

UNIVERSITY LIFE IN PARIS.

AS MISS LILLIAN STEPHENS SAW IT.

There is a Paris for the tourist and a Paris for the Parisien, and very seldom indeed does an Australian pass across the threshold of the latter. Miss Lillian Stephens, B.A., who is an Adelaide graduate, has just spent 18 months in Paris, and as a student at a French University, making her home with French families, she saw much of the life of urban France. Very fascinating it is to discuss with her her impressions.

She did not find, as we all somehow expect to find, that Parisiens, on closer acquaintance, were much as other people are—that is to say, very much like ourselves. It seemed to her, the longer she stayed in France, more and more a world of different manners, different ideals, different minds, from the world across the narrow channel.

"It is more than a difference of customs—it is a racial difference which goes right down to fundamentals. Living with a French family you come to see that they look upon almost everything in the world from an entirely different angle. They distrust the English in world affairs and think the individual English point of view strange and fantastic. They think the English are cold—and so we are. Until you stay with the French you don't realize how cold they must think us in comparison. In Paris men kiss each other when meeting at the station, and lovers embrace in the street, in the middle of the afternoon.

"Paris is the triumph of artificiality. The beauty is great, but it is all made with hands. The hedges are clipped into shape, the trees are pruned to symmetry. There were times when I longed for a wild hedge and a great untidy sweep of boughs. In the parks each flower blossoms punctually in its season. There is a day for every plant to cease flowering, and the morning after that day the parks are full of other plants, all in full bloom. They have been transplanted from pots, already flowering overnight. Now, I like to see the little things coming up—the young buds thrusting out of their sheathes and the new life appearing among the old."

University Life.

Miss Stephens went to France to study. For the first few months she took a special course of phonetics, under M. Paul Passy, the founder of the Association Phonétique Internationale, and then she entered Sorbonne University, to study for the Certificat d'Etude Française, which she now holds. This is specially arranged for foreign students, and consists of part of the ordinary arts course, with additional lectures. It is taken by students from all over the world—Chinese, Indians, Americans, and exiles from every European country, so that in between lectures one may study humanity from many angles. In vacations Miss Stephens and her friends either went over to England or made tours through Italy, Switzerland, and other lovely parts of Europe.

At Sorbonne there were many contrasts with the academic world in Australia.

"There is no university life as we understand it all," said Miss Stephens. "Perhaps it is too big—there are 24,000 students."

"I wish I could give you some idea of a typical Sorbonne lecture. Anything more unlike our quiet ways could not well be imagined. One set of lectures I attended were given at 5 o'clock. A very popular professor was lecturing on the history of comedy. At a quarter past 4 a crowd was waiting outside the closed doors, and the next half-hour reminded me of nothing so much as waiting for early doors at the theatre. Immediately the doors were opened everybody rushed them, and started to push and scramble a way in. Then began a race for front seats, partly because there wasn't enough form and table accommodation for everybody, and partly because the professor's voice was rather weak, and did not reach the back benches.

"Students all brought their hats, umbrellas, and coats, and as they passed the

long table in front of the professor they dumped their belongings on it, so that the professor looked at the students over a sea of umbrellas. Then those who came in late sat on the table, beside the professor.

"Time and timetables were very haphazard. An examination which was supposed to take place at half-past 7 in the morning began at half-past 8; and hardly anybody bothered to appear at the time arranged. That, however, is typical of the whole of Paris. Nobody keeps appointments punctually, and the street clocks, with the exception of two worked by electricity, are, every one, different; and none right.

"I was at Sorbonne at the time of the students' strike. You will remember that it began over the selection of a professor for the law school. The Professorial

Board, following the usual custom, sent two names to the Minister of Education, who, instead of selecting the first, according to precedent, chose the one whose political sympathies suited him. Now there is a strong Royalist element in the law school, and the Royalist students objected. They refused to allow the new professor to lecture; there was a street demonstration and a counter-demonstration, in which the students carried leaded sticks, and about 50 people were injured and taken to hospital. (And none of these fiery politicians, by-the-way, were old enough to have a vote!) Some of the students were imprisoned; but the others persisted, and when the professor came to give a lecture the students barricaded themselves in. The Students' Union called a strike in sympathy with the objectors, and the whole matter ended in the resignation of the professor.

"When we hinted that such things were unknown in Australia, the French said, 'Ah, but this is a republic—the land of liberty!'

"Politics very rapidly become a personal matter in France. In the Chamber of Deputies one member frequently hits another in the eye, and a short and fiery combat follows. In the house where we lived there was one girl student who was an ardent Communist, and there were heated arguments over the table. People looked as if in another moment they would be at each other's throats, but the next minute, on the contrary, all would be peace and amiability.

At Home.

"Nearly all of the university lecturers take paying guests. We ourselves stayed with a very pleasant family, that of a teacher of mathematics. The atmosphere of the home was extremely formal, according to our Australian ideas. We might see Madame at intervals all the morning, we might see her up to the very moment before dejeuner, but when we came to the table she always shook hands with us and said good morning. We then shook hands with everybody all round. After dejeuner our host and hostess rose and again shook hands, and wished us a pleasant walk or drive, or whatever we were going to do. In the evening the whole performance took place all over again.

"The French housekeeper achieves marvels of economy, and French people are content to do without very much that we would think necessary. The houses, except the new ones, have few or no conveniences. If a flat possess a bathroom, the rent immediately soars out of the reach of moderate means. 'The idea of expecting a bathroom at that price!' Madame would say indignantly.

"French cooking is, of course, on quite different principles from ours. A great deal of wine is used in cooking meat. There are no cakes, as we understand cakes, and once when I begged to go into the kitchen and keep myself in practice by making some. I found the French kitchen possessed neither self-raising flour nor baking powder."

Speaking of French women and public life, Miss Stephens said:—"When we first came to Paris we were paying guests in the house of an ex-ambassador and his wife. Madame was a most delightful person, both brilliant and charming. She was greatly interested in public affairs and in the suffrage. She was the office of a Society for Moral Unity, which aimed at an equal moral standard, and she also took us to a suffrage meeting. The speakers, with the exception of Mrs. Corbett Ashby, the President of the last intergal woman suffrage conference, were all French women barristers, and I was greatly impressed by the power of their arguments and their effective delivery. There are French women like these who would value the suffrage as a means to an end, and are very enthusiastic, but the bulk of the French women have no desire for the vote. It is foreign to their interests, and they cannot see what use it would be to them."

Marriage Customs.

Speaking of social differences, Miss Stephens said that while there were a greater number of marriages of convenience than of old, the marriage by arrangement was still a feature of French life. "They still attach great importance to the dot, and are at a loss to understand how a girl can expect to marry without it. When I said that with us men



MISS LILLIAN STEPHENS, B.A.

marry for love, whether a girl has any certain prospects of inheriting money or not, they thought it quite a fantastic idea. But that, they said, soon passes! Marriage is a more serious affair!

I do not mean that a man is never fond of the woman he marries, but I think he first finds out the size of the girl's dot and then allows himself to get fond of her. I met two very pretty and charming girls who had no offers of marriage, and it was understood by everybody that they had no 'dot,' and so could never expect any men to fall in love with them. It happens sometimes, of course. One hears, as of a kind of miracle? 'She was wonderfully lucky! She married quite well, and she had no dot!'

"Even our very modern and delightful friend the Ambassador's wife said, perplexedly, 'But naturally a man loves his wife better if she brings him a good dot!'

"Then French think that a girl should certainly do her share in providing the home and furnishing it; any other suggestion seems to them quite unfair. It may be due to the fact that the men earn less there. I was horrified at some of the teachers' salaries. A professor gets about £250 a year, or perhaps £300. Many of the professors and all the teaching staff take paying guests to keep things going; and all the professors give extra coaching lessons. Our host was teaching mathematics coaching, and taking a course in the law school. It seemed to me a very strenuous life.

"Teaching is not at all well thought of as a profession in France. It is regarded as something people can take up if they are no good at law or at medicine, and paid accordingly."

French Novels For the Young.

Talking of the youth of France, Miss Stephens said that the cloistered "jeune fille" was largely an imaginary figure. "The jeune fille reads everything. 'La Garconne,' a book which was prohibited in England, was the most widely read book in France. Of the daily short stories published in the leading newspapers, only one in a hundred is concerned with anything else but illicit love. There are, of course, many French people who think such fiction very stupid, but it interests the great mass of people, and they consider that to take any other point of view is putting one's head in the sand.

"One result of this tendency in French novels is that thoughtful mothers of growing children find it extremely difficult to obtain for them books which are good in style, and at the same time suitable to youth. There is nothing in French literature to correspond to the great body of wholesome juvenile literature on which English boys and girls grow up, or to the classics which appeal to youth—no Scott, no Kingsley, no Dickens. French parents of the best type, when they want good books for their children, buy English translations of 'Treasure Island' and the like."

No Sport.

"While individual French girls play tennis," Miss Stephens said, "there was not yet any widely spread interest in any sport."

"At the university there was no sport at all between students as students. We saw Lenglen play Mrs. McKane, and there were not more than 300 people present—and many of them were English. In England tickets went up to £1, and it was very difficult to get seats at all.

"Even the children do not play, or play so gently that it is not play at all. They never run and shout and jump as our children do. It was curious to Australian eyes to see the children in the parks. Little things of three and four walk along beside their nurses, all beautifully dressed and gloved. Perhaps they would have a hoop, and bowl that gently along, but they never walked any faster. You would see tiny children, almost babies, go up and shake hands with each other—'Bon jour, Paul.' 'Bon jour, Annette.' I couldn't imagine my young nieces and nephews behaving in such a fashion.

"On the other hand, you do see men playing. In all the public parks and gardens you can find, on a holiday, grown men sailing little toy boats, letting them go round the fountain and running round to catch them when they get to the other side."

Which seems to prove that the play instinct will find an outlet somewhere!

Nov. 16.9.25

THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

Asked on Tuesday whether there had been any marked falling off in the number of students entering for the medical course in recent years, Mr. F. W. Eardley (registrar of the University) said immediately after the war the medical courses, in common with other University courses, had been flooded with a large number of young men who had been in the army, and who, after demobilisation entered on their courses. That flood was now subsiding, and the next two or three years would see a marked decrease in the number of students qualifying. Last year 19 men qualified for the degree of bachelor of medicine. This was above the average. This year 29 men were expected to sit for the final. In the last two years the number entering for the course had been smaller than the number going out, but although the figures were tending to become normal they had not reached the pre-war standard, and probably would not do so. On the question whether South Australia had an over-abundance of doctors, Mr. Eardley was non-committal. "As far as I am aware," he said, "all our men are well placed and readily find positions." Advice from Melbourne disclosed that many students have taken up other courses, because of the gloomy outlook in the medical world. It has become increasingly difficult to get a start in the metropolis, and the number of hospital appointments, which is regulated by the needs of the institutions, has not grown.