SEVEN MONTHS IN AMERICA.

"AMERICA is not a nation : it is a state of mind." That is the only comprehensive text on which a book on the United States of to-day can be written. Until he reaches that conclusion the traveller stumbles in the dark. When, despite all assertions to the contrary, he determines to cleave fast to it, everything becomes clear. All that remains is joyfully to submit to the infection of the American consciousness and to attempt to transmit it to Europe.

For a man needs to travel in America before he can know what Europe means. Europe is an old old continent divided for centuries past into a number of fixed nations and cultures, each built up upon a foundation of immemorial origins. Europe sends the mind back to Greece and Rome and Palestine and the mediæval Empire and Papacy, and often, further back still, to the institutions of Celt and Teuton and Slav in the days before history. She bears upon her old but unwearied body the marks of endless generations; every stone in her house shows 'the golden stain of time'; and the cup that she offers to each of us has been mixed by the gentle chemistry of the ages. The Law, the Church, the Monarchy, the Houses of Parliament, the Universities, even the place-names and the look of the landscape—all these are not of yesterday : all these were old before the *Mayflower* left Plymouth or the Spanish missionaries came up out of Mexico; all these, and much more that is bound up with them, are in the very air we breathe; they move or restrain us daily and hourly, far oftener and more surely than we can know—until they are suddenly and irrevocably withdrawn from us.

The effects of that withdrawal are the subject of every immigrant's conversation and form the central theme of every true American's unconscious philosophy. Strange and curious indeed are their attempts to put so vague a feeling into words. The more definite and dogmatic the statement the more demonstrably false it can be shewn to be. Thomas Jefferson set the ball rolling in the Declaration of Independence. To him the emancipation from Europe appeared in the guise of Political Liberty. So it has become traditional among Americans (for America *has* traditions,

and very tough they are) to define the characteristics of their society in a set of political dogmas. The schoolboy is taught in his text-books, and repeats to every passing stranger, that America, being a Republic, is a free country, that she is a pure democracy, that she offers perfect equality to her citizens, that she knows no distinctions of rank or class, that, giving votes to all, she is governed by all. All this is false to-day, if it ever was true. America never has been a political democracy, as everyone familiar with the Constitution, and the circumstances under which it came into being, will admit. It has never been less a free democracy than it is to-day. The liberty of the subject is far less surely safeguarded than in Western Europe; there is far less free speech (by which is not meant unbridled speech) and far less free writing, both in books and newspapers. Class distinctions, so far from being absent, are becoming as marked as they are in Europe, though somewhat different in form, being based on distinctions of wealth, nationality and colour rather than of rank and breeding. And the belief that the country enjoys self-government is, as Mr. Roosevelt has lately once or twice observed, the thinnest of fictions. In reality it is governed by a small knot of powerful financiers and business men, who enjoy immunity owing to the shelter afforded them by the complicated structure of the ostensible government. It may be doubted whether anywhere in Europe outside Russia the mass of the people stand in so external and alien a relation to the driving forces of political life. But in Russia, at any rate, the people know the truth. In America they are deluded into a show of governing power, which by ministering to their self-esteem and gratifying their love of excitement, leaves their masters only the more securely in possession.* Lest the English reader should think this an intemperate statement let him ask the first American he meets which of the two he considers to enjoy the greater political power, 'Morgan and Standard Oil' on the one hand and the President and Congress of the United States and the Governors and legislatures of the several States put together on the other hand. Remembering the panic of 1907 and the personnel of the legislatures he will not take long to reply.

Another common political fallacy needs to be mentioned. Current ideas about the American system of government often assume that America is a nation in the sense that France or Portugal or China or Mexico or other republics are nations. That

* In the seven years 1902-8 468 statutes were declared unconstitutional by the highest courts of the different states.

is not the case. Whatever may have been true fifty years ago, and whatever may be true fifty years hence, there is to-day no American nation. America consists at present of a congeries of nations who happen to be united under a common federal government. Like Austria and Turkey, it contains a great variety of nationalities and cultures living side by side under varying conditions of harmony and dissonance. Our atlases are wont to contain ethnographic maps of Austria and South East Europe, and very complicated they are. So far as I know, no one has yet had the hardihood to draw up an ethnographic map of the United States (although I have seen one of Wisconsin); it would certainly be out of date before it was brought to completion. But it would be a most interesting object-lesson, and it would reveal many facts of which few Anglo-Saxon Americans are aware. There is not, I believe, a race or tribe in Europe, and there will soon be few in Western Asia, which has not found its way to the United States in the shape of a group of its more enterprising members. Every American knows of the Germans in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, of the Scandinavians in Minnesota, of the French-Canadians in Maine, of the Creoles and Acadians in Louisiana, of the Italians in New York and New Orleans, of the Poles in Chicago, and of the Greeks and Russian Jews in every large or small city—not to mention the twelve million Afro-Americans. But he is apt to forget the vast remainder—Icelanders in Dakota, Finns and Dutch in Michigan, Croatians, Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Slovaks and other Slavs in the manufacturing centres; Chinese, Japanese and Hindus in California; Mexicans in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona; and a motley sprinkling of Armenians, Bulgars, Catalans, Frisians, Swiss, Syrians, Vlachs, Welsh and many others whose very names (here arranged for courtesy's sake, in alphabetical order) may be unfamiliar to dwellers in the continent of their origin. The inquisitive traveller soon learns to be surprised at nothing. This dark-skinned bright-eyed boy playing ball in a public square saw the light in Beyrout; this crying infant is being coaxed to sleep in immemorial Basque; this smart young bootblack sends home a monthly remittance to the little village that nestles under the crags of Mycenae. One such experience is perhaps worth relating in detail. Two years ago a pair of my friends attached themselves to a party of Vlach shepherds and horse-dealers when they broke up their winter quarters in Thessaly, and accompanied them back to their summer homes in the mountains of Pindus across the Turkish border.

They spent some time there learning the language and studying the folklore, and so happy were they that they returned again next summer. Hearing that I was going to America they procured from the village schoolmaster a letter of introduction to the chief of their compatriots in America. It led me to a bare clubroom on the top floor of a shop-building in the heart of the fashionable district of New York, within a stone's throw of the hotels where the wealth of America congregates. There we sat, high above the traffic, sipping Turkish coffee and talking Balkan politics, and discussing the latest items of news from Samarina and Perivoli, two little villages buried in Pindus of which it is safe to say that no one in the roaring metropolis below us had ever heard—except the 400 Vlachs who belonged to the club. They however behold them daily, for, by a happy idea, they are depicted on the club note paper.

But my kind American friends, I know, are impatient to break in with a protest. 'Be it granted,' they will say, 'that all these nationalities exist. Yet they soon become American citizens and in a few year's time they will be assimilated. Have we not already proved, all through our history, our wonderful powers of assimilation? Is not America the champion melting pot of the world?' That is the current view, and bold must the passing traveller be to reject it. I would not do so if I could not confirm the evidence of my eyes and ears by the judgment of wiser and more experienced heads than mine.

How many of the immigrants become American citizens in fact and in spirit? A diminishing number. Some, like the Vlachs, come for a few years and go home again. They are in America between the ages of 16 and 25; they live together without women like young men at college and they postpone marriage till they return. I shall not forget the expression on the face of my interlocutor when I suggested that they might marry Greek girls, or on the face of the Greek lift-boy at my club when I told him where I had been. It takes more than the Atlantic to wipe out a Balkan feud.

But most of the immigrants, of course, stay in America, either because they are too poor to return or because they enjoy the licence and excitement of American life. Staying however is not the same as settling, or as imbibing the spirit of the older America. An increasing number of them is shut out from both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship because, once uprooted, they prefer to lead a migratory life. No European who has not

travelled in America, using her easy democratic standard of manners to catch the flavour of her life from the chance acquaintanceship of the train and the street-car, the picture-theatre and the saloon, can form any conception of how mobile and chaotic American society is to-day. No one ever seems to be living in the city where he was born, or to be working at the trade or profession for which he was trained—if indeed he was trained at all. It does one good to be in a country where there are no professional grooves—where (to take a few instances at random from a single week of my journey) a stockman can turn himself into a banker, a Socialist journalist into an agent for a patent boiler, and, most ironical of all, a brewery President in Illinois into a dry farmer in Arizona. That is the tradition of a new country, and for the strong steady worker it is the very breath of life. But a tradition formed in the Age of Agriculture, when there was free land for all and no industrious man need be a wage-earner for life, is not easily adjusted to the conditions of the present Age of Business. Fifty, and even twenty years ago, the excitement of migration was counteracted by the stability of agricultural life and of the Anglo-Saxon temperament. To-day, in the case of the newer immigrants, both these checks are removed, and the consequent fluidity is unfavourable not only to responsible citizenship but even to family life. The problem of the vagrant or casual labourer, called in America the ‘hobo,’ has assumed gigantic proportions—though owing to the traditions of American life and the ease with which, lawfully or unlawfully, a living can be picked up, it is hardly yet regarded as a problem. Last winter in Chicago it was reckoned that there were some 125,000 unemployed, attracted there, during the close season on the Great Lakes, by the excitements of the metropolis and the notorious slackness of its police. In Southern California, where a man can live on oranges and tourists, there may have been still more. One of the chief difficulties with which the political Socialists have to contend is that so many members of the discontented element, who would naturally range themselves under their banner, are too unsettled to secure a vote—or only do so by accident through temporary and gratuitous residence at some lodging-house kept for the purpose by a political boss. In two wards of Chicago an actual majority of the voters is registered from such houses. Such men, whether alien or native-born, have no interest in political reforms, as the reader can discover for himself by looking through the pages of the *International Socialist Review*, the attractive monthly journal

which illustrates their point of view. They represent most nations under the sun: or rather they represent none of them, but the *Wanderlust* of all the nations and the bitterness of the disinherited proletariat. They move to and fro in the country like the mercenary soldiers of the Middle Ages, with nothing to gain but by fighting society and 'nothing to lose but their chains.' And it is they alone, with their reckless courage, their lightheartedness in misfortune, their rough, windy, open-air philosophy and their clamorous appeal to the crude elementary instincts of humanity, whose magical call, as the recent strikes in Massachusetts prove, can wake to self-consciousness the sleepy overdriven proletariat of the new industrial order.

Few older Americans, except politicians and settlement-workers, know this new proletariat. It lives in Ghettos of its own, or in industrial towns, such as Gary and Pullman, created and baptised by some capitalist employer. Those that know it best are either hardened into a callous indifference or sick at heart at its contemplation. 'Go to Gary by all means,' said a Croatian physician to me in Chicago, 'if you would see the Sodom and Gomorrah of my race.' Here, and in similar fortresses of capitalism (for they are strategically disposed like fortresses and sometimes even have walls and gates) the big industrial and trading corporations, who are the real rulers of America, keep their machines running by the aid of cheap South-East European labour. Thousands of young workmen, mere ignorant peasant-boys, form the raw material of some of the most highly protected and privileged American industries, while the most influentially protected of them all swallows up their still more ignorant sisters, at the rate of over a thousand a month, into the neighbouring large town. Here they are assimilated indeed into the New World, assimilated into American economic life, into its crude violence and naked brutality, without a taste of freedom or a hint of citizenship. Emerging, if they do emerge, as adults, and flung upon a world of which they know nothing except that it has robbed them of their birthright as human beings, they are the natural rank and file of a labour revolt which, alike in its grievances and its methods, will soon put all our European squabbles into the shade. Take a single instance. The platelayers and other labourers on the American railways are mostly alien-born. The accident and death rates among them are appalling. In the year ending June 30, 1911, 10,396 persons were killed and 150,159 injured on the railroads of the United States. A large proportion of these deaths and injuries was due to level crossings

and stolen rides (a favourite device of the American vagrant), but deducting this the figures show that one out of every 458 railroad employees was killed and *one out of every 13 injured in the course of one year*. Suppose ten boys to enter the service of a railroad at 15 and stay till 60: by the law of chances one of them will be killed and each of them will be injured—sufficiently seriously for it to be notified— $3\frac{1}{2}$ times. And this in a country where the law is so defective that Compensation Acts have been declared unconstitutional and only one murderer in every 10 is even imprisoned. Small wonder that the American proletariat shows a tendency to prefer lawless methods and short cuts towards freedom to the long, stony, uphill path of political organization and civic propaganda. Russian methods provoke Russian reprisals.

I have dwelt at disproportionate length on this aspect of the assimilation question because of its growing importance and relative unfamiliarity. But I would not willingly be set down as speaking ill of the immigrant or despairing of his material prosperity. I know well that the great mass of the new immigrant population, like that of their English, Scotch, Irish, and German predecessors, consists of steady, hard-working, ambitious workmen and petty traders, whose clean and well-dressed children attend the public schools, salute the flag every morning, sing *Hail Columbia* with more gusto than any of the songs of their fathers, and look forward to a prosperous career in a home of their own, if not, in their heart of hearts, to at least one term in the White House. That is the obvious aspect of the immigration problem; and it is what Americans call 'the miracle of assimilation.' But, alas, the age of miracles is past. To the philosophic observer it seems far less akin to a second birth than to a spiritual death. You cannot make a Jew or an Italian or a Pole into an inheritor of Puritan or Virginian culture by waving a flag before his admiring eyes. But what you can achieve thereby is to kill in him what was the best thing he brought with him across the Atlantic, far more precious than the bundle he guarded so carefully in the steerage—his own little spiritual inheritance. You can make him ashamed of Mazzini and Kossuth and the Vilna Gaon, of the songs and stories of his father and the teachings of his Rabbi, of the lump in his throat at the mention of the holy names of Rome, Poland or Palestine. 'There is only one thing that can save our people,' said my Croatian friend in Chicago, 'and that is an education in Croatian Nationalism: we have only a few years in which to do it; if we miss our chance, we are lost.' All the wiser minds

among the different American races are coming to the same conclusion. 'There is all the difference in the world,' said a young Jewish philosopher to me, 'between an American Jew and a Jewish American. A Jewish American is a mere amateur Gentile, doomed to be a parasite for ever'; and he repeated this sentiment before enthusiastic audiences of Zionist workpeople all over the Middle West. 'There is one paramount question which every German-American must ask himself,' says Freiherr Ernst von Wolzogen, the well-known German poet and dramatist, in the very frank and amusing book which he has just published about the United States: 'Shall I help to hasten the development of this mongrel parasitic cosmopolitanism or shall I work with all my strength against it?' 'The chief thing our people learn in America,' said my Vlach friend, 'is Roumanian Nationalism. Up in our mountain villages Roumania is very far from us; here, where all of Roumanian speech are exiles together, it is very near.' The devotion of the Irish-Americans to the Home Rule cause is well-known. It is happily paralleled now by similar Nationalist manifestations on the part of the other American nationalities; even in far-away San Francisco a meeting of Southern Slavs was held last April to protest against Austrian misdeeds in Croatia. The leading spirit was the proprietor of one of the best restaurants in the town, who had enjoyed a classical education at Spalato under Monsignore Bulic, the distinguished authority on Roman Dalmatia. Such men in a colony are the salt of transatlantic life, and take the place in their own persons of the spark from the altar of the mother city which the old Greek colonist bore with him to his new home across the sea.

No, America is not a melting pot. It does not assimilate its aliens, as England does. There are too many of them. An occasional Italian may transmogrify himself from Salvatore into Sullivan and settle in the Irish quarter; an occasional Slav or Greek may marry out of his race, if only (as I was told in one case) to increase the circle of customers for his confectionery store; but on the whole the different races 'keep themselves to themselves' and lead their own spiritual lives.

What then does America mean to them, and what has it meant to their predecessors? To meet image with image I would reply, 'America is not a melting pot; it is a pot of varnish,' or, in the words of Freiherr von Wolzogen, 'It is a sausage machine for grinding out Equality sausages.' Or, to put it in plainer and more accurate language, America means a new external environ-

ment, and stamps upon each newcomer the specific hallmark of her social life. An Americanized Italian is not the same as an Italian; but he is more like an Italian than he is like an Americanized Irishman or Slav. He is an Italian plus certain qualities which have been imprinted upon him in the course of his transatlantic activities.

What are those qualities? They are the qualities necessary to success, or even to survival, in a large new country, sparsely populated by tribes of hunting Indians, and crying out for the development of untold material resources. They are the qualities of the pioneer. America means, not the Puritanism which discovered New England, not the learning and piety which out of its poverty founded Harvard and William and Mary College, not the Cavalier traditions of Virginia or the benevolent feudalism of the old plantations—all these are in America but not of it: America means something outside and independent of all these, something greater and more all-pervading—the spirit of the West. ‘America,’ says one of the acutest of her living historians, Professor Turner of Harvard, ‘America means the West. The history of the West is the history of America.’

Older historians wrote American history in the light of parties and presidents. The younger school are writing it in the light of the Moving Frontier—the slow westward migration of the American spirit from the eastern Seaboard to the Pacific. It is the application of the economic interpretation of history to a country where the play of economic forces has been singularly unimpeded; for the American spirit is not national or local or racial or religious or in any way cultural; it is a spirit common to all societies *at a particular economic stage*; but it has never had so fair a field for its exercise as over the broad lands of the Union in the century between the Declaration of Independence, when Thomas Jefferson first tried to give it utterance, and the year 1890 or thereabouts, when the supply of good free land for settlers’ homesteads at last gave out, and a proletariat began to be formed under a new industrial order.

Everyone knows what the American pioneer qualities are; most Europeans admire or even envy them, as the middle-aged envy the young, while laughing a little up their sleeve. Yet it is worth while trying to define them, indefinable though they are. An inexhaustible fountain of kindness and good nature, which makes a journey in America seem like a passage from friend to friend: a wonderful alertness and adaptability, through which the hostess grasps a

situation, the financier closes with a bargain, the citizen takes the law into his own hands, in as brief a moment as it took their ancestors to sight and shoot the Red Indian who was climbing the stockade: an undaunted self-confidence, which will plant a city in a treeless wilderness, as the Mormons did in Utah, or descry a business prospect where the Easterner can see only a castle in Spain: a ferocious optimism, which seems to welcome difficulty and disaster, bankruptcy and earthquake, for the fierce joy of overcoming them; an ingenious delight in novelty for the mere sake of experiment, which replaces the philosophic 'Why?' of Europe by the unanswerable 'Why not?'; a nonchalant venturesomeness, which gambles with life and fortune as gaily as the reprobates amongst ourselves would risk a handful of money on a race-course; a strength of purpose and a vigorous tenacity in action unexampled in any one people, even the Scotch, but explicable as the result of three centuries of social selection from among the stronger wills of Western Europe: a complete absence of self-consciousness or reflectiveness or any kind of deeper insight, and an inclination, developed by their education into a habit, towards using the mind simply as a quickfiring gun: all the qualities of childhood except reverence, with a continent for a nursery, its easy emotions and rapid tempers, its lively curiosity, its sunny expansiveness, its irresistible buoyancy, its short and fickle memory, its disobedience, its ruthlessness, its almost tragic capacity for laughter in the face of grave issues, its insatiable appetite for sweetness and light in the shape of confectionery and electric sky signs—above all, and in redemption of all, its intense and abounding and infectious vitality, its instinctive loyalty and comradeship in action, its idealism in the darkest hours, shedding immortal lustre on some disaster which its own unwisdom has failed to avert, when in a moment, as under Lee and Lincoln, at the bidding of Destiny the scattered band of 'boys' becomes an army of men—this, this is the American spirit and Walt Whitman is its prophet. *Pioneers, O Pioneers*, is the song of successive generations of young Americans, novitiates into the Dionysiac spirit of transatlantic life. At first sight there is little kinship between ancient Greece and modern America; yet how easily one slips, as my pen slipped just now, into a Greek reminiscence. 'You Americans are always children,' one hears the European saying, as the Egyptian priest said to Solon; "there is no such thing as an old American." 'In a word, if one should say of them that they neither keep quiet themselves nor suffer others to keep quiet he would be speaking the

truth.' This was not said by a nursemaid about a bevy of unruly children, but by their greatest historian about the Athenians.

America, like Athens, is full of great men and women, sprung from the loins of parents who took life and fortune in their own hands to cross the Atlantic. It is full of health and energy and adventure and imagination and kindness, abounding with the seeds of beauty and virtue and every form of human goodness. Why, in the Land of Promise, is the human harvest so poor? Why does America look to Europe, not only for its philosophers and scholars, its artists, writers and musicians, but even for its outstanding personalities? Why, irony of ironies, have we come to associate the Republic of the West with mediocrity?

In the answer to this question lies the whole tragedy of American life. It is the old old story of the conflict between human instincts and social institutions. The seeds of human excellence are there, needing but soil and nourishment to come to fruition. But society as at present organized provides no soil for them to grow in. The human soul can strike no roots in the America of to-day. All she asks is a little space and leisure, a little time to think and feel, and a little room to be with Nature—how small a boon to crave in a half-empty continent with its civilized life all as yet before it! Instead of these, what does America give her? Less perhaps even than Russia, or than Western Europe in her own Dark Ages of Migration. A universal atmosphere of money-making—the old qualities of the pioneer concentrated and crystallized in the institutions and standards of a business age. In America to-day, not only in the government of the Republic but in the minds of men, even of young men, Business is king. So the poet and artist, poor fools, exchange their few pieces of pure gold and the gratitude of posterity for the brilliant small change of journalism and the applause of an idle crowd. And the moral genius, the teacher, for whom it is a necessity of his nature to translate his ideas into action, becomes tired and despondent and even cynical in the hopeless task of engrafting them on to alien institutions. This is the terrible dilemma of American life to-day, as in all societies where there is a disharmony between the better minds of a people and its organized institutions.

Some of its best will go down to battle and take the wounds and the dust, bearing away the scars on their souls. Others will be driven into solitude, comforting themselves in their tents, like the old monks in our Dark Ages, with an alien culture and the vision of a future world. And this solitary academic life is as disappoint-

ing and fruitless as the other. For the soul can only bear her best fruit when Theory and Action, Culture and Reality, Knowledge and Power, join in the work of creation. 'There is so much artistic intensity,' writes a young teacher in one of the new Western Universities, 'so much chaotic idealism, and life itself is so unleavened—all "culture and anarchy" getting along together: and never a thought that the two together make life only by mutual understanding. No man, no movement anywhere, that has put in both. There must be something in the air. All my life I have been eating lotus-blossoms, and then suddenly this spring I have wakened up to find myself a red anarchist. It's all wrong, I know, but where is a man to find the place here in touch with society to do constructive work with dormant faculties like mine? Politics, teaching, "social work," etc., are all so disconnected, so divorced from one another. And I do feel that the whole man should work together, that what one happens to know of French literature or Italian art or this or that should be continually brought into service, should express itself in action. This is all good pragmatism, I suppose, and since the doctrine has come out of America the life will surely follow one day. But it can only come with strong practical intellects which are vastly more far-sighted, more mystical, more human, more experienced than anything we call practical just now. Meanwhile it is enough to make one cry out to see all this good *secondary* material going to waste, secondary because it has its contributions to make without the power to make those contributions effective: all this capital machinery rusting away for want of a social background, for want of a few guiding hands to set it in motion. It's the devil of all these things that one can run along so nicely without feeling the want of anything, that one can live—that a man of normal powers *does* live—in a perpetual myopia, that it requires more perspective or sudden light or poetry, or something, than a decent society would have any right to expect of common humanity. One has to fret and strain and be wretched to push home the tiniest, meagrest contribution, and most of us go under at once, relinquishing life totally and living in gray theory.'

'For want of a social background.' That is the thought to which the traveller perpetually recurs. At one moment he is a revolutionary fiercely longing to sweep away the hideous shoddy structure of capitalism and to make all things new. Then he remembers with a start that, with no soil to grow in, the soul of man in the new order will be as puny and stunted as in the old;

and, if he has been talking to a Southerner or pondering on Burke, he will relapse with an equal vehemence into an unreasoning Conservatism. So, swinging backwards and forwards, between the New Socialism and the Old South—the two best bodies of opinion in America to-day—his mind finds rest at last in a mood of serene unquestioning patience. It will take centuries, he feels, before there can be here what Europe and Asia call civilization, before America can outgrow her stormy youth and settle down, as Europe settled down five to ten centuries ago, into not one but a pleasing variety of civilizations and cultures, before California can mean to the West what Italy means to the East, and Chicago and Niagara and the Great Lakes be held in equal honour with Weimar and Grasmere and Lake Leman. Meanwhile, until that day comes, let us take what America offers us and be thankful : for it is surely good. ‘Are you going back to live in Europe,’ I asked a waiter in San Francisco whose face in repose was that of his fathers, agricultural labourers in Norfolk. ‘I could not bear it,’ he replied, ‘when I landed in New York from my last trip home I felt as though I had grown wings.’ By the time these lines are in print their writer will have grown wings too.

ALFRED E. ZIMMERN.