

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.¹ 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-

¹ The Danes and Portuguese are examples.

tries.¹ There was less conceit after the Civil War than before, though the Civil War had revealed elements of greatness unexpected by foreigners; there is less now than there was at the close of the Civil War. An impartially rigorous censor from some other planet might say of the Americans that they are at this moment less priggishly supercilious than the Germans, less restlessly pretentious than the French, less pharisaically self-satisfied than the English. Among the upper or better-educated classes, glorification has died out, except of course in Fourth of July and other public addresses, when the scream of the national eagle must be heard. One sometimes finds it replaced by undue self-depreciation, with lamentations over the want of culture, the decline of faith, or the corruption of politics. Among the masses it survives in an exultation over the size and material resources of the country,—the physically large is to them the sublime,—in an overestimate of men and events in American history; in a delight, strongest, of course, among the recent immigrants, in the completeness of social equality, and a corresponding contempt for the “serfs of Europe” who submit to be called “subjects” of their sovereign, in a belief in the superior purity of their domestic life and literature, and in the notion that they are the only people who enjoy true political liberty, liberty far fuller than that of England, far more orderly than that of France.² Taking all classes together, they are now not more sensitive to external opinion than the nations of Western Europe, and less so

¹ Tocqueville complains that the Americans would not permit a stranger to pass even the smallest unfavourable criticism on any of their institutions, however warmly he might express his admiration of the rest.

² It must, however, be admitted that this whimsical idea is not confined to the masses. I find, for instance, in an address delivered by an eminent man to a distinguished literary fraternity in October, 1887, the following passage: “They (*i.e.* ‘the immortal periods of the Declaration of Independence’) have given political freedom to America and France, unity and nationality to Germany and Italy, emancipated the Russian serf, relieved Prussia and Hungary from feudal tenures, and will in time free Great Britain and Ireland also”!

I have often asked Americans wherein they consider their freedom superior to that of the English, but have never found them able to indicate a single point in which the individual man is worse off in England as regards either his private civil rights, or his political rights, or his general liberty of doing and thinking as he pleases. They generally turn the discussion to social equality, the existence of a monarchy and of hereditary titles, and so forth—matters which are of course quite different from freedom in its proper sense.

than the Russians, though they are still a trifle more apt to go through Europe comparing what they find with what they left at home. A foreign critic who tries to flout or scourge them no longer disturbs their composure; his jeers are received with amusement or indifference. Their patriotism is in one respect stronger than that of Frenchmen or Englishmen, because it is less broken by class feeling, but it has ceased to be aggressive.

Accordingly the attitude of thoughtful Americans to Europe has no longer either the old open antagonism or the old latent self-distrust. It is that of a people which conceives itself to be intellectually the equal of any other people, but to have taken upon itself for the time a special task which impedes it in the race of literary and artistic development. Its mission is to reclaim the waste lands of a continent, to furnish homes for instreaming millions of strangers, to work out a system of harmonious and orderly democratic institutions. That it may fulfil these tasks it has for the moment postponed certain other tasks which it will in due time resume.¹ Meanwhile it may, without loss of dignity or of faith in itself, use and enjoy the fruits of European intellect which it imports until it sees itself free to rival them by native growths. If I may resort to a homely comparison, the Americans are like a man whose next-door neighbour is in the habit of giving musical parties in the summer evenings. When one of these parties comes off, he sits with his family in the balcony to enjoy the quartettes and solos which float across to him through the open windows. He feels no inferiority, knowing that when he pleases he can have performers equally good to delight his own friends, though for this year he prefers to spend his surplus income in refurnishing his house or starting his son in business.

There is of course a difference in the view of the value of European work as compared with their own, taken by the more educated and by the less educated classes. Of the latter some fail to appreciate the worth of culture and of science, even for practical purposes, as compared with industrial success, though in this respect they are no more obtuse than the

¹ A Chicago man is reported to have expressed this belief with characteristic directness in the sentence “Chicago has had no time for culture yet, but when she does take hold she will make it hum.”

bulk of Englishmen; and they accordingly underrate their obligations to Europe. Others, knowing that they ought to admire works of imagination and research, but possessed of more patriotism than discernment, cry up second or third rate fiction, poetry, and theology because it is American, and try to believe that their country gives to Europe as much as she receives. Taste for literature is so much more diffused than taste in literature that a certain kind of fame is easily won. There are dozens of poets and scores of poetesses much admired in their own State, some even beyond its limits, with no merit but that of writing verse which can be scanned, and will raise no blush on the most sensitive cheek. Criticism is lenient, or rather it does not exist, for the few journals which contain good reviews are little read except in four or five Northern Atlantic States, and several inland cities. A really active and searching criticism, which should appraise literary work on sound canons, not caring whether it has been produced in America, or in Europe, by a man or by a woman, in the East or in the West, is one of the things most needed in America. Among highly educated men this extravagant appreciation of native industry produces a disgust expressing itself sometimes in sarcasm, sometimes in despondency. Many deem their home-grown literature trivial, and occupy themselves with European books, watching the presses of England, France, and Germany more carefully than almost any one does in England. Yet even these, I think, cherish silently the faith that when the West has been settled and the railways built, and possibilities of sudden leaps to wealth diminished, when culture has diffused itself among the classes whose education is now superficial, and their love of art extended itself from furniture to pictures and statuary, American literature will in due course flower out with a brilliance of bloom and a richness of fruit rivalling the Old World.

The United States are, therefore, if this account be correct, in a relation to Europe for which no exact historical parallel can be found. They do not look up to her, nor seek to model themselves after her. They are too proud for a province, too large for a colony. They certainly draw from Europe far more thought than they send to her, while of art they have produced little and exported nothing; though what they do

now produce, improves in quality. Yet they cannot be said to be led or ruled by Europe, because they apply their own standards and judgment to whatever they receive.

Their special relations to the leading European countries are worth noting. In old colonial days England was everything. The revolt of 1776 produced an estrangement which might have been healed after 1783, had England acted with more courtesy and tact, but which was embittered by her scornful attitude. Wounds which were just beginning to scar over were reopened by the war of 1812; and the hostility continued as long as the generation lived whose manhood saw that war. Tocqueville, in 1833, says he can imagine no hatred more venomous than that between the Americans and the English. The generation which remembered 1812 was disappearing when the sympathy of the English upper classes for the Southern Confederacy in 1861-65 lit up the almost extinguished flames. These have been quenched, so far as the native Americans are concerned, by the settlement of the Alabama claims, which impressed the United States not merely as a concession to themselves, but as an evidence of the magnanimity of a proud country. There is still a certain amount of rivalry with England, and a certain suspicion that the English are trying to patronize even when the latter are innocent of such intentions. Now and then an Englishman who, feeling himself practically at home, speaks with the same freedom as he would use there, finds himself misunderstood. But these lingering touches of jealousy are slight compared with the growing sympathy felt for "the old country," as it is still called. It is the only European country in which the American people can be said to feel any personal interest, or towards an alliance with which they are drawn by any sentiment. For a time, however, the sense of gratitude to France for her aid in the War of Independence was very strong. It brought French literature as well as some French usages into vogue, and increased the political influence which France exercised during the earlier years of her own Revolution. Still that influence did not go far beyond the sphere of politics: one feels it but slightly in the literature of the half century from 1780 to 1830.

During the reign of Louis Napoleon, wealthy Americans

resorted largely to Paris, and there, living often for years together in a congenial atmosphere of display and amusement, imbibed undemocratic tastes and ideas, which through them found their way back across the ocean, and coloured certain sections of American society, particularly in New York. Although there is still an American colony in Paris, Parisian influence seems no longer to cross the Atlantic. French books, novels excepted, and these in translations, are not largely read. French politics excite little interest: France is practically not a factor at all in the moral or intellectual life of the country. Over art, however, especially painting and decoration, she has still great power. Many American artists study in Paris, indeed all resort thither who do not go to Rome or Florence; French pictures enjoy such favour with American dealers and private buyers as to make the native artists complain, not without reason, that equally good home-made work receives no encouragement;¹ and house decoration, in which America seems to stand before England, particularly in the skilful use of wood, is much affected by French designs and methods.

The enormous German immigration of the last thirty years might have been expected to go far towards Germanizing the American mind, giving it a taste for metaphysics on the one hand, and for minutely patient research on the other. It does not seem to have had either the one result or the other, or indeed any result whatever in the field of thought. It has enormously stimulated the brewing industry: it has retarded the progress of Prohibitionism: it has introduced more outdoor life than formerly existed: it has increased the taste for music, it has broken down the strictness of Sabbath observance, and has indeed in some cities produced what is commonly called "a Continental Sunday." But the vast majority of German immigrants have belonged to the humbler classes, and were but faintly influenced by their own literature. There have been among them extremely few *savants*, or men likely to

¹ There was, until 1894, a heavy customs duty on foreign works of art, but this does not greatly help the native artist, for the men who buy pictures can usually buy notwithstanding the duty, while it prevents the artist from furnishing himself with the works he needs to have around him for the purposes of his own training.

become *savants*, nor have these played any conspicuous part in the universities or in literature.¹

Nevertheless the influence of Germany has been of late years powerfully stimulative upon the cultivated classes, for not only are German treatises largely read, but many of the most promising graduates of the universities proceed to Germany for a year or two to complete their studies, and there become imbued with German ideas and methods. The English universities have, by their omission to develop advanced instruction in special branches of knowledge, lost a golden opportunity of coming into relation with and influencing that academic youth of America in whose hands the future of American science and learning lies. This German strain in American work has, however, not tended towards the propagation of metaphysical schools, metaphysics themselves being now on the ebb in Germany. It appears in some departments of theology, and is also visible in historical and philological studies, in economics, and in the sciences of nature.

On the more popular kinds of literature, as well as upon manners, social usages, current sentiment generally, England and her influences are of course nearer and more potent than those of any other European country, seeing that English books go everywhere among all classes, and that they work upon those who are substantially English already in their fundamental ideas and habits. Americans of the cultivated order, and especially women, are more alive to the movements and changes in the lighter literature of England, and more curious about those who figure in it, especially the rising poets and essayists, than equally cultivated English men and women. I have been repeatedly surprised to find books and men that had made no noise in London well known in the Atlantic States, and their merits canvassed with more zest and probably more acuteness than a London drawing-room would have shown. The verdicts of the best circles were not always the same as those of similar circles in England, but they were nowise biassed by national feeling, and often seemed to proceed from a more delicate and sympathetic insight. I recollect, though I had better not men-

¹ Mr. A. D. White, in an interesting article on the influence of German thought in the United States, cites only Lieber and Mr. Carl Schurz. In public life two or three Germans have attained high distinction.

tion, instances in which they welcomed English books which England had failed to appreciate, and refused to approve American books over which English reviewers had become ecstatic.

Passing English fashions in social customs and in such things as games sometimes spread to America,—possibly more often than similar American fashions do to England,—but sometimes encounter ridicule there. The Anglomaniac is a familiar object of good-humoured satire. As for those large movements of opinion or taste or practical philanthropy in which a parallelism or correspondence between the two countries may often be discerned, this correspondence is more frequently due to the simultaneous action of the same causes than to any direct influence of the older country. In theology, for instance, the same relaxation of the rigid tests of orthodoxy has been making way in the churches of both nations. In the Protestant Episcopal church there has been a similar, though far less pronounced, tendency to the development of an ornate ritual. The movement for dealing with city pauperism by voluntary organizations began later than the Charity Organization societies of England, but would probably have begun without their example. The University Extension movement, and the establishment of "university settlements" in the poorer parts of great cities are further instances. The semi-socialistic tendency which I have referred to as now noticeable among the younger clergy and the younger teachers in some of the universities, although similar to that which may be discerned in England, does not seem traceable to direct English influences. So too the rapidly growing taste for beauty in house decoration and in street architecture is a birth of the time rather than of Old World teaching, although it owes something to Mr. Ruskin's books, which have been more widely read in America than in England.¹

In political matters the intellectual sympathy of the two countries is of course less close than in the matters just described, because the difference between institutions and conditions involves a diversity in the problems which call for a

¹ America has produced of late years at least one really distinguished architect now unhappily lost to her: and the art seems to be making rapid progress. European artists and critics who saw the buildings erected for the Chicago Exhibition of 1893 were greatly impressed by the inventiveness and taste they displayed: nor can a traveller fail to be struck by the beauty and variety of design shown by the villas which surround the richer cities.

practical solution. Political changes in England affect American opinion less than such changes in France affect English opinion, although the Americans know more and care more and judge more soundly about English affairs than the French do about English or the English about French. The cessation of bitterness between Great Britain and the Irish would make a difference in American politics, but no political event in England less serious than, let us say, the establishment of a powerful Socialist party, would sensibly tell on American opinion, just as no event happening beyond the Atlantic, except the rise and fall of the Southern Confederacy, has influenced the course of English political thought. However, the wise men of the West watch English experiments for light and guidance in their own troubles. A distinguished American who came four or five years ago to London to study English politics, told me that he did so in the hope of finding conservative institutions and forces from which lessons serviceable to the United States might be learned. After a fortnight, however, he concluded that England was in a state of suppressed revolution, and departed sorrowful.

On a review of the whole matter it will appear that although as respects most kinds of intellectual work America is rather in the position of the consumer, Europe, and especially England, in that of the producer, although America is more influenced by English and German books and by French art than these countries are influenced by her, still she does not look for initiative to them, or hold herself in any way their disciple. She is in many points independent; and in all fully persuaded of her independence.

Will she then in time develop a new literature, bearing the stamp of her own mint? She calls herself a new country: will she give the world a new philosophy, new views of religion, a new type of life in which plain living and high thinking may be more happily blended than we now see them in the Old World, a life in which the franker recognition of equality will give a freshness to ideas and to manners a charm of simplicity which the aristocratic societies of Europe have failed to attain?

As regards manners and life, she has already approached nearer this happy combination than any society of the Old World. As regards ideas, I have found among the most

cultivated Americans a certain cosmopolitanism of view, and detachment from national or local prejudice, superior to that of the same classes in France, England, or Germany. In the ideas themselves there is little one can call novel or distinctively American, though there is a kind of thoroughness in embracing or working out certain political and social conceptions which is less common in England. As regards literature, nothing at present indicates the emergence of a new type. The influence of the great nations on one another grows always closer, and makes new national types less likely to appear. Science, which has no nationality, exerts a growing sway over men's minds, and exerts it contemporaneously and similarly in all civilized countries. For the purposes of thought, at least, if not of literary expression, the world draws closer together, and becomes more of a homogeneous community.

A visitor doubts whether the United States are, so far as the things of the mind are concerned, "a new country." The people have the hopefulness of youth. But their institutions are old, though many have been remodelled or new faced; their religion is old; their views of morality and conduct are old; their sentiments in matters of art and taste have not greatly diverged from those of the parent stock. Is the mere fact that they inhabit new territories, and that the conditions of life there have trained to higher efficiency certain gifts, and have left others in comparative quiescence, is this fact sufficient so to transform the national spirit as to make the products of their creative power essentially diverse from those of the same race abiding in its ancient seats? A transplanted tree may bear fruit of a slightly different flavour, but the apple remains an apple and the pear a pear.

However, it is still too early in the growth of the United States to form conclusions on these high matters, almost too soon to speculate regarding them. There are causes at work which may in time produce a new type of intellectual life; but whether or not this come to pass, it can hardly be doubted that when the American people give themselves some repose from their present labours, when they occupy themselves less with doing and more with being, there will arise among them a literature and a science, possibly also an art, which will tell upon Europe with a new force. It will have behind it the momentum of hundreds of millions of men.

CHAPTER CXIII

THE ABSENCE OF A CAPITAL

THE United States are the only great country in the world which has no capital. Germany and Italy were long without one, because the existence of the mediæval Empire prevented the growth in either country of a national monarchy. But the wonderfully reconstructive age we live in has now supplied the want; and although Rome and Berlin still fall short of being to their respective states what Paris and London are to France and England, what Vienna and Pesth are to the Dual Monarchy, they bid fair to attain a similar rank¹ in their respective nations. By a Capital I mean a city which is not only the seat of political government, but is also by the size, wealth, and character of its population the head and centre of the country, a leading seat of commerce and industry, a reservoir of financial resources, the favoured residence of the great and powerful, the spot in which the chiefs of the learned professions are to be found, where the most potent and widely read journals are published, whither men of literary and scientific capacity are drawn. The heaping together in such a place of these various elements of power, the conjunction of the forces of rank, wealth, knowledge, intellect, naturally makes such a city a sort of foundry in which opinion is melted and cast, where it receives that definite shape in which it can be easily and swiftly propagated and diffused through the whole country,

¹ Athens, Lisbon, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Brussels, are equally good instances among the smaller countries. In Switzerland, Bern has not reached the same position, because Switzerland is a federation, and, so to speak, an artificial country made by history. Zurich, Lausanne, and Geneva are intellectually quite as influential. So Holland retains traces of her federal condition in the relatively less important position of Amsterdam. Madrid being a modern city placed in a country less perfectly consolidated than most of the other states of Europe, is less of a capital to Spain than Lisbon is to Portugal or Paris to France.