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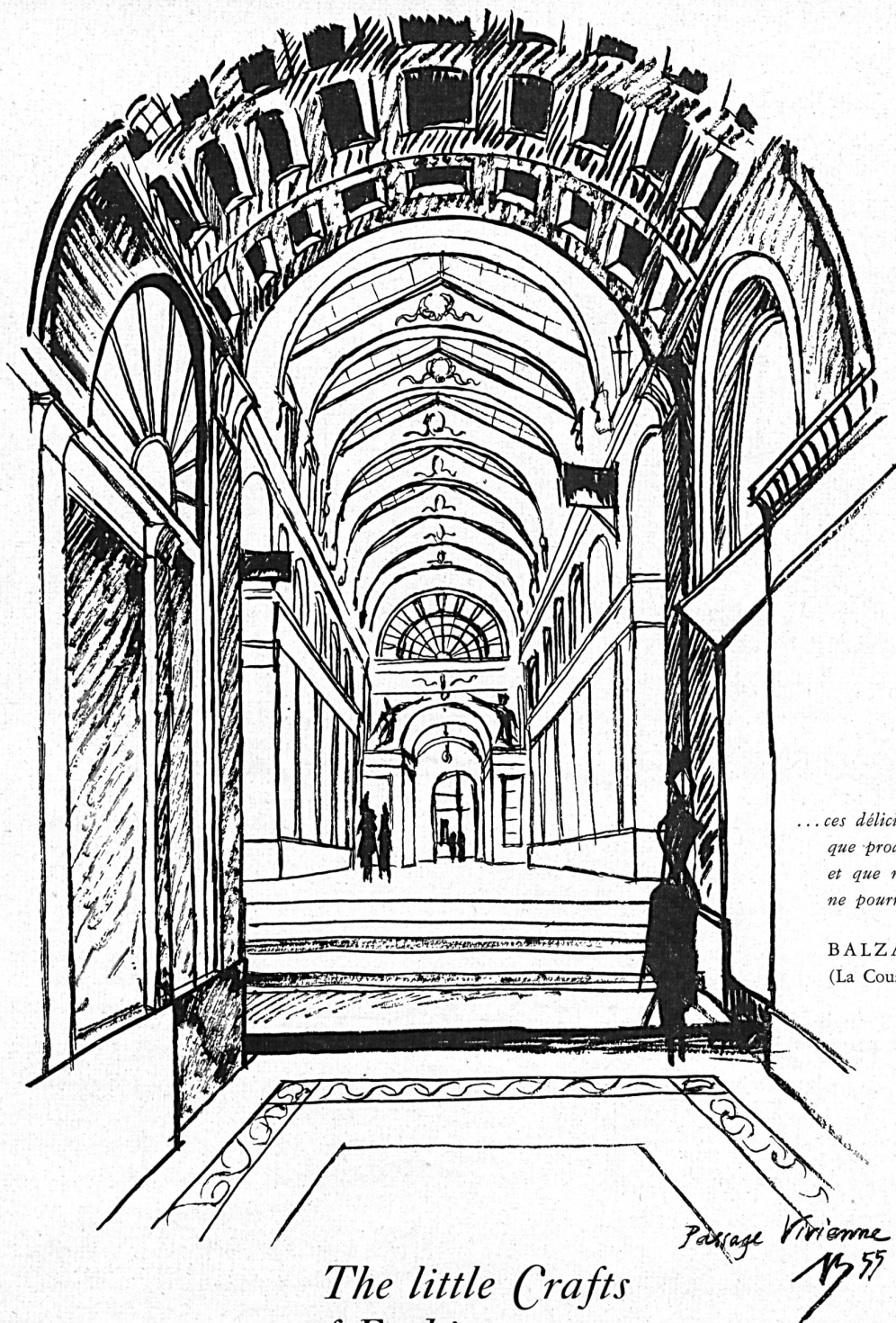
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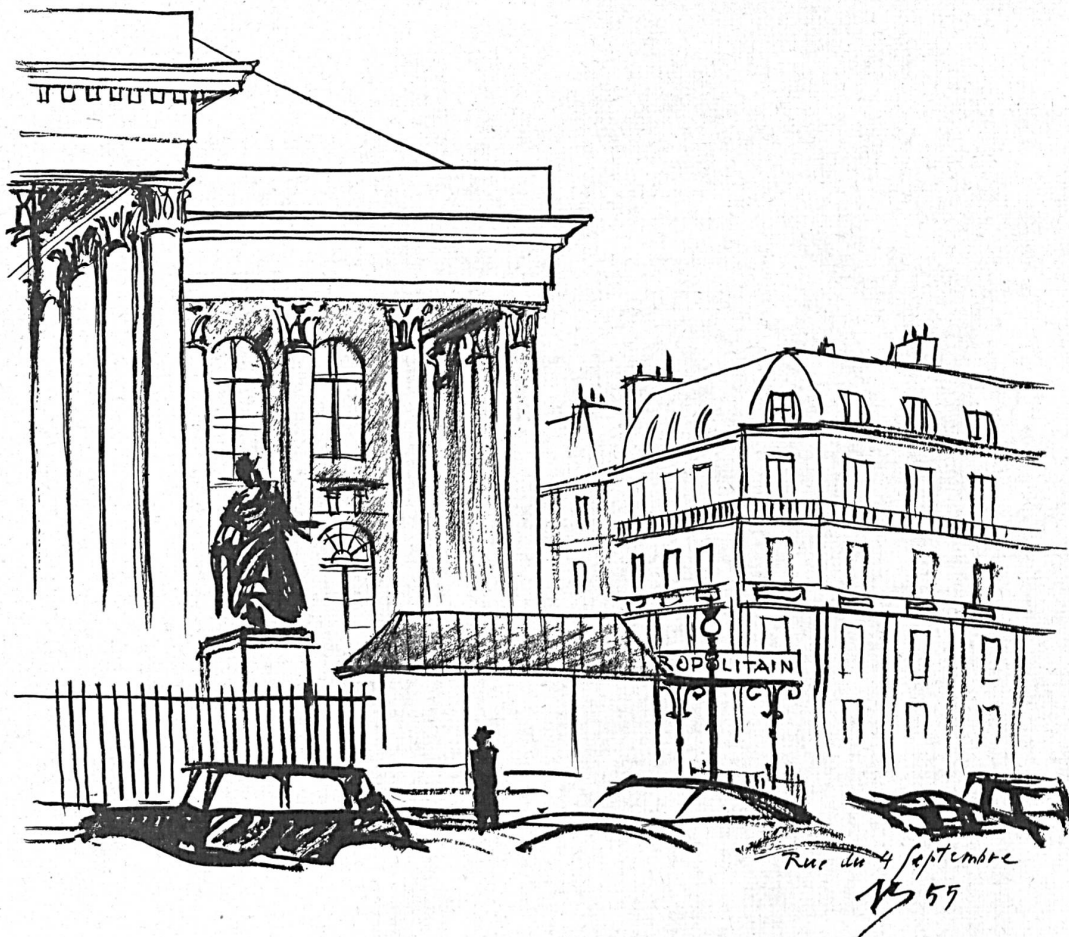
*...ces délicieuses babioles
que produit Paris,
et que nulle autre ville
ne pourra produire.*

BALZAC
(La Cousine Bette)

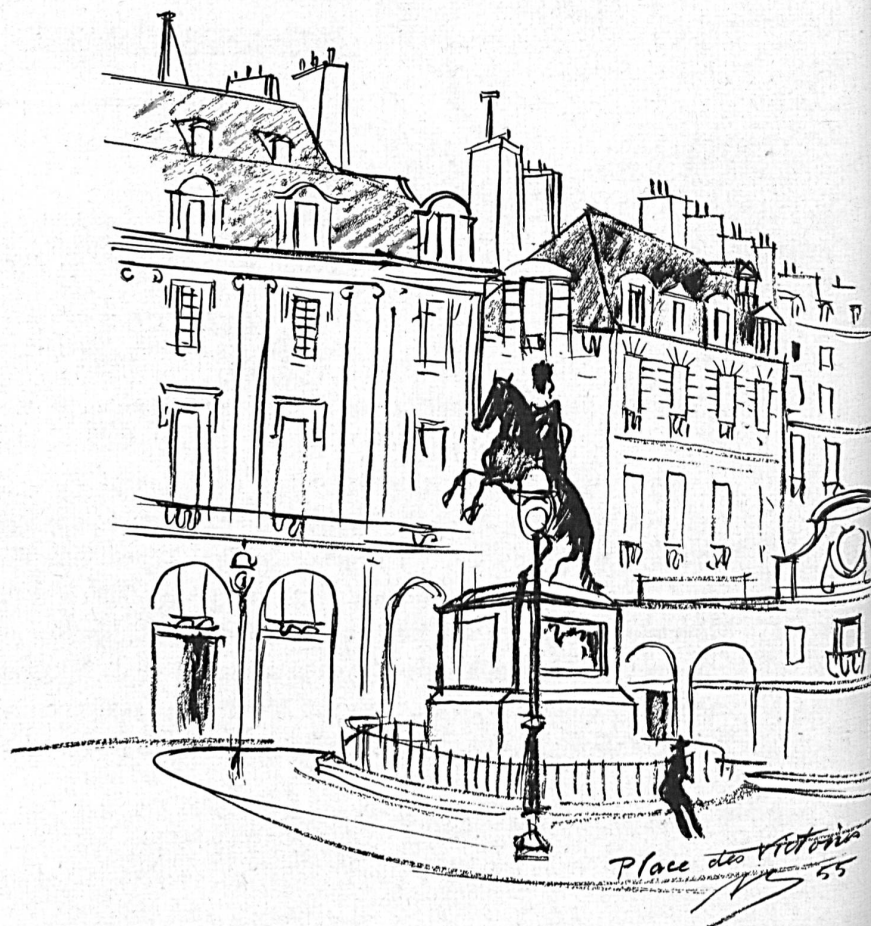
*Passage Vivienne
1757*

The little Crafts of Fashion

They are situated on the fringe of the luxury districts of Paris. Having always avoided the wide avenues, the streets with brightly decorated shop-windows, they have no need of sumptuous facades, of shops with exorbitant rents decorated according to the fashion of the day ; they work in gloomy back streets off the main thoroughfares. And yet everything they produce is bright and glittering. You have only to turn to the pages of Balzac. Where does Cousine Bette who makes passementerie live ? Near the Louvre, almost next door to the Palace in fact, but in the dark, shadowy Rue du Doyenne. There, all day long and part of the night, she sits and embroiders, making gold and silver passementerie. The Rue du Doyenne and the Rue du Musée have long since vanished, but the little crafts of fashion still go on. Some of these skilled craftsmen have moved away from the district that has been theirs for centuries, but most of them have remained faithful to this « 2nd arrondissement »



bounded to the north and west by the big Boulevards, to the east by the wide, seemingly endless Boulevard Sebastopol, and to the south by the Rue des Petits-Champs. They live near the Halles or the Bourse, not far from the Palais-Royal. When they leave their old part of Paris to visit the kings of Couture, on the other side of the Place Vendôme and the Rue Royale, they arrive discreetly, without any fuss or great show of assistants and wares like the creators of textiles. One or two little suitcases are sufficient for them. But once the lids are opened, a fairy world is revealed within. Passementerie, embroideries of all kinds, in soft or brilliant colours, shimmering and gleaming spangles, pearls and precious stones come spilling forth. Flowers, shells, arabesques, different styles and periods mingle within a few square feet. During long hours, even days, keensighted women and girls





with sensitive fingers, have worked with strass, spangles, bugles and metallic thread, while the buses passing by made the windows of the old houses rattle. The craft is fast dying out, say the embroiderers; and yet each season, the best couture collections shine with the lustre of these works of patience which have been created in the half light of the Rue des Jeûneurs or the Rue Richelieu, or even the Rue St. Marc or Place Boëldieu. But the couturier has made his selection. Place must be made for others. Next it is the florist who is announced. The flowers of the world lie heaped on the studio table. One would seek in vain in other capitals of the world for the like of these inimitable artificial flowers: only the craftswomen of Paris could reproduce the purple splendour of the roses of France, the purity of the lily, the malefic beauty of orchids, the fragility of the forget-me-not, the white bells of the lily of the valley, the swirl of the poppy, the panache of the peony and the splendour of the chrysanthemum, only they could give that natural curve to the petals, arch the leaves, place two drops of dew

in the corolla, reproduce the exotic look of the tropical bloom and the fresh sparkle of the humble meadow flower. With these variegated blossoms, it is spring and summer all the year round in the apartments of these sombre districts. In July, the modest violet and her stately sister, the Parma violet, make their way to the Champs Elysées; in December, when the flowerbeds are bare, daisies and cornflowers adorn dresses and hats. A breath of wind, and there is mad confusion among the plumes of all the birds of creation — dyed, decorated, sorted and matched.

There is a knock, a third magician appears; he is the « parurier » with his collection of buckles, bracelets, buttons, necklaces, costume jewellery and ear rings. The splendour of the Arabian Nights is spread before us on the table.



This time it is the nearby « 3rd arrondissement » that presents its creations, from the Rue du Temple to the Rue St. Martin, as well as from the Rue Réaumur to the Rue du Caire and the Rue d'Aboukir which still belongs to the « 2nd arrondissement ».

To stroll through this old part of Paris is to go the rounds of the little crafts of fashion. Who would think that all these fine and delicate creations are conceived and carried out in these noisy streets cluttered with the porters of the Halles (Paris's equivalent of Covent Garden), and yet so near to the glorious Place des Victoires, where Bosio's Louis XIV prances on his charger, in front of the old houses with their charmingly grotesque masks and filigree balconies. One would expect them rather to have been created in the green and sunny districts of the west, than so near to the noisy crowds of the Bourse, the Place and Passage du Caire and the Rue St. Martin.

These little crafts are part of the tradition of Paris. They have not moved. For more than two centuries, they have remained faithful to their first home, as have the joiners and cabinet makers of the Rue St. Antoine. They have not followed the migration towards the west. They have clung to the soil where they first took root. Behind the old window panes and shutters, they have flourished and prospered so that now the windows of the Rue du Quatre-Septembre, the Sentier, the Bourse, the Halles and the Palais-Royal, are the setting for this magnificent flowering which defies the seasons and blossoms all the year round in Paris.

X. X. X.

