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What I Saw in America *

By HENRY WIGNY

WE are arriving in Seattle, which just now we only touch, and a short crossing of 81 miles takes us to Victoria on Vancouver Islands, British Columbia. It is a short passage but how magnificent. The most magnificent of fiords or inlets with quiet deep water, so deep that I saw no channel buoys. On one side the chain of the Cascades and on the other the Olympic range, and everywhere the magnificent verdure of the north. I have sailed the Bay of Naples and at Rio de Janeiro: perhaps what I now see still surpasses them in beauty.

The salmon swarms here, salmon with firm rose colored flesh, since it lives in the salt water. We fished for them and ate them. I was told that near the mouths of streams they fish for trout which take the cure as we do, going to the sea for iodine during vacation.

Victoria is a pleasing city built at the head of a bay. It is very near the United States but never-the-less has kept its own British character. The hotel in which we are housed is immense, but not tall, in fact only four stories. Everything is comfortable with distinctly reposeful luxury. Its vast parlors on the ground floor seem unaware of the trepidation of the great American hotel lobbies. These latter, with their ten elevators, some express which stop only at certain floors, others stopping at every floor, and always in motion at full speed, remind one of a subway station. Life here seems organized at slower rhythm: at intervals one sees a chambermaid dressed in the cap, fichu and dress of Marie Antoinette. The striking beauty of this part of the island, and the mild climate it enjoys, makes the city a quiet vacation center. Its drives are charmingly enlivened with the verdure of flowers, and at every turn of the road are magnificent glimpses of the sea and the mountains.

* Translated from "La Libre Belgique," Brussels, Belgium, by Dr. John D. Clark, University of New Mexico. Continued from the May QUARTERLY.

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After a few days I returned to Seattle, that pearl of the extreme west. I think I saw it and saw it thoroughly, and felt its charm, thanks to the kindness of friends who did me the honors.

"To invite one is a great responsibility," says Brillat Savarin. "It amounts to taking the responsibility for the happiness of the guest while he is under our roof." The Americas, especially those of the west, rigorously observe the maxim of a Frenchman who has lived in the United States. Once you cross the hospitable threshold you are honored, feted and cared for. They seek to satisfy your desires and to create desires in order to please you by satisfying them. You are enveloped with sympathetic cordiality, and you depart from him who was unknown to you yesterday with the feeling that you are leaving an old friend.

People are cordial in the United States, ignoring in public places the disdain which prevails in Europe, as says Daudet, between rice and prunes. I lunched in Yellowstone at the table with a family from California. At the end of five minutes we were engaged in conversation. I learned that the man was a confrere from San Francisco. When you pay the cashier in a restaurant you are greeted with a pleasant, "Good morning, Sir." Taxi drivers are neither humble nor bold, which I shall prove by citing the following incident: I was taking a long ride in New York. The traffic signals are set at right angles. Every half minute the red light blocks the cars coming from one direction and the green light signals to go ahead in the perpendicular direction. Stops are frequent. At the first stop my chauffeur confided to me that it was hot, which was an indisputable fact. At the second he invited me to take off my coat as he had done. At the third he offered me a cigaret. Some companion!

Well, I saw Seattle, its animated business center and its buildings, its blocks, and rectangular streets. Ameri-

cans like these right angles and have them at any cost. As proof of this, some months ago a hill stopped the construction of one of these straight thoroughfares. They cut down the hill. The scar left from cutting down that great knob was still visible. Construction gangs are now removing all signs of the hill.

But the fine thing about Seattle is its surroundings, consisting of sumptuous villas set in the verdure of gardens with gardens overflowing with flowers, villas built on the bay and on nearby Lake Washington.

In a well wooded park, containing many flower beds, are the many buildings of the University of Washington, which has 11,000 students. Yes, I saw this jewel of the frontier thanks to the kindness of friends, one of whom, among others was a lady who took me about. She was very intelligent and well informed, having traveled widely and she had a taste for the beautiful. She loved her city and at each spot of interest made me get out of the car and admire the country side.

Now it happened that at one of the stops we had to enter a garden to enjoy the view. It was not enclosed. We had scarcely gone a few steps when an immense police dog came toward us, hair raised and barking angrily. I'll be frank. I made an inglorious retreat. The lady, without fear spoke to the dog, "hello, hello, good dog, sweet boy." The voice pleased the furious beast who wagged his tail and came up to be patted. "You can go by," she said. "I will hold the collar." I went by neither confident nor assured. The owner came out a few minutes afterward curious to know these strangers who thus entered his private property. When he found that I came from the other end of the world he wished earnestly to have me go up stairs where the view was still more marvellous.

But the arrangement of my trip permitted me to stop only a few days, and I had to depart for Yellowstone.

Everyone has heard of this American national park

kept by law in its wild state. A friend put an auto at our disposal and we were able to make the complete tour in two days, much less time than required by bus. A son acted as guide. He was a student and a charming boy, who, in going along, told me his family history. His family was large—600 members. His great grandfather came to the west in a covered wagon in 1828 and had not less than 35 children. Adopting the Mormon law he had married five wives. If he had thus used, some say abused, marriage it was only because of the necessity of quickly populating the immense solitudes. Polygamy has disappeared. Never-the-less to-day marriage is contracted differently than it is with us. They allow the affianced much more liberty. The law has done away with many obstacles. In certain states one can prove legal marriage by exchange of letters. The ease of union is, alas, followed by easy divorce.

People who in those heroic days made the trip to the extreme west were hardy. Alone in a country infested with savages, they cultivated the land, gun always at hand, and at evening when they read the family Bible at the least barking of the dogs they seized their weapons. The conquest of the soil could only have been maintained by a numerous race of strong, white men. The ancestor erected his tent where now stands a city. His descendants love to tell of the times in which he lived.

Grandson Freddy guided the car with sure hand. We saw the famous places, geysers of which there are thousands, from the large and even very large, which play every 58 minutes, throwing a stream of boiling water 170 feet into the air, to the small ones which fester at the sides of the paths. We saw the famous canyon, its waterfalls, its torrent, the lake and the forests. And the animals who live at liberty, and, not being hunted, have made peace with man, regaining earthly paradise. The beavers have dammed a river, the deer, the moose and elk brouse at the side of the road. The bears come forward upright to the cars, and

have an understanding debonaire manner. One must not touch them, for everywhere are signs, "Danger. Please do not feed the bears." There is no harm in throwing them bits of sugar, but the great temptation comes to pat their great furry heads. The animal might not understand and accident result.

Great picturesque hotels are stationed throughout the park. They serve travelers at their different stages. We arrived the first time on Sunday evening. After dinner the guests assembled in a great hall and a young woman in evening dress addressed the group. "You come from everywhere and are of all religious faiths but you all believe in God the Creator. How could one not believe in God in the presence of these sublime beauties which He has given us to contemplate. Think of Him and glorify His magnificence by beauty." And then Bach and Beethoven were played and old songs were sung, songs which exalted the grandeur of nature and Him who had created it.

Next morning I found out that the conductor of the services was the cashier. The young woman whose agile fingers had caused the piano to vibrate waited on table where I was seated. She told me she was about to leave Yellowstone to resume her post as teacher in Alaska.

Here is the explanation: the help is composed almost exclusively of students. The fine young man with open intelligent face who awakened me in the morning in the little cabin where I was lodged, in keeping with the picture, was a student. He enters, speaking to me in French, for we are pointed out as Europeans. He builds the fire and prepares hot water while we hold cordial conversation. He told me that, not being rich, this vacation work was very useful to him. I was struck with the gaiety and grace with which they accepted work which, to us, would seem menial. Everywhere youth knows how to stand these days of trial, eating like a mad cow, but going about with happy countenance, and later remembering these hours of poverty as the

happiest years of their lives, and appreciating them. This is indeed American. To accept the divine law of labor, whatever it be, if it is honorable, is not only a virtue, it is to be admired.

Periods of depression which have come to the United States have caused this alternation of intellectual and manual work. A professor from one of the western universities told me that 70 per cent of his students were working with their hands outside of class hours, and that this was nothing new, that he himself had done the same in his youth, being hired as a janitor in the university. He swept, washed and cleaned the class-rooms before having lessons in them. This continued until a Greek became a student, and then the latter took over the work and from the former received lessons in English and in mathematics.

I was to see this fine youth assembled once more on the morning of my departure in the cars. They were gathered at the platform and while the visitors took their seats the young folks, as a chorus, sang songs of farewell. I do not know which I should admire the more—their bravery or their beauty.

In general, Americans are very good-looking. The mixture of all bloods which go to make up their race brings about happy results. The cocktail is a success.

Perhaps this courage of youth will be an element to help America to come through the depression with which it now struggles, a depression more severe than ever known before, Fortune never having ceased to smile since the Civil War.

It is very grave. I saw begging in the streets. The manager of an important establishment, having contacts all over the world, told me that in years of prosperity his firm hired an average of 600 engineers a year, but now they are letting out some of the personnel. The president of a great bank told me that merchants had hard time to meet their payments and that credit was restricted.

In the Rocky mountains I saw abandoned factories as I looked from the car window. The little agglomeration of buildings of which the mill was the center was abandoned by its occupants. In the cities are many "To rent" signs. The most beautiful, splendid Empire State Building in New York sees 70 per cent of its premises unoccupied. The immense sumptuous motion picture houses have plenty of vacant seats. The wife of an engineer told me that half of her friends were from necessity going into some sort of trade. Some sold coal, others gasoline, others fruit or produce. They retain their social positions, never-the-less, their places in the bridge or tennis clubs.

But they must help keep the family pot boiling for over there even the high officers of industry are sometimes idle. Contrary to us their hours of work have been reduced and their salaries reduced in the same proportion.

On the other hand as we were returning, a ship's officer who was something of a woman hater, pointing out the large number of women passengers who were on deck, said bitterly, "The women outnumber the men seven to one. They go to Europe for a pleasant trip and to spend money in Paris, while their husbands at home grow thin sweating dollars. It is the image of America." Who believes it?

Be it as it may, many women work. A long time ago they invaded the universities. A professor told me that at Seattle they were in the proportion of three out of five of the young people in college. They work in offices and are very well dressed. At 11 in the morning I was received by a secretary of a financier, who wore an afternoon gown. I was almost ashamed of my sport coat. If the depression imposes restrictions upon the women these do not extend to the domain of seeking admiration.

However, the depression is there. The United States is going through difficult times, aggravated by the improvidence of people who had been fortunate. A professor in Philadelphia who knows Europe well told me that careless-

ness about the future was much more general in his country than in ours. We try to plan in advance, but over there, in summer they forget the north wind.

The American ambition is to have a good time. This means to enjoy life during the days of good fortune, spending, going to Europe, buying automobiles, which go on and on, until overdriven and worn out they take them to the cemeteries ad hoc. These auto grave yards are numerous and in seeing these old wrecks going to dust, I thought of the rag gatherers who pick over the rubbish of our cities to find a few old nails. Good times are the immediate realizable ambition, and, paid for or on credit, symbolize an intrepid materialistic civilization. The expressions, "I wish you a good time," or "Have a good time," are often used. A good time is charming but fugitive. Once passed the cycle begins again.

At the moment, Fortune has turned its bad side. The number of unemployed is sad to see. In certain industrial states, such as Montana, the slower trains are sometimes invaded by those out of work. They hang to the steps and climb to the roofs, and go with the train, not knowing where, but in the deceptive hope toward more clement life. The train crews cannot prevent it.

Will this misery lead to graver things? Its suggestions are always pernicious. In New York in a public place, Union Square, where speech is absolutely free, incendiary speeches are made, so they tell me. Other places have their outbursts, but the country is so large that the disturbances at one point wear out and become imperceptible in a certain number of miles, and vaporize in space. Moreover the protective forces of this great nation are ample, comprising not only the federal forces but the independent National Guard of each State. This protection is augmented by wealth, wealth of national resources in a scarcely populated country, where it seems impossible that anyone can lack bread. There is a wealth of national income little burdened with

the charges which so ruin ours. The tax burden would be light and easy and the national budget would be easily balanced were it not for the thoughtless gesture of grants of large bonuses to the soldiers engaged in the war, grants given whether they are incapacitated or not, and even if they never crossed the Atlantic.

For a visitor to that country the happy consequence of the present situation is the lowered cost of living. I had left home with the conviction that the cost of living was two or two and one-half times what it is with us. This conviction had to be much revamped.

The large stores have "sales," certain articles are more expensive than ours but not much, others are noticeably cheaper. Postage and, for long journeys, the railroads cost less than in Europe. The present hard times have kindled a faith among the Americans in older economic conceptions: many are ready to repudiate theories which have been found faulty. I have come to this conviction from numerous conversations. I had the pleasure of being applauded when I was asked to speak in public, and when, at first timidly, and then more forcefully, I upheld the classical political economy of the interdependence of peoples and of free trade. Have the times changed? Are these only the first symptoms which thoughtful people are showing? Who can tell? Let us hope.

But I notice that I left Yellowstone some time ago. Some days on the train and we are in New York. We are now near home. Only a crossing of the ocean remains. We go aboard a ship loaded with people. The departure is a tumult. There are many passengers and there are many friends on board to bid them good bye, "Hello, Hello, Bon Voyage." Handkerchiefs wave and they throw confetti and streamers. Some women cry. Then we separate, perhaps for a short time, perhaps forever. From time to time comes a whistle. It is the last expression of enthusiasm. At sport events or in the theatre they express great pleasure by whis-

ting, and whistling is too harsh. The sportsman or artist deserves being praised in a better manner.

It is five o'clock. At home it is ten and night has come. New York is still in the glory of a beautiful summer sun. There files before us and for the last time the colossal mass of buildings.

Then it fades in the distance, and then the shore vanishes.

And seeing the coast of this country vanish, this country in which I spent so many magnificent hours, even though the prow of the ship is turned toward my native land, and though at the foremast there floats the streamer of three colors, I cannot prevent heartfelt emotion which comes with every departure. I think of the places where I was so happy, and which, probably, I shall never see again, alas never, never more.

Perception

MARY DENGLER HUDGINS

I wandered down an eerie path last night
Feeling my way with slow, uncertain feet
And to my eager nostrils came the sweet
Fresh fragrance of the water, but my sight
All unaccustomed to the lack of light
Perceived but vaguely. Then I heard the fleet
Mad dash of water as it rushed to meet
Some far off river in its eager flight.

You laugh at naiads dwelling in a stream
And in your worldly wisdom mock at me,
And call my faith a simple childishness?
I swear, that night I saw their bodies gleam
Milk white, and heard their new pitched minstrelcy
And felt their presence like a warm caress.