



How Paris Amuses Itself

F. Berkeley Smith

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This is a late 19th century look at what Paris was like at the time. Excerpt from the intro:

When the sun shines, the city is en fête.

Rows of geraniums flame in the well ordered gardens of the Tuileries. Masses of flowers, gay in color as the ribbons streaming from the bonnets of the nurses, lie in brilliant patches along gravel walks or within the cool shadow of massive architecture. Brown-legged children, in white socks and white dresses fresh from the blanchisseuse, run screaming after runaway hoops, or watch in silent ecstasy the life and exploits of Mr. Punch at the Théâtre Guignol.

Under a vault of turquoise sky the Alexander Bridge, emblazoned with its golden horses, spans the Seine, crowded with traffic sweeping beneath the great arc. Sturdy steam-tugs with vermilion funnels tow long sausage-like lines of newly varnished canal-boats, whose sunburned captains with their sweethearts or families lounge at déjeuner under improvised awnings stretched from the roofs of cabins shining in fresh paint. Down the great vista of the Seine each successive bridge is choked with thousands of hurrying ant-like humanity. Swift bateaux-mouches dart back and forth to their floating stations. For a few sous these small steamers will take you to St. Cloud or beyond, past feathery green islands, past small rural cafés perched upon grassy banks where all day long old gentlemen wearing white socks and Panama hats wait patiently for a stray nibble.

This bright morning in Paris the boulevards are crowded with a passing throng which is gazed at for hours by those who fill the terraces of the cafés to linger over a morning apéritif. At one café a party of commerçants are transacting business.

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