

SAUERWEIN ADMIRE MUCH IN AMERICA

Praises Buildings, Transformation of Aliens and Use of Mechanical Appliances.

SAYS HOTELS LACK SERVICE

Sleeping Cars Are Also Unfavorably Compared With Train Accommodations in Europe.

By JULES SAUERWEIN,
Foreign Editor Le Matin, Paris.

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Although for the past twenty years I have been traveling almost six months every year, it so chanced that I did not visit the United States, and by another accident it happened that when I did enter the country it was not through New York, as is generally the case, but through San Francisco. Thus I saw the California paradise and the deserts of Nevada and Utah before the true America, that of the gigantic enterprises, the blast furnaces, the seething offices, the feverishly busy cities where, under the shadow of skyscrapers, a torrential flood of humanity three times a day rushes to work, to lunch or to recreation.

Every one forms in advance an idea more or less correct of a country like America, of which it seems one knows the details from having read descriptions of it and from having talked with Americans themselves. However, I confess that my conception was not a true one. I have been surprised, sometimes for the better, sometimes—much less often—for the worse, and I ask permission to speak frankly of what my impressions have been.

In the first place, from an esthetic point of view, it is an error quite widespread in Europe to make fun of American architecture. I have found, on the average, that the architects of this country are infinitely superior to our contemporary architects. I am not speaking of the great artists of the Gothic period, of the Renaissance and the century of Louis XIV. I am speaking of their successors, and I find that, on the whole, the Americans surpass them by a great deal.

Praises Our Interior Decoration.

I had already formed that idea before getting off the boat in California. For example, in Honolulu I found hotels where there was practiced an art unknown to us, that of using normal and logical coloring. On the Bay of Waipiki I remember a great building where all the rooms were in different shades of green or rose—the walls as well as the furniture and the flooring.

That might well have been hideous, but the shades were so artistically combined that it was charming from two points of view: firstly, because of the harmony between those colors and the colors of the sun, the vegetation and the sea, and, secondly, because the eyes were delightfully reposed instead of being shocked by ugly and offensive hues. In most of the private houses, hotels or public buildings of the United States I found again that intelligent and artistic use of colors and even in the trains I often appreciated it. I think that the art of "interior decoration" is infinitely better perfected here than in any European country.

The style, too, is equally well worked out in a very artistic spirit. It was a pleasure to peruse those pages in American journals where one is offered, as reward for work and thrift, the purchase of a little home in good condition. I have compared those pages with my memories of Europe. I must say that with us, barring rare exceptions, the little house offered for sale is uniformly hideous, under the pretext that it is cheap. In America an artistic ideal enters into the conception of the most humble home and everyone has a choice between a number of different types of cottages, according to his tastes, each one being made as perfect as possible for the price asked.

Finds Beauty in Buildings.

I do not share the opinion of my compatriots on the skyscrapers. Some of them are simple and bare; there is nothing to say of them except that they are not in bad taste. But a certain number of them are of great beauty. The Woolworth Building, the tower of the Times Building and many others reveal a carefulness to adapt an architectural style to the requirements of an enormous enterprise that lends a gracefulness even to the gigantic.

From an unbiased and (if it may be so expressed) spiritual point of view, nothing is more natural than to have immense buildings in a country like America. Americans are at a degree of civilization and economic development which justifies, from a practical standpoint, immense edifices such as exist in Chicago and New York. If they did not possess skyscrapers they would be obliged to occupy a very considerable area which would be both ruinously expensive and inconvenient. In the birth of every architectural style the practical side has played a legitimate rôle. It was of the combination of material need and spiritual intention that were born the marvels we call Greek temples, Oriental pagodas, Gothic cathedrals, the palaces and chateaus of the Renaissance.

As regards the comforts of life, there are things which I have keenly admired and others which did not seem to have attained their perfection. America is not a country where foreigners can sojourn comfortably unless they speak English rather fluently. Nobody does anything to make their trip easy. They want to take a train, let us say. Here they have a choice between a number of companies, and no one tells them which is the most practical way to get from one place to another. All the same, they find themselves in a train where, let it be said in parenthesis, the beds are better, the food more varied and healthy than in any European train.

Train Berths Agitate Occupants.

But one is requested to penetrate behind green curtains, to take, for better or worse, the position of a paralytic, and to undress in a space where one cannot straighten up without risk of breaking one's skull. One's legs cannot be stretched out without risk of appearing indecent.

I have heard, in the San Francisco Overland, the distressed sighs of corpulent old ladies who have not succeeded in disrobing, and from time to time a leg or an arm would appear, frantically agitated as in a shipwreck. Gentlemen are requested to make their toilet before a tiny washstand, contending for it with each other during crowded hours, and being separated from the corridor solely by a little curtain open to the winds of every quarter. Certainly there is not enough privacy in a country where everything, nevertheless, is done to treat the susceptibilities of the weaker sex with regard.

But it is in an American hotel that the foreign traveller's agony commences. It is in vain that he has a good bed, a fine bathroom, an electric fan, and ice-water to drink. He lacks that inestimable thing, the assistance of his fellow-man, which is commonly called "service." For us Europeans the

symbol and token of comfort is the bell, that is to say, the ability to summon an individual, male or female, who will make life comfortable for you by his or her assistance.

In the immense hotel where I lived in New York there was nothing of the sort. In order to have one's shoes shined it was necessary in the first place to put them in a little closet, contrived to fit in the door, called the "servidor," and which no one opens without an imperative motive; in the second place, to telephone and hold communion with a mysterious person known as the "order clerk," and in the third place, to expound in detail to this order clerk just what ought to be done with the clothes, linen and shoes deposited in the servidor.

Several hours later, in case of success, one has shoes that are shined and clothes which are cleaned and pressed. But if, instead of a chargeable and administrative request you should ask simply to have your clothes brushed, you must negotiate with the valet, give him a special tip each time • • • But it would be cruel to "rub it in." Americans themselves know only too well how painful it is to do without genuine servants.

Mechanical Helps Are Superior.

On the other hand, everything in daily life that is mechanical is incomparably superior: the quality of automobiles and elevators, the speed of local trains, the bridges, the tunnels under the river. We in Paris have not yet succeeded in perfecting communication between the suburbs and the business centres. It is certainly shorter and easier to regain one's home from a place of business fifteen miles away in America than to return home a distance of six kilometers in the city of Paris.

But what interested me most in America is that it is a crucible where human beings are formed and transformed. One finds the most cosmopolitan population in the whole world, an astonishing mixture of Anglo-Saxons, Irishmen, Germans, Italians and Jews. It is not only after one or two generations that these individuals transform themselves into Americans. The same immigrant, in the course of his own life, changes in aspect and manners. It is true that he does not cease to belong to his race, that he reads his newspaper in his mother tongue, goes to his synagogue, eats his spaghetti, downs his sausages and beer (at one-half of 1 per cent., alas!), drinks good wine that he makes himself in his own cellar from California grapes. At the same time he keeps his traditions, he becomes progressively and rapidly an American.

In San Francisco I attended a grand reunion of the French colony. The transformation of those people struck me, because your Frenchman is a man who alters with great difficulty. I looked about me in amazement. This rich, well-dressed gentleman, surrounded by his strong, ruddy, clean-shaven sons, and his athletic, elegantly dressed daughters, was a man who came thirty years ago from the Departement des Basses-Alpes, where he was a peasant, to make about \$3,000,000 here in ice cream. This man, who alights from his superb, eight-cylinder limousine, began by washing his own clothes, and today he has 1,500 workers divided among his thirty laundries. Speak to those people of France and they will listen to you with composure and pity, but if some one has the misfortune not to speak of the United States with enough admiration, they are almost on the point of starting a fight. Thus, the first thing that strikes a stranger is that here the foreigner becomes an American at the same time that he becomes, in many cases, a well-to-do man.

Immigrants Gain New Perspectives.

Being an American he transforms himself at 6 in the evening into a decorous, gentlemanly bourgeois, enjoying life. For a day's work a mason earns \$14, a mine worker almost as much, and after their hours of labor comes the satisfaction of proper clothing, a comfortable apartment and a little automobile. Such is the plan of existence which distinguishes the American from the individual that he was a few years before when he lived modestly in Europe. The road is open before him; nothing prevents him from aspiring to riches and an important position. All the perspectives from which routine or overpopulation bar him in his native country are now open and smoothed out before him.

I would have only one criticism to make on the spirit of this admirable organization, which is that the American accustoms himself a little too much to be used by machines rather than to make use of them. The artisan's skill is disappearing little by little. For work which requires every minute a quick adaptability of initiative and manual dexterity, Americans are no longer finding proper artisans. I realize that they are compensating for the atrophy which excess of mechanism could bring about in their creative powers by great religious emotionalism and a taste for the art of music, and that they make up for the inconveniences of constant automobile and train transportation by athletic sports.