

deference by one class to another, would imply a revolution in national ideas, and a change in what may be called the chemical composition of the national mind, which is of all things the least likely to arrive.

I have left to the last the most difficult problem which a meditation on the future of American society raises. From those first days of the Republic in which its people realized that they were Americans and no longer merely English colonists, it has been a question of the keenest interest for them, as it is now for the world, when and how and in what form they would develop a distinctively new and truly national type of character and genius. In 1844 Emerson said, addressing those who had lately seen the coincidence of two fateful phenomena—the extension of railways into the West and the establishment of lines of swift ocean steamers to Europe—

“We in the Atlantic States by position have been commercial and have imbibed easily a European culture. Luckily for us, now that steam has narrowed the Atlantic to a strait, the nervous rocky West is intruding a new and continental element into the national mind, and we shall yet have an American genius. We cannot look on the freedom of this country in connection with its youth without a presentiment that here shall laws and institutions exist on some scale of proportion to the majesty of nature. To men legislating for the area between the two oceans, betwixt the snows and the tropics, somewhat of the gravity of nature will infuse itself into the code.”

Half a century has passed since these words were spoken, but many events have intervened to delay that full expression of the national gifts in letters and arts, as well as in institutions, by which a modern people must reveal the peculiar nature of its genius. Emerson would doubtless have admitted in 1874 that the West had contributed less of a “new and continental element” than he expected, and that the majesty of nature had not yet filled Congress with its inspiration. Probably another generation must arise, less preoccupied with the task of material development than the two last have been, before this expression can be looked for. Europe, which used to assume in its contemptuous way that neither arts nor letters could be expected from commercial America—as Charles Lamb said that the whole Atlantic coast figured itself to him as one long counter spread with wares—Europe has

now fallen into the opposite error of expecting the development of arts and letters to keep pace with and be immediately worthy of the material greatness of the country. And the Americans themselves have perhaps, if a stranger may be pardoned the remark, erred in supposing that they made, either in the days of the first settlements or in those when they won their independence, an entirely new departure, and that their new environment and their democratic institutions rendered them more completely a new people than the children of England, continuing to speak the English tongue and to be influenced by European literature, could in truth have been expected to become. As Protestants have been apt to forget the traditions of the mediæval Church, and to renounce the glories of St. Anselm and St. Bernard and Dante, so the Americans of forty years ago—for this is a mistake which they are beginning to outgrow—sought to think of themselves as superior in all regards to the aristocratic society from which they had severed themselves, and looked for an elevation in their character and an originality in their literature which neither the amplitude of their freedom nor the new conditions of their life could at once produce in the members of an ancient people.

What will be either the form or the spirit of transatlantic literature and thought when they have fully ripened is a question on which I do not attempt to speculate, for the forces that shape literature and thought are the subtlest the historian has to deal with. I return to the humbler task of pointing to causes whose already apparent power is producing a society such as has never yet been seen in Europe. Nowhere in the world is there growing up such a vast multitude of intelligent, cultivated, and curious readers. It is true that of the whole population a majority of the men read little but newspapers, and many of the women little but novels. Yet there remains a number to be counted by millions who enjoy and are moved by the higher products of thought and imagination; and it must be that as this number continues to grow, each generation rising somewhat above the level of its predecessors, history and science, and even poetry, will exert a power such as they have never yet exerted over the masses of any country. And the masses of America seem likely to constitute one-half of civilized mankind. There are those now living who may

see before they die two hundred and fifty millions of men dwelling between the Atlantic and the Pacific, obeying the same government, speaking the same tongue, reading the same books. A civilized society like this is so much vaster than any which history knows of, that we can scarcely figure to ourselves what its character will be, nor how the sense of its immensity will tell upon those who address it. The range of a writer's power will be such as no writers have ever yet possessed; and the responsibility which goes hand in hand with the privilege of moving so great a multitude will devolve upon the thinkers and poets of England no less than upon those of America.

The same progress which may be expected in the enjoyment of literature and in its influence may be no less expected in the other elements of what we call civilization. Manners are becoming in America more generally polished, life more orderly, equality between the sexes more complete, the refined pleasures more easily accessible than they have ever yet been among the masses of any people. And this civilization attains a unity and harmony which makes each part of the nation understand the other parts more perfectly, and enables an intellectual impulse to be propagated in swifter waves of light than has been the case among the far smaller and more ancient states of Europe.

While this unity and harmony strengthen the cohesion of the Republic, while this diffused cultivation may be expected to overcome the economic dangers that threaten it, they are not wholly favourable to intellectual creation, or to the variety and interest of life. I will try to explain my meaning by describing the impression which stamps itself on the mind of the stranger who travels westward by railway from New York to Oregon. In Ohio he sees communities which ninety years ago were clusters of log-huts among forests, and which are now cities better supplied with all the appliances of refined and even luxurious life than were Philadelphia and New York in those days. In Illinois he sees communities which were in 1848 what Ohio was in 1805. In the new States of Dakota and Washington he sees settlements just emerging from a rudeness like that of primitive Ohio or Illinois, and reflects that such as Ohio is now, such as Illinois is

fast becoming, such in some twenty years more will Dakota and Washington have become, the process of development moving, by the help of science, with an always accelerated speed. "If I return this way thirty years hence," he thinks, "I shall see, except in some few tracts which nature has condemned to sterility, nothing but civilization, a highly developed form of civilization, stretching from the one ocean to the other; the busy, eager, well-ordered life of the Hudson will be the life of those who dwell on the banks of the Yellowstone, or who look up to the snows of Mount Shasta from the valleys of California." The Far West has hitherto been to Americans of the Atlantic States the land of freedom and adventure and mystery, the land whose forests and prairies, with trappers pursuing the wild creatures, and Indians threading in their canoes the maze of lakes, have touched their imagination and supplied a background of romance to the prosaic conditions which surround their own lives. All this will have vanished; and as the world has by slow steps lost all its mystery since the voyage of Columbus, so America will from end to end be to the Americans even as England is to the English. What new background of romance will be discovered? Where will the American imagination of the future seek its materials when it desires to escape from dramas of domestic life? Where will bold spirits find a field in which to relieve their energies when the Western world of adventure is no more? As in our globe so in the North American continent, there will be something to regret when all is known and the waters of civilization have covered the tops of the highest mountains.

He who turns away from a survey of the government and society of the United States and tries to estimate the place they hold in the history of the world's progress cannot repress a slight sense of disappointment when he compares what he has observed and studied with that which idealists have hoped for, and Americans have desired to establish. "I have seen," he says, "the latest experiment which mankind have tried, and the last which they can ever hope to try under equally favouring conditions. A race of unequalled energy and unsurpassed variety of gifts, a race apt for conquest and for the arts of peace, which has covered the world with the triumphs of its sword, and planted its laws in a hundred

islands of the sea, sent the choicest of its children to a new land, rich with the bounties of nature, bidding them increase and multiply, with no enemies to fear from Europe, and few of those evils to eradicate which Europe inherits from its feudal past. They have multiplied till the sapling of two centuries ago overtops the parent trunk; they have drawn from their continent a wealth which no one dreamed of, they have kept themselves aloof from Old World strife, and have no foe in the world to fear; they have destroyed, after a tremendous struggle, the one root of evil which the mother country in an unhappy hour planted among them. And yet the government and institutions, as well as the industrial civilization of America, are far removed from that ideal commonwealth which European philosophers imagined, and Americans expected to create." The feeling expressed in these words, so often heard from European travellers, is natural to a European, who is struck by the absence from America of many of those springs of trouble to which he has been wont to ascribe the ills of Europe. But it is only the utterance of the ever-fresh surprise of mankind at the discovery of their own weaknesses and shortcomings. Why should either philosophers in Europe, or practical men in America have expected human nature to change when it crossed the ocean? when history could have told them of many ideals not less high and hopes not less confident than those that were formed for America which have been swallowed up in night. The vision of a golden age has often shimmered far off before the mind of men when they have passed through some great crisis, or climbed to some specular mount of faith, as before the traveller when he has reached the highest pastures of the Jura, the line of Alpine snows stands up and glitters with celestial light. Such a vision seen by heathen antiquity still charms us in that famous poem of Virgil's which was long believed to embody an inspired prophecy. Such another rejoiced the souls of pious men in the days of Constantine, when the Christian Church, triumphant over her enemies, seemed about to realize the kingdom of heaven upon earth. Such a one reappeared to the religious reformers of the sixteenth century, who conceived that when they had purged Christianity of its corrupt accretions, the world would be again filled with the glory of God,

and men order their lives according to His law. And such a vision transported men a century ago, when it was not unnaturally believed that in breaking the fetters by which religious and secular tyranny had bound the souls and bodies of men, and in proclaiming the principle that government sprang from the consent of all, and must be directed to their good, enough had been done to enable the natural virtues of mankind to secure the peace and happiness of nations. Since 1789 many things have happened, and men have become less inclined to set their hopes upon political reforms. Those who still expect a general amelioration of the world from sudden changes look to an industrial and not a political revolution, or seek in their impatience to destroy all that now exists, fancying that from chaos something better may emerge. In Europe, whose thinkers have seldom been in a less cheerful mood than they are to-day, there are many who seem to have lost the old faith in progress; many who feel when they recall the experiences of the long pilgrimage of mankind, that the mountains which stand so beautiful in the blue of distance, touched here by flashes of sunlight and there by shadows of the clouds, will when one comes to traverse them be no Delectable Mountains, but scarred by storms and seamed by torrents, with wastes of stone above, and marshes stagnating in the valleys. Yet there are others whose review of that pilgrimage convinces them that though the ascent of man may be slow it is also sure; that if we compare each age with those which preceded it we find that the ground which seems for a time to have been lost is ultimately recovered, we see human nature growing gradually more refined, institutions better fitted to secure justice, the opportunities and capacities for happiness larger and more varied, so that the error of those who formed ideals never yet attained lay only in their forgetting how much time and effort and patience under repeated disappointment must go to that attainment.

This less sombre type of thought is more common in the United States than in Europe, for the people not only feel in their veins the pulse of youthful strength, but remember the magnitude of the evils they have vanquished, and see that they have already achieved many things which the Old World has longed for in vain. And by so much as the people of the

United States are more hopeful, by that much are they more healthy. They do not, like their forefathers, expect to attain their ideals either easily or soon; but they say that they will continue to strive towards them, and they say it with a note of confidence in the voice which rings in the ear of the European visitor, and fills him with something of their own sanguine spirit. America has still a long vista of years stretching before her in which she will enjoy conditions far more auspicious than any European country can count upon. And that America marks the highest level, not only of material well-being, but of intelligence and happiness, which the race has yet attained, will be the judgment of those who look not at the favoured few for whose benefit the world seems hitherto to have framed its institutions, but at the whole body of the people.

## APPENDIX