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The Diverse and Sophisticated Landscape of France Viewed in All Shades of Social Meaning

A PORTRAIT OF PARIS

*An American Art Collector Assesses
French Life in the 19th Century*

by James Jarves

A PORTRAIT OF PARIS is an exceptional book where an American businessman and art collector living in Paris in the 19th century presents his thoughtful views on French society, temperament, habits and culture, government, military, and education. Thus, James Jarves' book lacks the extreme emotions that sometimes characterizes other works about the French, and deals with the facts without distortion resulting from personal feelings or prejudices. The book is not a superficial appraisal meant to show the inferiority of France versus America, but rather an intriguing contemporary sociological examination of a complex European society. It is different from other works, such as *The French at Home*, by Albert Rhodes (Rollright Books), which examine the fundamental traits of "racial" or ethnic character. Instead, Jarves helps us to understand how this character is expressed within a particular economic, demographic and physical context, that of a great city.

Jarves delves into a variety of topics, including occupations, living expenses, restaurants and leisure activities. But he also investigates various institutions, for example providing an excellent summary of the French educational system, one in which he put his own children. Governmental policies and mechanisms are scrutinized, and excerpts from Parliamentary proceedings are used to show the peculiarly French nature of their deliberations. However, he tackles topics other authors hesitated to discuss. The book reviews the various forms of revolutionism and Socialism present at the time, and shows the dark side of politics by revealing the inner workings of government incompetence and spying. Perhaps most interestingly, Jarves deals with the psychology of a city, including its gaudier side, such as poverty and prostitution in Paris, citing the actual numbers of women in the underground trade, and the reasons for their being involved. He even goes so far as to describe the development of pornography in France, and its peculiar effects on the populace.

Jarves writes with great spirit and vivacity, and his sketches of the French capital are both colorful and insightful, providing rich impressions of all areas and strata of French society. This book will give the reader an excellent view of the Metropolis of France in the 19th century, and although the style is conversational it still manages to convey singular information. Jarves states: "I have admired Paris, the Magnificent, but I have also inquired its cost. I have asked why Republicanism was a curse in France, and a blessing in America. In short, having some leisure hours during the past winter, I employed them in not only examining the outer world of this modern Athens, but in endeavoring to solve its inner life." Throughout, **A PORTRAIT OF PARIS** is an entertaining, highly readable, balanced and objective evaluation of life and culture within the unique confines of urban north-central France.

James Jarves (1818-1888) in his varied roles as author, critic, diplomat and pioneer, had an adventurous and challenging life. He traveled extensively to such places as California, Mexico, Central America, and the Hawaiian Islands. In Honolulu, he founded and became the editor of a weekly newspaper, and four years later he became director of the government press, his journal becoming the official organ of the

Hawaiian government. He then became engaged in negotiating commercial treaties in Europe, thus his time spent in Great Britain, Italy and France afforded him ample opportunity to observe European life. Although a modest, retiring, and unworldly man, he received various honors, including being created a Chevalier of the Order of the Crown of Italy by King Humbert I in recognition of his work in helping Italian art and artists. He was also an honorary member of the Academia delle Belle Arti of Florence. James Jarves married twice and had six children. He died in Switzerland and was buried in the English Cemetery at Rome.

James Jarves, through his writings and exhibitions, attempted to influence and elevate the artistic taste of the American public. Jarves earnestly hoped that he might form the nucleus of a Free Gallery in one of the large American cities. Despite great efforts, he encountered great difficulty arousing in the American public a love of higher art. Jarves found that “popular indifference, misunderstanding, misliking and even hostility” was so prevalent, that he contemplated taking his collection to be displayed in England. The European Old Master paintings bought and promoted by Jarves did not achieve acceptance by the public until some thirty years after his death. Jarves’ collection of antique and modern Venetian glass was presented by him to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Jarves published many works including “Art Hints, Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting” (1855); “Italian Sights and Papal Principles seen through American Spectacles” (New York, 1855); “Art Studies: The Old Masters of Italy” (New York, 1861); “The Art Idea, Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture in America” (Boston, 1866); “Art Thoughts: The Experiences and Observations of an American Amateur in Europe” (1869); “Glimpses at the Art of Japan” (New York, 1876); and “Italian Rambles” (1884).

Paul Dennis Sporer (editor) is the author of *The Dimensions of Companionship; Liberating Love; The Concept of Family*; and *Equal but Different*. He has also served as editor on more than 30 culturally and historically significant books, including *Painting Explained*, by Thomas Gullick; *Is Secession Treason?*, by Albert Bledsoe; *The Heart of Aryavarta*, by Lawrence Dundas; *Beauty and Art*; by Aldam Heaton; *The French at Home*, by Albert Rhodes; *From Slave Cabin to Pulpit*, by Peter Randolph; *Newer Ideals of Peace*, by Jane Addams; *Views of Old Europe*, by Bayard Taylor; *Gentle Measures*, by Jacob Abbott; *Parental Influences*, William Bacon; *Finding a Way Out*, by Robert Moton; *The New Birth*, by Austin Phelps; *Tupelo*, by John Hill Aughey; *An Incident of Travel*, Arthur Jerome Eddy; *End of an Era*, by John Sergeant Wise; *The Missionary*, by Samuel Mazzuchelli; *Half a Century*, by Jane Swisshelm; *Born Three Times*, by Thomas L. Johnson; *Dark Hollow*, by Anna Katharine Green; and *1492: Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, by Mary Johnston.

For further information about **A PORTRAIT OF PARIS**, or to arrange an interview with the editor, please contact Cassandra Foxton, [inform at anzapublishing.com](mailto:inform@anzapublishing.com). The publisher’s website address is AnzaPublishing.com.

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