

## BEER IN PARIS

TRANSLATED FROM THE CZECH BY PETER DYER

For a long time the hoppy drink was not to the taste of the French; French soldiers in Germany perhaps became acquainted with it for the first time during the Napoleonic wars, and the story is still told here, as a curiosity of the 1840s, that some captain or Polish emigrant, being a daily guest in some café, induced the owner to order for him from time to time typically a small consignment of beer, always from Strasbourg, where they brewed black beer which was distributed in bottles. As there were no ice cellars for it in Paris, and not very many customers could be found, it regularly went sour and often even had to be drunk very warm. And whenever such a customer got his drink, black as ink and frothing in the glass, in the café, he was the object of general admiration, as if he had performed a real heroic deed. Only after the February revolution and at the end of the fifties could pale beer be found here, which in the cafés was drawn into small glasses under the name of “bock”, usually sour, solely for better digestion or really for a clear stomach upset. When in the early sixties a Czech society was set up in Paris, its members yearning for their home nectar persuaded a café owner to order Czech beer, which the French nicknamed “pivo” after them. While our countrymen, as good connoisseurs, even then wanted Pilsen beer, the old share company “always true to Pilsen” paid no attention to exporting abroad, indeed even the agreement before the Paris exhibition of 1867 to send it came to nothing. The Czechs had to be content with beer from Litoměřice, which began to find respectable sales there, in so far as it did not lose its original quality. The big change was brought about only at the 1867 world exhibition by the entrepreneur Dreher, who not only delivered every day there on the spot several ice-

cooled wagons of his drink, but also had his product sold by about two dozen mostly very charming girls, dressed in various national costumes. As the visitors to that exhibition perhaps still remember, as well as girls dressed as Viennese, Austrians, Hungarians, Serbs, Poles and Slovaks, there were also two Bohemians, one in Pilsen costume, one in Domažlice dress. It is understandable that such an exhibition was an attraction - which, however, displeased the Austrian commissioners to the extent that, unwilling that the whole world could discover what a mixture of interesting nationalities the Austrian monarchy consisted of, they at once prohibited all national costumes. Only much later, principally as a result of the efforts of our countryman Makovský, did Pilsen beer too start to make its way there. But now every year the dominance of Bavarian beers is increasing, and in every main street signs may be read which say that here Spatenbräu is on draught - there Löwenbräu - over there Zacherl's Salvator - or real Munich from the so-called Stadtbrauerei - here various beers from Müller, Gruber, Fanta etc. And in those pubs, particularly in the student district, girls serving meals as well provide every sort of smoked meat, for which the German national pickled cabbage, called “choucroute”, forms the main foundation. The stronger English beers, if only for reasons of climate, even though they are closer to the French, cannot be found anywhere in Paris. Only in recent times has a reaction against German beers arisen, from which the success of Pilsen beers could come about.

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