

European Eyes Intent Upon America

ENVY AND ADMIRATION as well as ridicule and praise are found in the many articles in the European press devoted to this country. Our big business astonishes them, our so-called lack of culture inspires thinly veiled contempt, while our homicide records lead some rather irascible English critics to speak of the United States as "the Land of Liberty—for the murderer." In the London *Evening Standard*, Stacy Aumonier asks: "What does this callous indifference to murder imply? Why is it that a country like the United States, which started so well, has got all its moral and social values so mixed?" The fact of the matter is, we are told, that from the beginning, Europe has treated America very badly, for since the "Plymouth brethren" no civilizing influence has entered this country with the idea of stopping here and doing good, and Mr. Aumonier continues:

"The United States is now, I suppose, the only country in the world that no one visits for pleasure. After it had enjoyed a century or so of material prosperity, Europe recognized that here was the largest and most gullible public to be found anywhere. And Europe proceeded to exploit it, and has been exploiting it ever since.

"Even the emigrants, who pour in by thousands, have no idea of settling there. Their idea is to make as much money as quickly as they can, and go back home and retire. And that is the key-note of all the visitors to that country.

"Effete aristocrats visit there in the hope of finding rich wives. English authors, Scandinavian explorers, German scientists, adventurers of all sorts, go on long lecture tours. They embellish their lectures with all kinds of flattery for the land of their visit, and when it is over they pouch the check and write home to their wives: 'God! what a country!'

"As for the musicians, the fat singers, and the scraggy instrumentalists, they are as a rule too ill-bred to conceal their contempt for the land which pays them so well. Every one wants to grab what they can and get away. Nor can it be said that the cultivated Americans help matters much. Some there are—business men, lawyers, politicians, etc.—who can not get away, but those with leisure, and particularly those with a bent toward the arts, gradually percolate to Europe."

They go first on a visit to Europe, Mr. Aumonier asserts, and then another visit, and the visits grow longer and longer, and at last they find themselves living over there and "confess that they find the social life of the United States intolerable." This English critic, who obviously tries to be amusing while he lambastes us, then adds:

"And so poor dear America, hungry for culture, anxious for improvement, willing to put up patiently with all these foreign insults if the end be justified, finds itself alone fighting for its own soul, with only crude material at its disposal. Can you wonder that it breeds a type of morality that bewilders the older civilizations?"

"And even now one wonders whether it still may not be too late. Can Europe do nothing to save America? Why should not the League of Nations appoint a small commission, with—us say—representatives from Portugal, Albania, Lapland, and Turkey—to visit the United States and hold a conference with the two prospective candidates for the Presidency to discuss the possibility and advisability of introducing a measure of civilization into the American continent?"

In more serious vein, a Frenchman, who has seen much of the United States, Stephane Lauzanne, editor of the *Paris Matin*,

writes in *La Revue Mondiale* of Americans with a sense of humor and of admiration. The Americans, he tells us, have their national vanity, and yet they are the first to laugh at it. He recalls that on a journey from New York to Philadelphia he passed through Trenton and noticed a gigantic sign with this inscription: "Trenton Makes—the World Takes." Now as a matter of fact, Mr. Lauzanne avers, the people of Trenton would be the first to laugh if anybody were to say that the needs of the universe depend on their manufactures, and he proceeds:

"America is also forgetful. It is the price paid for the speed with which men and affairs carry on in that country. One has no time to stop to think, or to remember. Hearses are driven to the cemetery at high speed. For all that, there are certain things that Americans never forget. They do not forget that at the dawn of their country's birth France existed. There is not a child in school along the Mississippi who does not know how to spell the names of Marquette, La Salle, Joliet, and Champlain, and who will not tell you that the first men who followed the course of this immense river and went up to the Great Lakes were Frenchmen."

On the other hand, Mr. Lauzanne continues, America is ignorant and especially ignorant of Europe. But she knows she is ignorant of Europe, in fact she knows it too well, he claims, and this knowledge almost cost Europe very dear, because in the hesitation and the neutrality at the beginning of the war the American idea always was: "Let us not get mixed up in matters of which we know nothing." Young America looked upon the remote and complicated machinery of old Europe in veritable terror, he tells us, fearing to touch it even with its little finger, because that "would be to risk the hand being caught in the machine, and with the hand the arm, and with the arm the shoulder, and with the shoulder the whole body." Yet if America has all her faults, and more still, she has also her admirable qualities, and Mr. Lauzanne adds:

"It is these very qualities that we should like to see implanted and developed in our country. First of all, America sees far ahead and sees on a grand scale. When the city of New York decided to have a subway, it did not say to itself: 'Let us excavate for one tube, later we can add to it and enlarge the stations.' No, New York immediately built a four-track subway—two tracks for expresses and two for locals—with stations having four or six exits, with trains of never less than eight cars.

"Similarly, when the lawyers of New York decided to form a bar association and have a meeting-place of their own, they did not say: 'Let us just get a temporary place, and later we can let an apartment, and after that buy ground on which to put up building.' No, they immediately erected a marvelous building in one of the most expensive quarters of New York, which could easily accommodate three times the membership, and with a wonderful library capable of housing three times the number of volumes it contains.

"Again when America entered the war, it did not say: 'Let us get a few regiments together, give some money to our allies, and send some bushels of wheat to various ports.' No, America visioned the matter on a big scale. Men were recruited by millions, and the money to be sent to the Allies was calculated in billions. The wheat for Europe was grouped in hundreds of millions of bushels. The material necessary for the construction of sixteen great camps of military instruction was gathered in millions of cubic yards. If America had not seen the problem on this grand scale, would the war have been ended so quickly?"