

PARIS

The Complete Travel Companion

A Guide to the Quarters, the Monuments,
the Table and the Art of Living

James TALL

First Edition

PARIS: The Complete Travel Companion

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Why Paris

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OF ALL THE CITIES of the world, none is more famous, more beloved, or more dreamed of than Paris, the City of Light, the capital of France and, for many, the most beautiful and most romantic city on earth. It is a place known, in imagination, even to those who have never seen it, the city of the Eiffel Tower and the café terrace, the Seine and the boulevards, the art and the fashion and the famous art of living; and yet the reality of Paris surpasses every image of it, for the city is more beautiful, more various, and more alive than any postcard can convey. To come to Paris is to come to one of the great cities of human civilisation, a treasure-house of art and history, beauty and pleasure, that has enchanted travellers for centuries and enchants them still. This book is an invitation to discover it, quarter by quarter and pleasure by pleasure.

Familiar though the idea of Paris is, the experience of it astonishes, for the city is richer and deeper than its image, a great living capital of extraordinary beauty and inexhaustible interest, that rewards the first visit and the fiftieth alike. The visitor who comes expecting the Paris of the postcards finds all of that and far more: a city of grand monuments and intimate quarters, world-famous museums and hidden corners, of the café and the market and the bookshop, the river and the bridges and the light, that no single visit can begin to exhaust.

This opening chapter sets out why Paris is so beloved and so rewarding a destination, and what awaits the traveller who comes to discover it: the beauty of the city itself, built with care over centuries

into one of the great works of urban art; the river at its heart, with its islands and its bridges; the incomparable wealth of art and history, in the museums and the monuments; the distinct and characterful quarters, each a world of its own; the famous Parisian table and the art of living; and the capacity of the city to reward every taste and every visit. It closes with a word on this book and how it is arranged, the better to help the traveller plan and enjoy his journey to the most beloved of cities.

The City of Light

Paris is known the world over as the City of Light, a name it earned both as a cradle of the Enlightenment, when the city was a centre of learning and ideas that illuminated the age, and as one of the first great cities to light its streets and monuments, so that it glowed in the night when other cities lay in darkness. The name suits the city, for Paris is a place of light in every sense, a city of luminous beauty over which plays the soft, silvery light that has drawn painters for generations, and which is at its most magical in the evening, when the monuments and the bridges are lit and the river reflects their glow. To stand on a bridge over the Seine at dusk, with the city lighting up around one, is to understand why Paris is called the City of Light, and to feel the spell that it casts.

The beauty of Paris is, by common consent, among the greatest of any city in the world, a beauty not of a single monument but of the whole, the harmonious loveliness of a great city built with care and love over many centuries. It is a city of pale stone and grey roofs, of grand avenues and intimate streets, of squares and gardens and the great river winding through, all gathered into a harmonious whole that delights the eye at every turn; and it is built to a human scale, a city made for walking, where the visitor may stroll from one beauty to another through streets of unfailing charm. The beauty of Paris is felt everywhere, in the grand vista and the quiet corner alike, and it

is the first and the abiding impression of the city, the thing the traveller remembers above all.

The name has more than one origin, for Paris was among the first cities of Europe to light its streets, in the age of the kings, and was later the capital of the Enlightenment, the great movement of ideas that the French call the century of light; so that the city is the City of Light in a double sense, of the lamps that made it bright and the ideas that made it brilliant. But it is the light itself, the soft luminous light of the Paris sky, that most deserves the name, the light that has drawn the painters for generations, and that the visitor sees at its loveliest in the long evenings, when the low sun gilds the stone and the monuments glow against the sky.

There is, besides its visible beauty, an atmosphere to Paris that is harder to name but no less real, a quality of romance and elegance, of pleasure and refinement, that hangs over the city and that the visitor feels from the first; it is in the cafés and the bridges, the gardens and the boulevards, the very air of the place. Paris has long been the city of romance and of art, of pleasure and of beauty, and something of that long reputation lingers in its streets, an atmosphere that the visitor breathes in along with the beauty. It is this, as much as the monuments, that casts the famous spell of Paris, and that draws the traveller back again and again.

A City Built for Beauty

Much of the harmony and beauty of Paris dates from the great rebuilding of the nineteenth century, when the old medieval city, a maze of narrow and crowded streets, was transformed by the cutting of the grand boulevards and the raising of the elegant stone buildings that give the city its characteristic look, the long uniform façades of pale stone with their iron balconies and their grey roofs. This great work gave Paris its grand and harmonious appearance, its long vistas and its uniform elegance, the look that the world knows as Parisian;

and though it swept away much of the old city, it created one of the most beautiful and coherent cityscapes in the world, a city built, as it were, all of a piece.

Yet Paris is a city of every age, not only the nineteenth century, and its beauty is layered, the medieval islands and the old quarters surviving amid the grand boulevards, the monuments of every period from the Roman to the modern gathered into the whole. There is the medieval Paris of the islands and the narrow streets; the classical Paris of the grand squares and palaces; the nineteenth-century Paris of the boulevards and the iron tower; the modern Paris of the bold new buildings; all woven together into a single harmonious city. To walk Paris is to walk through this layered beauty, the work of two thousand years and more, gathered into one of the loveliest cities on earth; and the pleasure of it is inexhaustible, for there is always another street, another square, another vista to discover.

Much of the beauty of Paris lies in its harmony, for the centre of the city was largely rebuilt in the nineteenth century to a single grand design, its avenues lined with stone buildings of a uniform height and style, of a creamy stone and a common elegance, crowned with roofs of grey zinc and rows of chimneys; this unity gives the city its harmonious and characteristic appearance, the very image of Paris. Above the streets rise the great monuments and the spires and domes, and the famous skyline; below, the life of the streets and the cafés; and the whole, built to a human scale and made for walking, composes one of the most beautiful and coherent cityscapes in the world.

Above all, Paris is a city made for walking, compact and beautiful, where the visitor may stroll from one great sight to another through streets of unfailing charm, along the river and through the gardens, discovering at every turn some new beauty. To walk Paris, with no object but the pleasure of it, is to understand why it has been loved by so many, for the city is a work of art in itself, and its streets a

perpetual delight; and the visitor who would know Paris must walk it, for it yields its deepest pleasures not to the hurried sightseer but to the unhurried stroller, the one who wanders its quarters and its riverbanks with time to look and to savour. Paris rewards the walker as few cities do, and the stroll is the truest way to know it.

The River at its Heart

Through the heart of Paris winds the river Seine, the city's central artery and one of its chief glories, dividing it into the Right Bank to the north and the Left Bank to the south, and giving the city much of its beauty and its shape. The banks of the Seine, lined with masterpieces from the Middle Ages to the modern age, the cathedral and the Louvre, the grand palaces and the Eiffel Tower, are honoured among the treasures of the world; and the river itself, with its stone embankments and its many bridges, its booksellers' stalls and its boats, is among the loveliest sights of the city. To walk the banks of the Seine, or to glide along it by boat, past the monuments and the bridges, is one of the essential pleasures of Paris, and the best way to grasp the shape and the beauty of the city.

At the heart of the river, and of the city, lie two islands, the cradle of Paris and still its historic core: the larger, the site of the original settlement and the home of the city's greatest medieval monuments; the smaller, a quiet and elegant island of fine old houses. From these islands the city grew outward over the centuries, onto both banks of the river, and the Seine has remained ever since the central thread of Paris, the axis around which the city is arranged. The river is more than a feature of Paris; it is the soul of the city, the line along which its monuments are strung and its beauty gathered, and the traveller who would know Paris should begin, as the city did, at the river and its islands, the historic heart of the capital.

The Seine is crossed by many bridges, each with its own character and its own history, from the oldest, a venerable monument despite

its name, to the grand and ornate spans of the imperial age; and to cross and recross the river by its bridges, pausing to look up and down the water at the monuments along the banks, is among the simple pleasures of Paris. The riverbanks themselves invite the walker, with their quays and their booksellers' stalls, the green boxes of the old book-dealers that have lined the parapets for generations; and a journey by boat along the Seine, gliding beneath the bridges and past the great monuments, by day or by night, is among the loveliest of the city's experiences. The river is the great artery of Paris, and the source of many of its pleasures.

A Treasure-House of Art and History

Paris is one of the great treasure-houses of art and history in the world, a city where the past is everywhere present and the riches of human art gathered in incomparable abundance. It is the greatest museum city on earth, home to the most visited museum in the world and to a wealth of other great collections, holding between them the supreme treasures of art from the ancient civilisations to the modern age; and it was, for the better part of two centuries, the very centre of the art world, where the great movements were born and the great painters worked. For the lover of art, Paris is an inexhaustible treasure-house, a city where one may spend a lifetime among the museums and never know them all.

The wealth of art in Paris is not confined to the one great museum, famous as it is, but spread among a host of collections, each a treasure-house in its own right: the great gallery of the Impressionists in its former railway station; the museum of modern art in its bold building of pipes and glass; the museums of the sculptors and the painters, the decorative arts and the Orient, the medieval and the modern, scattered through the city. For the lover of art there is no end to Paris, a city where every taste and every period is catered for in some fine museum, and where a lifetime of visits would not exhaust the riches. The museums of Paris are among

the supreme glories of the city, and a chief reason that art-lovers come from across the world.

The history of Paris is written in its streets and its stones, in the monuments of every age that stand side by side, from the Roman remains and the medieval churches to the royal palaces and the grand monuments of the empire, the bold buildings of the modern age; to walk the city is to walk through two thousand years of history, layer upon layer, each age having left its mark. The visitor who knows something of this long history will see far more in Paris than the visitor who does not, reading in the buildings and the boulevards the story of the city and the nation; for Paris has been, for most of its existence, the heart of France, and its history is, in large part, the history of the French.

Paris is rich, too, in history and in the monuments that record it, for it has been the capital of France for many centuries, the seat of kings and emperors and republics, the scene of great events that have shaped the history of the world. Its monuments tell this long story: the medieval cathedral and the Gothic chapel; the royal palaces and the grand classical squares; the triumphal arch and the great monuments of the empire; the relics of the Revolution that shook the world; and the bold buildings of the modern age. To travel Paris is to travel through the history of France and much of the history of Europe, written in stone across the city; and the traveller who comes with a sense of this history finds the monuments and the streets speaking to him of two thousand years and more of the European past.

The Quarters of Paris

Beyond its grand monuments, the deeper charm of Paris lies in its quarters, the distinct neighbourhoods each with its own character and history, its own atmosphere and its own pleasures, that make the city not one place but many. There is Montmartre, the artistic hill of

the north, crowned by its white basilica; the Marais, the old aristocratic quarter turned fashionable, with its mansions and its squares; the Latin Quarter, the ancient student quarter of the Left Bank; Saint-Germain, the elegant quarter of the literary cafés; and many more, each a small world with its own life and character. To explore the quarters of Paris, wandering their streets and squares, pausing at their cafés and markets, is to discover the many faces of the city, and among its deepest pleasures.

Paris is divided, for administration, into a score of districts that spiral outward from the centre, and the visitor will soon learn to find his way among them; but the true divisions of the city, for the traveller, are the quarters, the neighbourhoods with their distinct characters, which do not always follow the administrative lines. Each quarter has its own atmosphere, its own pace, its own pleasures, from the bustle of the grand boulevards to the village calm of the old quarters, the artistic memory of Montmartre to the literary chic of Saint-Germain; and the pleasure of Paris lies as much in feeling these distinct atmospheres, wandering from quarter to quarter, as in seeing the great monuments. The traveller who would know the true Paris, beneath the famous sights, should give time to the quarters, each at its own pace, and discover the intimate, living city that lies behind the grand façade.

To know Paris, then, is not merely to see its famous sights, but to explore its quarters, each a world of its own, with its own character and atmosphere, its own streets and squares, its own life; and the visitor who gives his time to the quarters, wandering them on foot, soaking up their distinct atmospheres, will know the city far more deeply than the one who merely ticks off the monuments. The great pleasure of Paris lies as much in this wandering, the unhurried exploration of the quarters, as in the seeing of the sights; and the visitor should leave time, amid his sightseeing, simply to wander and to savour the quarters, where the true life of the city is found.

Half the pleasure of these quarters lies simply in wandering them, with no fixed object, letting the streets lead where they will, pausing at a café or a square, soaking up the atmosphere; for each quarter rewards the stroller with its own character and its own small discoveries, and the unhurried wanderer finds in them the true, living, everyday Paris that lies beneath the grand monuments of the guidebook. To wander the quarters of Paris on foot, without haste and without a plan, is among the surest ways to fall in love with the city.

The Parisian Table

Paris is one of the great food cities of the world, and the pleasures of the table are central to a visit, for the city offers a wealth of good eating and drinking at every level, from the corner café to the grand restaurant, the market stall to the bakery. The café is the heart of Parisian life, the place where Parisians and visitors alike sit and watch the world go by over a coffee or a glass of wine; the bistro and the brasserie offer the classic dishes of French cooking in their convivial rooms; the bakeries fill the morning air with the scent of fresh bread and pastries; and the markets, spilling colour and abundance through the streets, are among the city's great pleasures. To eat and drink in Paris, in the cafés and the bistros, the markets and the bakeries, is among the chief delights of a visit, and a window onto the soul of the city.

The café deserves a special word, for it is an institution of Parisian life, a place not only to eat and drink but to sit and watch the world, to read or to talk or to rest, for as long as one likes; one is never hurried from a Paris café, and may linger over a single coffee for an hour, watching the life of the street. To take a table on a café terrace, with a coffee or a glass of wine, and to watch the passing scene of the city, is one of the quintessential pleasures of Paris, costing little and open to all; and the visitor should make use of the cafés, for a

coffee in the morning, a rest during the day, an apéritif before dinner, as the Parisians do, for they are the living rooms of the city.

The food of Paris is not only the grand cooking of the famous kitchens but the everyday pleasures of the café and the market, the bread and the cheese, the wine and the pastry, available to every traveller, whatever his means. To take a coffee on a café terrace, to buy bread warm from the baker, to shop a Paris market heaped with the produce and the cheeses of France, to dine in a neighbourhood bistro on the classic dishes, washed down with a glass of wine, are among the simplest and deepest pleasures of the city; and the traveller who would eat well in Paris need not seek the famous and the costly, but only follow the Parisians, to the markets and the cafés, the bakeries and the bistros. The Parisian table is treated more fully in its own chapter; but the traveller should know, from the first, that to come to Paris is to feast.

The Art of Living

For all its monuments and museums, the deepest pleasure of Paris, for many, lies in its art of living, the famous Parisian way of savouring the pleasures of life, that makes the city not only a place to see but a place to live, however briefly, in the Parisian manner. It is found in the café terrace and the long lunch, the stroll along the river and through the gardens, the market in the morning and the apéritif at dusk, the care for beauty and pleasure and the savouring of the moment; for the Parisians have made an art of daily life, of taking time and pleasure in the ordinary good things, the coffee and the walk, the meal and the talk, the glass of wine in the sun. The visitor who falls in with this rhythm discovers one of the deepest pleasures of the city, and perhaps the truest secret of its enduring appeal.

The art of living is, at its heart, the art of savouring the pleasures of life, of taking time and care over the good things, the meal and the

wine, the stroll and the conversation, the hour at the café and the afternoon in the garden; the Parisians have made of daily life an art, and it is this, as much as the monuments and the museums, that the lover of Paris comes to seek and carries away. The visitor should give himself to this art of living, slowing his pace to that of the city, taking time to savour its pleasures rather than rushing through its sights; for in doing so he will not only enjoy his visit the more, but carry away the truest gift of Paris, a richer way of living.

To travel Paris well is not merely to tick off its monuments but to enter, for a time, into this art of living, to slow to the pace of the city and to take its pleasures as the Parisians do. Take a table on a café terrace, with no object but to watch the passing scene; spend an afternoon in one of the great gardens, among the trees and the fountains; wander an old quarter with no fixed object, pausing where the fancy takes you; linger over a long lunch or an evening drink, savouring the beautiful city at a human pace. These simple pleasures, as much as any monument or museum, are the soul of Paris, and the traveller who gives himself to them, who tastes the Parisian art of living as well as sees the Parisian sights, will know the city far more deeply, and carry away its truest gift.

A City for Every Traveller

One of the deepest charms of Paris is that it rewards every kind of traveller and every kind of visit, from the briefest first acquaintance to the deepest lifelong love. The lover of art finds the world's greatest museums and the studios and haunts of the painters; the lover of history, two thousand years written in stone across the city; the lover of food and wine, one of the great tables of the world; the lover of romance, the most romantic city on earth; the lover of fashion and style, the capital of elegance; the lover of simple pleasure, the café and the market, the garden and the stroll. Whatever one seeks, Paris offers it in abundance, and offers it with a beauty and a style that few cities can match.

Paris rewards, too, both the first visit and the fiftieth, for it is inexhaustible, and no single visit can do more than begin to know it. The visitor with a few days may see the great glories, the river and the islands, the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower, the famous quarters; the one who returns, again and again, may spend a lifetime discovering the city and never exhaust it, for there is always another museum, another quarter, another café, another corner to discover. This inexhaustible richness, this capacity to reward both the first visit and the lifelong love, is among the city's deepest charms; and it means that no traveller, whatever his time or his taste, need leave Paris unsatisfied, and that all who come are drawn to return. There is always more of Paris to discover, and always a reason to come again.

Paris welcomes every kind of traveller, and offers something to each: to the lover of art, its incomparable museums; to the lover of history, its monuments of every age; to the lover of food, its markets and its tables; to the romantic, its bridges and its gardens; to the family, its parks and its pleasures; to the idler, its cafés and its streets. There is no one way to see Paris, and no single Paris to see, but as many cities as there are visitors, each finding the city that answers to his own desires; and the visitor should shape his visit to his own tastes, seeking out what he loves, and making of Paris his own.

Paris rewards every season, too, for the city has its beauty and its pleasures in every weather and every time of year. The spring and the autumn are, for many, the loveliest seasons, when the weather is pleasant and the city at its best; the summer is warm and long-dayed, the season of the riverbanks and the gardens and the long evenings, though the city is busiest then; and the winter, cool and quiet, has its own charm, the lit shop windows and the cafés, the museums and the festive season, the city in its more intimate mood. Whenever the traveller comes, Paris will reward him; and each season shows the city in a different light, so that the visitor who returns at different

times of year discovers a different Paris each time, and never tires of it.

About This Book

This book is a complete travel companion to Paris, designed to help the visitor understand and enjoy the city, from its great monuments to its quiet quarters, its world-famous museums to its simple pleasures, its grand sights to its art of living. It is written for the English-speaking traveller, whether planning a first visit or a return, and it aims to convey not only the practical essentials but the deeper character of the city, the things that make Paris Paris. It is not an exhaustive listing of every sight and street, for no single volume could be that and remain useful; rather it is a guide to the city as a whole, an introduction to its quarters and its monuments, its themes and its pleasures, that the traveller may grasp Paris and shape his own discovery of it.

The book is arranged to be useful and clear. After this introduction and a chapter on reaching and getting about the city, it treats the quarters and the great sights of Paris in turn: the river and the islands, the Louvre and the museums, the Eiffel Tower and the grand monuments, Montmartre and the Right Bank, the Latin Quarter and the Left Bank, the markets and the shopping. It then gives a chapter to the Parisian table, one of the city's chief glories; chapters on day trips to Versailles and the region around the capital, and on suggested itineraries for visits of various lengths; a practical guide from A to Z; and a concluding reflection, with resources for the journey. The traveller may read it through, or turn to the chapters that serve his needs.

A word on the spirit of the book. It concentrates, throughout, on the durable and the essential, the character and the highlights of the city that do not change from year to year, rather than the perishable details of times and prices, which date quickly and are best checked,

at the time of travel, with the current and official sources. Its aim is to give the traveller a lasting understanding of Paris, a sense of the city and its quarters, its monuments and its pleasures, that will serve him on any visit and for years to come; and to send him out to discover the most beloved of cities with an informed eye and an open heart. Let us begin, then, with the long and fascinating story of how Paris came to be the city we know, before we turn to the practical matter of reaching it and setting out to explore its quarters and its riches.

CHAPTER TWO

The Story of Paris: A Short History

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TO WALK THE STREETS of Paris is to walk through more than two thousand years of history, for the city has been continuously inhabited since before the Romans came, and every age has left its mark upon the streets and the stones, the monuments and the very plan of the city; and the traveller who knows something of this long story will see far more in Paris than the traveller who does not, reading in the buildings and the boulevards the layers of the past. The history of Paris is, in large measure, the history of France itself, for the city has been the capital and the heart of the nation for most of its existence, the stage on which the great dramas of French history have played out, from the Roman conquest to the Revolution, from the age of kings to the modern republic. This chapter offers a short history of the city, that the traveller may understand the past he will encounter in its streets.

We cannot, in a single chapter, do justice to so long and rich a history, and we shall not try; rather, we offer a brief sketch of the great ages of Paris, the Roman town and the medieval city, the Renaissance and the age of kings, the Revolution and the empire, the great rebuilding of the nineteenth century and the modern city, that the traveller may have a framework on which to hang what he sees, and a sense of the long story written in the streets. For the history of Paris is not a dead thing, shut up in books, but a living presence in the city, visible at every turn, in the Roman remains and the medieval churches, the royal squares and the grand boulevards, the monuments of every age that stand side by side; and the traveller who carries this history in his mind will find the city the richer and the more meaningful for it.

A word of caution: the history that follows is a sketch only, simplified and compressed, leaving out far more than it contains, and the reader who would know the rich and complex history of Paris in its fullness must look to the many fine books devoted to it. But even a brief sketch will serve the traveller's purpose, which is not scholarship but understanding, a framework on which to hang what he sees; and with this modest aim, we offer the following short account of the great ages of the city, from its origins to the present day.

Roman Lutetia

The story of Paris begins, so far as we can trace it, with a tribe of Celtic Gauls, the Parisii, who settled on the banks of the Seine some centuries before the Christian era, and gave the city its eventual name; they established themselves on and about the island in the river, built their bridges and their fort, minted their coins, and traded along the great waterway, a small but prosperous river settlement. Their independence was ended by the Romans, for in the middle of the first century before Christ, a Roman army defeated the Parisii in the course of Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul, and the Romans established on the site a garrison town, which they called Lutetia, the Latin name by which the city would be known for centuries before it took the name of the tribe.

Roman Lutetia spread from the island across to the gentle hill of the Left Bank, and took the form of a proper Roman town, laid out on a grid, with the buildings and amenities of Roman civilisation: a forum on the heights, public baths, an amphitheatre for the games, temples and villas, the whole connected by the straight Roman roads. Something of this Roman town survives for the traveller to see, for the remains of the great baths are preserved beside a medieval mansion that is now a museum of the Middle Ages, and the oval of the Roman amphitheatre may still be seen, tucked away among the streets of the Left Bank; these are the oldest monuments

of Paris, the relics of its Roman infancy, and a reminder of how deep the city's history runs.

For all its Roman amenities, Lutetia was never one of the great cities of the Roman world, but a modest provincial town, prosperous enough on its river trade, and important chiefly for its position on the great north–south road and the crossing of the Seine. As the Roman Empire declined and the barbarian invasions began, the town contracted, its people withdrawing for safety to the island in the river, which could be more easily defended; and the open Roman town of the Left Bank fell into decay, while the fortified island became the nucleus of the medieval city. The shift from the Roman town on the hill to the fortified island marks the passage from the ancient to the medieval city.

In the centuries of the Roman town, two developments shaped the future city. The first was the coming of Christianity, in the third century, brought, so tradition holds, by the city's first bishop, who was martyred on the hill to the north of the city, which took from his martyrdom its name, the mount of the martyr, the hill we now call Montmartre; this early Christianity would make Paris, in time, one of the great religious centres of Europe. The second was the gradual change of the city's name, for as the Roman order faded, the town came to be known by the name of its old tribe, the city of the Parisii, and so, at last, simply Paris; and a holy woman of the fifth century, who according to tradition saved the city from the Huns by her prayers and her courage, became its patron saint, honoured in Paris to this day.

The Medieval City

The Roman order gave way, in the fifth century, to the rule of the Franks, the Germanic people who gave their name to France; and their king, having conquered the old Roman Gaul, chose Paris as his capital in the early sixth century, beginning the city's long career as

the seat of kings. Through the troubled centuries that followed, Paris was not always the chief seat of power, for the early Frankish kings divided their realm and moved their courts; but the city endured, and with the rise of a new royal dynasty at the end of the tenth century, whose kings made Paris the centre of their power, the city's position as the capital of the emerging French nation was secured, and it began its long ascent to greatness.

Through the Middle Ages, Paris grew into the largest and one of the greatest cities in Europe, a centre of royal power, religious life, trade and learning, its population swelling far beyond that of its rivals; the island in the river remained the heart of the city, the seat of the royal palace and the great cathedral, while the two banks developed their distinct characters, the Right Bank the place of trade and commerce, the Left Bank the place of learning. It was a city of churches and monasteries, markets and workshops, a teeming medieval metropolis; and it was here, in the region around Paris, that one of the great achievements of the medieval mind was born, the Gothic style of architecture, which would spread from the Île-de-France across all of Europe.

The birth of the Gothic is among the glories of medieval Paris, for it was at the royal abbey to the north of the city that the new style first took shape, in the rebuilding of the abbey church with its soaring arches and its great windows of stained glass; and the style reached its first full flowering in the cathedral of Notre-Dame, begun in the twelfth century on the island in the river, one of the supreme achievements of the age and a monument that has stood at the heart of the city ever since. To the great cathedral was added, in the following century, the exquisite royal chapel built by the most pious of the medieval kings to house the holy relics he had acquired, its walls dissolved almost wholly into glowing stained glass, the jewel of the Gothic and one of the loveliest interiors in the world.

The medieval kings strengthened and adorned their capital. One of the greatest of them, around the end of the twelfth century, enclosed

the city on both banks with a great wall, and built, as its western bulwark, a fortress on the right bank of the river, which would in time become the most famous palace in France, the Louvre; what began as a grim medieval stronghold guarding the river approach would be transformed, over the centuries, into the royal palace and at last the great museum we know today. The kings' own residence was the palace on the island, the seat of royal power and justice, of which a grim and famous fragment survives, having served in later ages as a prison; and the island remained the royal and religious heart of the medieval city.

Medieval Paris was, besides a royal and religious capital, one of the great centres of learning in Europe, for the schools that gathered on the Left Bank grew, in the course of the thirteenth century, into the University of Paris, one of the first and most famous universities of the medieval world, drawing students from across the continent. The most famous of its colleges, founded in the middle of the thirteenth century by a chaplain of the king, gave its name to the university itself, the Sorbonne; and the scholars and students of the university, who studied and disputed in Latin, gave the Left Bank quarter the name it bears to this day, the Latin Quarter. Thus the medieval city laid the foundations of the Paris we know, the royal city, the religious city, the city of learning, in its monuments and its quarters.

Plague, War and Renaissance

The later Middle Ages brought hard times to Paris, as to all of Europe, in the form of the great pestilence, the Black Death, which swept through the crowded city in the fourteenth century and carried off a great part of its people; and in the form of the long and ruinous war between the kingdoms of France and England, the Hundred Years' War, which brought misery and disorder, and in the course of which Paris itself was for a time occupied by the English and their Burgundian allies. These were dark and difficult years for the city, of plague and war, occupation and recovery; but Paris endured them,

as it has endured so much, and emerged, with the ending of the long war, to recover its place as the capital of a reunited kingdom, and to enter a new age.

The recovery of Paris after the long war was slow but sure, and through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the city grew again in size and wealth, spreading beyond its medieval walls, its population swelling, its trade reviving; the kings returned to the city, though they preferred, increasingly, the châteaux of the Loire and the country around. Paris remained the greatest city of the kingdom, its commercial and intellectual heart, even when the court was elsewhere; and it was poised, as the modern age dawned, to enter upon new splendours, though not without first passing through the fire of religious war.

The sixteenth century brought the Renaissance to Paris, and with it a new flowering of art and learning, building and printing, for the city became one of the great centres of the new art of printing, the book-publishing capital of Europe, and its kings, touched by the new learning of Italy, began to transform the medieval city in the new style. But the century brought also a terrible strife, the Wars of Religion, the long and bloody conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants that tore France apart, and that reached in Paris one of its most dreadful moments, a great massacre of the Protestants on a single night, a stain upon the city's history that is remembered still.

From these wars Paris was at last delivered by one of the most beloved of French kings, a Protestant prince who, to win his capital and his kingdom, embraced the Catholic faith, declaring, so the famous saying goes, that the city was well worth a Mass; and having won Paris, he set about its improvement, and gave it two of its most enduring treasures. He completed the oldest of the city's surviving bridges, which despite its name is the oldest standing bridge across the Seine, a broad and handsome span that was a marvel of its day; and he laid out the loveliest of the old squares, a perfect square of rose-coloured brick and stone in the Marais, the model of the elegant

royal square, around which the nobility built their mansions. With this good king, Paris entered the seventeenth century and the great age of the French monarchy.

The Age of Kings

The seventeenth century, the great age of the French monarchy, was a time of magnificence for Paris, even though its greatest king, the Sun King, chose at last to remove his court from the city to the great new palace he built in the countryside at Versailles, making it from then the seat of the court and government, and leaving Paris, in a sense, behind. Yet the Sun King and his age did much for Paris, even as the court departed: they built the great hospital and home for old soldiers with its golden dome, among the noblest monuments of the city; they pulled down the old medieval walls, which were no longer needed, and replaced them with broad tree-lined promenades, the grand boulevards, which gave the city a new kind of grandeur; and they adorned it with triumphal gates and grand squares.

It was in this age, too, that Paris began to earn its famous title, the City of Light, for the king ordered the lighting of the streets with lanterns, to make the dark and dangerous city safer by night, an innovation that made Paris one of the first great cities of Europe to light its streets, and gave rise, in time, to the famous name. And it was in this age that there opened the first of the cafés, those institutions that would become so central to the life of the city, where the wits and writers gathered to talk and to drink the new beverage of coffee; the café was born in the Paris of the kings, and would flourish ever after as one of the chief institutions of the city's life.

Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the face of Paris was gradually transformed, as the medieval city of timber and crowded lanes gave way, quarter by quarter, to a city of stone, of fine mansions and elegant squares, of churches in the grand classical manner and palaces along the river. The nobility built their grand

town houses in the fashionable quarters, first in the Marais and later in the new quarters to the west; and the city acquired, in these centuries, much of the stately architecture and the elegant manner that we still admire, the Paris of fine stone and noble proportion that underlies the later city.

The eighteenth century made Paris the capital of the European mind, the centre of that great movement of thought and inquiry we call the Enlightenment, when the city's salons and cafés buzzed with the new ideas of the philosophers, and Paris became the acknowledged centre of European civilisation, art and fashion, thought and pleasure. The city grew and was embellished: the great domed church that would become the resting-place of the nation's heroes rose on the hill of the Left Bank; the grand avenue of the Champs-Élysées was laid out, climbing westward from the gardens of the palace to the great square that would become the Place de la Concorde; and the city spread westward, towards the open country, in elegant new quarters. By the eve of the Revolution, Paris was a great capital of more than half a million souls, the brilliant centre of a brilliant civilisation, and the stage on which the next great drama of its history was about to unfold.

Revolution and Empire

The French Revolution, the great upheaval that shook France and all of Europe, found its centre and its stage in Paris, and the city was the scene of its most famous and most terrible events. It began, in the popular memory, with the storming of the old royal fortress and prison, the Bastille, by the people of Paris on a July day in 1789, an event so charged with meaning that it is commemorated still as the national day of France; and it proceeded, through the overthrow of the monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic, to the dark days of the Terror, when the guillotine stood in the great square of the city and the blood of the king, the queen, and thousands of others was shed in the name of the Revolution. These tremendous events,