

backwoodsmen of Indiana forty years ago, the mountain folk of Tennessee, the humours of the Mississippi steamboat and the adventurous life of the Far West, are all known to Europe through the tales of writers now living, as the Indians of ninety years ago became known through the romances of Fenimore Cooper. However, this is familiar ground to European readers, so I pass to work of a less generally attractive order.

Thirty years ago the standard of classical scholarship was low, and even the school commentaries on classical authors fell far short of those produced in Germany or England. Nowadays both in classical and in Oriental philology admirably thorough and painstaking work is produced. I have heard high European authorities observe that there is an almost excessive anxiety among American scholars to master all that has been written, even by third-rate Germans, and that the desire they evince to overtake Germany in respect of knowledge betrays some among them into the German fault of neglecting merits of form and style. In the sciences of nature, especially in those of observation, remarkable advances have been made. Dr. Asa Gray, whom the eldest American university has lately lost, was one of the two or three greatest botanists of his age. Much excellent work has been done in geology and palæontology, particularly in exploring the Rocky Mountain regions. Both for the excellence of their instruments and the accuracy of their observations, the astronomers stand in the front rank; nor do they fall behind Europe in the theoretical part of this science. In some branches of physics and chemistry, such as spectrum analysis, American investigators have won like fame. Competent authorities award the highest praise to their recent contributions to biology and to medical science. In economics they seem to stand before either England or France, both as regards the extent to which the subject is studied in universities and as regards the number of eminent persons whom it occupies. In jurisprudence and law, American text-books are quite as good as those produced in England;<sup>1</sup> and one author, the late Mr. Justice Story, deserves, looking to the quantity as well as to the quality of his work, to be placed at the head

<sup>1</sup> The number of legal journals and magazines in the United States is very much larger than in England, and the average of workmanship in them seems higher.

of all who have handled these topics in the English tongue during the last seventy years. Political science has begun to be studied more energetically than in England, where, to be sure, it is scarcely studied at all; and every year sees treatises and articles of permanent value added to the scanty modern literature which our language possesses on this subject. Similarly there is great activity in the field of both secular and ecclesiastical history, though as the work done has largely taken the direction of inquiries into the early history of institutions, and has altogether been more in the nature of research than of treatises attractive to the general public, its quantity and its merits have not yet been duly appreciated even at home, much less in Europe. Indeed, it is remarkable how far from showy and sensational is the bulk of the work now done in America. It is mostly work of the German type, solid, careful, exact, and often dry, not at all the sort of work which theorists about democracy would have looked for, since it appeals rather to the learned few than to the so-called general reader. One receives the impression that the class of intellectual workers, who until recently wanted institutions in which the highest and fullest training could be had, have now become sensible that their country, occupied in developing its resources and educating its ordinary citizens, had fallen behind Europe in learning and science, and that they are therefore the more eager to accumulate knowledge and spend their energy in minutely laborious special studies.<sup>1</sup>

I may be reminded that neither in the departments above mentioned, nor in statesmanship, can one point to many brilliant personalities. The men whose names rise to the lips of a European are all advanced in life. Perhaps this is true of Europe also; perhaps the world has entered on an age of mediocrities. Some one lately said that there was now nobody in Paris, Berlin, or London under sixty years of age whom one would cross the street to look at. If this be so, it is not merely because length of years has given better chances of winning fame, for nearly all the men now famous in Europe had won fame before they were forty. There have been periods in

<sup>1</sup> The extreme pains taken in America to provide every library with a classified catalogue directing readers to the books on each subject, illustrates this tendency.

history when striking figures were lacking, although great events seemed to call for them. As regards America, if there be few persons of exceptional gifts, it is significant that the number of those who are engaged in scientific work, whether in the investigation of nature or in the moral, political, and historical sciences, is larger, relatively to the population of the country, than it was thirty years ago, the methods better, the work done more solid, the spirit more earnest and eager. Nothing more strikes a stranger who visits the American universities than the ardour with which the younger generation has thrown itself into study, even kinds of study which will never win the applause of the multitude. There is more zeal and heartiness among these men, more freshness of mind, more love of learning for its own sake, more willingness to forego the chances of fame and wealth for the sake of adding to the stock of human knowledge, than is to be found to-day in Oxford or Cambridge, or in the universities of Scotland. One is reminded of the scholars of the Renaissance flinging themselves into the study of rediscovered philology, or of the German universities after the War of Liberation. And under the impressions formed in mingling with such men, one learns to agree with the conviction of the Americans that for a nation so abounding in fervid force there is reserved a fruitful career in science and letters, no less than in whatever makes material prosperity.

## CHAPTER CXII

## THE RELATION OF THE UNITED STATES TO EUROPE

ONE cannot discuss American literature and thought without asking, What is the intellectual relation of the United States to Europe? Is it that of an equal member of the great republic of letters? Or is it that of a colony towards the mother country, or of a province towards a capital? Is it, to take instances from history, such a relation as was that of Rome to Greece in the second and first centuries before Christ? or of Northern and Western Europe to Italy in the fifteenth? or of Germany to France in the eighteenth? in all of which cases there was a measure of intellectual dependence on the part of a nation which felt itself in other respects as strong as or stronger than that whose models it followed, and from whose hearth it lighted its own flame.

To answer this question we must first answer another — How do the Americans themselves conceive their position towards Europe? and this, again, suggests a third — What does the American people think of itself?

Fifty, or even forty years ago, the conceit of this people was a byword. It was not only self-conscious but obtrusive and aggressive. Every visitor satirized it, Dickens most keenly of all, in forgiving whom the Americans gave the strongest proof of their good nature. Doubtless all nations are either vain or proud, or both; and those not least who receive least recognition from their neighbours.<sup>1</sup> A nation could hardly stand without this element to support its self-reliance; though when pushed to an extreme it may, as happens with the Turks, make national ruin the more irretrievable. But American conceit has been steadily declining as the country has grown older, more aware of its true strength, more respected by other coun-

<sup>1</sup> The Danes and Portuguese are examples.