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(Franco-Prussian War) Fameux Probleme Algebrique & Politique [Famous Algebraic & Political Problem]

Stock#: 86125
Map Maker: Paul
Date: 1871
Place: Paris
Color: Color
Condition: VG
Size: 19 x 12.5 inches
Price: \$ 875.00



Description:

The Future of France Following the Franco-Prussian War, Told as a Riddle. With Anti-Republican Undertones

Rare and highly interesting riddle-print telling of France's past, present, and future, as it stood in 1871 at the peak of the humiliation of the Franco-Prussian War.

Divided according to three playing cards, labeled 1870, 1871, and 187..?, each tells a different story (explained in simple terms in the corners of the print). These three cards are explicated below.

This work was issued in 1871 in Paris by L. Paul and printed by A Blanc printers. The author of the print remains unknown.

The Past

In 1870, we see laws ("lois") are put aside, rebellion is in the four corners of France, the monarchy of overthrown (upside down), and Paris is "divided." This leads to the Prussian sword plunging into France's heart.

Here we get our first glimpse at the monarchist tendencies of the author of this print. The Prussian victory only comes after the fall of the monarchy, rebellion, and the loss of religion. This is despite Napoleon III's many mistakes that led to the outbreak of the war and the French defeat.

The Present



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The tale of 1871 sees some tragedy on the Franco-Prussian side, but at least the Republicans were defeated. We see that this year starts with the adoption of the Republic (which one can decipher through a very complicated unscrambling of words and sounding out of letters). In an even more convoluted series of word puzzles, the reader can solve that "Mr. Thiers [the French president, phonetically pronounced 'un tiers [one-third]]' quartered himself to appease the spirits," "The army is standing up ['armee' is printed vertically]," "The debt [of 2 billion Francs] is twice covered," and finally "The insurrection is dispersed." The allegorical representation at the bottom is easier to interpret - Alsace and Lorraine are beaten by Prussia while France watches, temporarily powerless.

1871 sees the restoration of order. President Adolphe Thiers's conservative stint as President of the Republic is mentioned favorably. Thiers was a pro-monarchist who had led the violent suppression of the Paris Commune in the spring of that year. His primary goal was to pay the debt to Prussia to restore as many departments to France's control as possible.

The Future

The author of the print looks optimistically towards the future (placing it within the 1870s) in the final playing card. We start out with the instruction to "Remember" before unscrambling "Let us always keep memories of the suffering of Paris under Prussia." Then, by only reading letters in the same typeface in the grid, we see that "soon we will have revenge and bestow punishment." Victory and laughter are scattered: "Victory will smile at us from everywhere." The allegorical print is slightly harder to decipher but means that the affairs of Prussia are all jumbled now; soon, they will be clear. This last bit seems to be an ominous warning to the recent occupier.

Little historical interpretation is needed here - the author simply looks joyously at the future, certain that Prussia's crimes against France will be avenged.

Interpretations

The author of this print does little to hide his political inclinations, but several readings can be made of the work. Least controversially, it is anti-Prussian. However, as stated above, it is also strongly pro-Monarchist and against the Paris Commune and the Radical Republicans. Further undertones are present - the author oftentimes conflates Paris and France, reflecting the very metropolitan-centric tendencies of Parisians at this time.

This print appears to have been made to try to garner mass-market appeal as one of the ephemeral broadsides produced during this period. It may have been published with a younger audience in mind.



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Rarity

We locate an example in the collection of Les Musees de la Ville de Paris. In addition, the work is listed in an 1879 catalog from the BNF.

Detailed Condition:

Hand-colored lithograph. Staining and foxing. Damage to edges. Adjoined to a larger sheet on the left and bottom.