that it divided the Prés aux Clercs or Students' Meadows from which the abbey took its name, into the Petit Pré and the Grand Pré. East of the Petite Seine, between the monastery and the river, lay the Petit Pré, comprised in the tract of land now bounded by the rue