

## CHAPTER XIII

Conclusion—Literature and art in America—Mark Twain—Walt Whitman—Bret Harte—Lincoln—Whistler—Architecture—Latin *versus* Teuton.

THE end of Republican dominance came with the election of Dr. Woodrow Wilson in 1912 and his inauguration in March 1913. It is not without significance that Dr. Wilson, although fully entitled to use this title, prefers to be called plain "Mister" in the United States; for the bulk of the people are still suspicious of a man of learning; he may not be "practical." In previous chapters I have touched upon the main problems of international importance to which the Wilson Administration will have to give its attention; but there is one more with which, I fear, neither it nor its successor will be able effectively to deal. In recent years the emigrants from Europe who have landed at American ports have been very different from the Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic stock who populated and developed the United States in the earlier stages of her history. It is still customary for Americans to speak of the great capacity of their country for "assimilation," and there is no doubt that until recent years the immigrants were "assimilated"—but to what? Not to a definite type of people; but simply to types resembling themselves—German to German, English to English, Dutch to Dutch.

The next scene in the drama of American immigration—a wonderful drama it is, this discharging of a million souls a year into a new country—will be different. The Dutch, the English, and the German races cannot “assimilate” the Croats, the Poles, the Russians, the Italians, and so forth, who have recently been pouring into the country in large numbers—they represent about three-fourths of the immigrants. The old faculty of assimilation has gone. Even if we put the negroes aside there is no hope, no prospect, of a uniform white race in America. A country may make shift to settle down to political unity, because economic considerations have the effect of bringing together men with something to lose, though not necessarily men with something to gain (the American capitalists are united; the American workmen are not). Before the nation can be really united, however, it must produce something which is spiritually national; and for this there must be a spiritual unity resulting from a slow process of national growth. All the “effete” peoples of Europe have passed through this phase of development; every European country has its outward manifestation of the artistic instincts which have come to maturity after the lapse of generations. There is no mistaking the nationality of Goethe, of Machiavelli, of Voltaire, of Milton. This is a stage of growth at which the United States has not yet begun to arrive. The Spanish countries of South America are as emphatically Spanish as Brazil is Portuguese. The old legends, the familiar idioms, have suffered nothing by their transfer to a new land. Juan Valera, in his “*Cartas Americanas*,” was satirically cruel to the young literary men of the South American



THE SAN FRANCISCO MOUNTAINS.

continent; but those young men were simply immature. They were none the less Spanish on that account.

The United States, on the other hand, possesses no definite artistic character at all. The Teutons, Celts, and Anglo-Saxons there have created no individual works of art, and they have not yet mingled and intermarried to the extent of creating an American nation which could create some work of art for itself. The literature we find in the Colonies before the revolution is purely English, though commonplace. Franklin was its best representative; and what more can be said about it? With the revolution there was no hope for any of the fine arts at all. Every province had been rudely disturbed; and nobody had the leisure for reflection and meditation. We shall find in the United States, if we think it worth while to take the trouble to do so—I am far from encouraging the reader to enter upon the task—a relatively large number of writers, painters, and sculptors of the third or fourth class; but very, very few artists who can be called distinctively American. Indeed, the country itself lacks an adjective. It has become customary to use the term United States with a singular verb and to call the inhabitants Americans, in distinction to other "Americans" such as the Canadians, the Brazilians, etc., but this is, after all, merely custom. It was not custom alone that led to the people of England being called Englishmen.

I have been looking for some years for a few distinct types of great typical Americans—artists. It has not been for want of zeal that I have been able to find only two or three. There is only one man typically American in the sense that Torquemada is

typically Spanish or Bismarck typically German. That man is Abraham Lincoln. There are only three writers who are sufficiently national in their work to be called typically American; and in them the "national" level is not long maintained. I refer to Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and Bret Harte. Poe, Emerson, Bryant, Longfellow, Channing, are all as English as George Washington and Alexander Hamilton. There is only one painter who can be called American; and he is American less for what he painted than for what he wrote. This man is Whistler, a great part of whose youth was spent in St. Petersburg, and whose manhood was spent in France and England.

In truth, everything is against the artist in America—not merely the obstacles raised by a whole nation which (taken generally) prefers money to anything else, but the essential, primitive obstacle of the land itself. The vastness of the place is overwhelming. One has a feeling, not in an irreverent spirit, that God could reduce its chaos to order; but before a man could do so he would require an unusually intensified inspiration. Lincoln is so American because he has arranged the vastness of his country in order. The whole aspect of the man—his wiry but powerfully strong frame, his bony hands, his thin, tense face—indicates the victor and not the victim of circumstances. And what circumstances! When the monument was dedicated on Gettysburg battlefield to the glory and remembrance of the northern soldiers who had fallen there, orator after orator delivered himself of an address; and the celebrated Edward Everett spoke for two hours or so, indulging in his favourite gesture of dropping his

handkerchief from one hand into the other. Long, prosy harangues have always been characteristic of American speakers; and most of the American Ambassadors to London cannot be excluded from this criticism. Lincoln spoke for five minutes at Gettysburg; and as I have already referred to this famous speech I may be allowed to quote it:

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honoured dead we take increasing devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

This is a noble address—the language of a man whose ability to sum up what he thought in sentences that sounded like pistol-shots was the result of the hardest and most bitter of personal experiences.

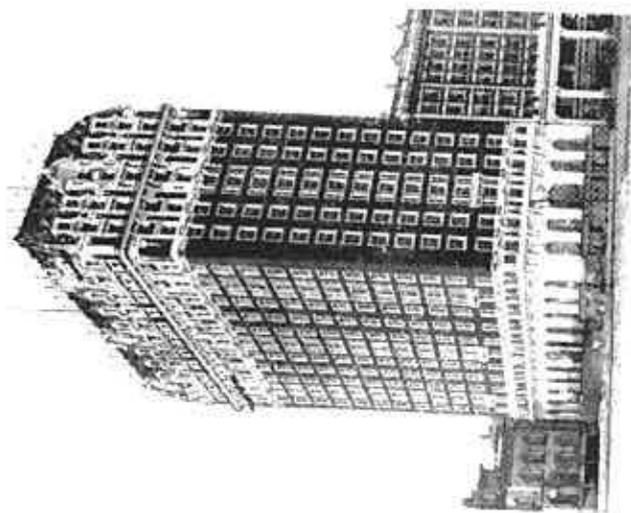
Of Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Whitman there is less to say. Bret Harte's mining-camp stories are thoroughly American; when he left the mine and the camp and aimed at fine writing he was less in his element. The same criticism applies to Mark Twain, whose *Huckleberry Finn* is almost as American as Lincoln himself, but whose religious and artistic dissertations are so little "national" that we can parallel them in the London weekly reviews at any time. Mark Twain, too, shows in a great degree certain marked characteristics of the American which have been so happily summed up by one of our most scholarly dramatic critics (Mr. John Palmer, in the "Saturday Review" of January 17th, 1914) that I take pleasure in quoting his words:

Judging from their plays and their Press the American public is more sentimental than the English; but their sentimentality is less disgusting. Englishmen are only sentimental after a heavy meal; the American is sentimental before breakfast. . . . The charm of the Americans is that they are still able to discover and to enjoy things that were long ago exhausted in Europe. Anybody who has heard an American quote from Tennyson will know what I mean. The intellectual world is still quite new to them.

Every reader of American literature will appreciate the aptness of this criticism.

Whistler was Lincoln in art; but Lincoln with far less strenuous trials and experiences of life. Whitman and Twain were overcome by the spiritual

THE  
 BUILDING  
 INDUSTRY  
 OF  
 AMERICA  
 IN  
 1900



A NOTWORTHY EXAMPLE OF AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE:  
 THE BLACKSTONE HOTEL, NEW YORK.  
 (It is acknowledged in the *Grey's*, N. *Engl. Rev.*)



PARK ROW BUILDING, NEW YORK.  
 This is one of the best of skyscrapers, and among the best.  
 It has accommodated more than 6,000 persons.

disorder in which they found themselves ; Whistler and Lincoln tried to master it. In all his pictures Whistler aimed at selection, the discarding of what was unessential, as Lincoln did in his letters and speeches. Lincoln's instincts were surer ; Whistler reasoned rather than felt ; and he reasoned so well that he committed theories of painting to paper—a very hazardous thing for a painter to do. Mr. Max Beerbohm was, I think, one of the first (in " Yet Again ") to draw attention to Whistler's powerful English style, so powerful that it illustrates the defect of Whistler's art, his emphasis on the mechanical. When he says, for example, under the heading of " Propositions "—

That, in Art, it is criminal to go beyond the means used in its exercise.

That the space to be covered should always be in proper relation to the means used for covering it.

The one aim of the unsuspecting painter is to make his man stand out from the frame—never doubting that, on the contrary, he should really, and in truth absolutely does, stand within the frame—and at a depth behind it equal to the distance at which the painter sees his model—

he is elevating technique beyond vision. The application of these " propositions " to Whistler's own work often resulted in a pseudo-Rembrandt—Rembrandt brought up to date by the use of slide-rules and Birmingham wire-gauges.

In architecture the Americans have been more fortunate. In the erection of skyscrapers they have at least had designers who could adapt means to

ends. The results were, at first, hideous; but recent twenty- or thirty-storey buildings show harmonious and well-proportioned outlines. There are few clumsy structures in America such as our Piccadilly Hotel, or our new War Office, or any other of the numerous ugly buildings in London with those useless pillars, which, supporting and supported by nothing, lie propped up outside between the first and second stories.

This, however, is not enough, and before the United States can become a united nation much greater development will be required. We shall have to look for that fusion of like races, with the predominance of one superior type, which has resulted in the evolution of European nations. Such races, from two parent stems—the Spanish and the Portuguese—are already forming in South America. It is true that there are thousands of Italian immigrants, and that there is a large German colony in Brazil which the German Government is said to be anxious to “protect”; but the fact remains that South America is Spanish and Portuguese. North America is vague and indefinite; for even in Canada the intellectual and social life of the country is swayed by the French-Canadians. It would appear, therefore, that we may expect to see a mature South America before we see a mature North America. To psychologists and to students of race-problems this is a matter of profound interest. To the inhabitants of the United States of America it is likely to prove a disconcerting factor before the tale of the present century is told.