

## These United States—XIII\* CALIFORNIA the Prodigious

By GEORGE P. WEST

CALIFORNIA lies wide and luminous and empty under the infinite blue between the high Sierra and the sea. Horizons are not miles but counties away, and between distant mountain sky-lines the land, lustrous and radiant in pastel shades of blue and green and golden brown, swims in warm sunlight. A physical entity seven hundred miles long and two hundred and fifty wide, California is cut off from the nearer West by a high rampart of mountains, with the sea on its other flank, while on the north its contact with Oregon lies across a wild tumble of mountains and forests, and on the south there is only the trackless mountainous desert of Mexico's Lower California. Inside these limits lies a land larger than Italy and Switzerland, as richly endowed with beauty and natural wealth as any in the world, with a climate of a semi-tropical friendliness that robs the mere business of sustaining life of its rigors and leaves human energy free for whatever other tasks the spirit may conceive. Within itself in stimulating variety are great deserts; noble mountain ranges where peaks of 14,000 feet go unnoticed; vast stretches of rich farming land in valleys flat as a billiard table; gentler mountains along the coast, where immigrants from northern Italy cultivate the vine or descendants of the Spanish conduct cattle ranches larger than Eastern counties; great regions in the north where mountain and valley are black with forests of giant pine and redwood, and bear lope across the logging road ahead of the infrequent stage; endless miles of glittering sea-coast where the lazy blue Pacific crashes and pours at the foot of tawny brown hills; gold mines and placer diggings in the lower canyons of the Sierra; valleys and foothills that at certain seasons are one vast flare of blossoming fruit trees; broad belts of olive-green orange and lemon orchards and of silver-green olives.

For northern Europeans made somber and astringent by a centuries-long struggle with obdurate soil and unfriendly climate to stumble upon such a land and discover it empty and waiting was in itself a dramatic episode in the life of the race. The people who call themselves Californians are not yet over their surprise. A sense of the prodigious abides with them. They are like children let loose in a new and wonderful nursery, and their enjoyment lies still in the contrast of its spacious magnificence with the meagerness into which they were born. The joy of the discoverer still exhilarates them, and stimulated and organized as their "looting" is by the land speculator and the hotel-keeper, its swelling chorus voices also a generous eagerness to share the new-found blessings with friend and neighbor. They live in the radiance of a great destiny, which envisages the taming and the diverting of the torrents of the high Sierra,

so that valley after valley and desert after desert now lying parched and empty shall become so many gardens for the culture of children and roses. The Californian of today is a pioneer in the task of turning water onto virgin soil and transforming wheat ranches, grazing land, even desert, into patinas of orchards and vineyards and truck-gardens.

But only the map-makers and politicians still think of California as an entity. In its human aspects it is sharply divided into north and south. There is San Francisco and there is Los Angeles, each with a million people within an hour's travel. Between the two stretch nearly five hundred sparsely settled miles of mountain and valley and desert, and a spiritual gulf wider still. These two communities are the State, in a cultural sense, and they are farther apart, in background and mental habits, than New York and San Francisco, or Chicago and Los Angeles. For ten years there has been a movement to write southern California with a capital S. Its people are as different from the older Californians up San Francisco-way as Cromwell's Roundheads were different from the Cavaliers and the seventeenth century successors of Falstaff. It is a difference of origins.

San Francisco's beginnings have been sufficiently celebrated. In an epilogue to "Two Years Before the Mast," Richard Henry Dana describes in diary form a visit to San Francisco in 1859. Here, set down more than sixty years ago, are observations that remain true of the city of today. "It is noticeable," he writes, "that European continental fashions prevail generally in this city—French cooking, lunch at noon, and dinner at the end of the day, with *café noir* after meals, and to a great extent the European Sunday, to all of which emigrants from the United States and Great Britain seem to adapt themselves. Some dinners which were given to me at French restaurants were as sumptuous and as good, in dishes and wines, as any I have found in Paris."

It is a picture of the one pioneer American community where Puritanism was never permitted to intimidate the gusto and the zest for living of healthy men. Dana meets "a man whom I had known, some fifteen years ago, as a strict and formal deacon of a Congregational Society in New England. . . . Gone was the downcast eye, the bated breath, the solemn, non-natural voice, the watchful gait, stepping as if he felt himself responsible for the balance of the moral universe! He walked with a stride, an uplifted open countenance, his face covered with beard, whiskers and mustache, his voice strong and natural, and, in short, he had put off the New England deacon and become a human being."

Thus Dana in 1859—and still today the north holds all that is natively and distinctively Californian. It faces San Francisco, and celebrates the Argonauts of forty-nine as New England the Mayflower Pilgrims. It is a lusty, cosmopolitan community that has drawn its later increments of population largely from Ireland and northern Italy, and that maintains with undiminished gusto the Good-Fellow tradition instead of the Puritan. It cherishes a romantic, conventional æstheticism, drinks wine habitually, despite the

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This is the thirteenth article in the series entitled These United States. The first was on the State of Kansas by William Allen White (April 19), the second on Maryland by H. L. Mencken (May 3), the third on Mississippi by Beulah Amidon Ratliff (May 17), the fourth on Vermont by Dorothy Canfield Fisher (May 31), the fifth on New Jersey by Edmund Wilson, Jr. (June 14), the sixth on Utah by Murray E. King (June 28), the seventh on South Carolina by Ludwig Lewisohn (July 12), the eighth on Nebraska by Anne Martin (July 26), the ninth on Ohio by Sherwood Anderson (August 9), the tenth on Maine by Robert Herrick (August 23), the eleventh on Delaware by Arthur Warner (September 6), the twelfth on Tennessee by E. E. Miller (September 20).

Eighteenth Amendment, feels a vast tolerance toward weaknesses of the flesh, nurses a sense of the great world, a feeling of kinship with New York and Paris, a contempt born of utter ignorance for Chicago and the Middle West, a touch with the Orient, a love of the sea, a quick eye for the picturesque and the romantic. It loves fetes and pageants and froths with uncritical sentiment at the slightest provocation. There is a regard for the past such as you will hardly find in Boston. "The days of old, the days of gold, the days of forty-nine" live again in the imagination of every school-child. Yet this San Francisco which holds an undisputed eminence over the older California belongs rather to the world and to the sea, which pierces the coast here through the narrow straits of the Golden Gate, between steep cliffs, and spreads out then into a bay of vast extent. One arm of it runs south for twenty miles and leaves between it and the sea a mountainous sliver of land with San Francisco crowded onto its northerly tip. The city's half-million live on wind-swept and seagirt hills, now drenched with fog, now bathed in a sunlight that is opalescent and sparkling and bracingly cool in reminiscence of the sea-mist that here never quite surrenders to the California sun. They live for the most part in the innumerable downtown hotels and apartments, or in solid blocks of wooden houses and tenements, standing flush with the sidewalk, painted white or gray, ugly with scroll-work. Here and there through the town a cluster of charming houses in Italian renaissance cling incredibly to some steep hillside and look sheerly down over the red-brown roofs of gray tenements to the blue Bay. But the city would be hideous if its streets were not forever marching up sheer hillsides or plunging down from dizzy heights to the flashing sea, so that the poorest Italian on Telegraph Hill knows the imminent glory of far-flung waters and encircling hills, and breathes clean winds from afar.

Contrast and surprise lurk around every corner, and the city's people are sensitive and untiringly appreciative of every beauty, every contrast, every grotesquerie. They love their city as a man loves a woman of many moods and surprises. And the town is incurably bizarre and exotic. Cool trade winds blow down its streets every summer afternoon, and toward 5 o'clock a fleecy white billowing sea-fog, chill, eerie, palpable, drifts eastward over its hill-tops, hugging the land, bringing the feel and smell of the sea like a presence. It throws a glamor over the cheaply built wooden tenements, mile after mile of them. It makes of summer evening interiors so many cozy havens from its chill and sinister mystery, and accounts in part for a cafe life that for generations has been normal and habitual. People of every race and nation meet on an equal footing in the restaurants and on the streets. For San Francisco belongs to Europe and the Pacific Islands and the Orient and Latin America and the wanderers of the sea as well as to California.

Chinatown is now adored by a people who stoned Chinese a generation ago, only to discover, after the exclusion act had removed them as an economic factor, that they are a singularly honest, humorous, and lovable folk. The Japanese might be more popular if the large Japanese colony weren't so colorless. Perhaps we should be touched and flattered by their eagerness to discard everything Oriental and adopt every Western banality of dress and custom. It would take a Freudian to explain why the intensely proud, nationalistic Japanese should do this while the Chinese persist in their own ways. San Francisco owes its Oriental

flavor to Chinese who came before the exclusion act, or were born here, or smuggled in.

For the rest, San Francisco is distinguished by its startlingly radiant women with their superb health and their daring color; by its swaggering working men; by its rowdy and disreputable politics, nourished by an underworld that remains institutional and arrogant in spite of prohibition; by the imminence of the sea and the life of ships; by its dozens of odd characters, past and present, such as the monkey-house bar where an old man in a plug hat sold liquor amid the chattering of birds and beasts from the Pacific Islands—a long-vanished phenomenon that is yet somehow eloquent of the town today.

Here, in this district about the Bay, is the California of Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Joaquin Miller, Charles Warren Stoddard, John Muir, Robert Louis Stevenson, Frank Norris, Ambrose Bierce, Edwin Markham, Henry George, Gertrude Atherton, Henry Morse Stephens, Gelett Burgess, Lincoln Steffens, George Sterling, the Irwin boys, Jack London; the California of Stanford and California universities; the California of the Vigilantes, Nob Hill, the Big Four of the Central Pacific; Abe Ruef and the graft prosecution; the Mooney case; the California of Hiram Johnson, Fremont Older, William Randolph Hearst, David Starr Jordan, Herbert Hoover.

San Francisco has always been a favorite with those who rail against a Puritan and regimented America. Yet it might be instructive to our legions of young people who indolently blame Puritanism for everything banal to come and live for a time with these anti-Puritans of the Golden Gate. They would find the Good-Fellow tradition as stifling in its way as the Puritan, and harder to escape. There is a celebrated club in San Francisco the very name of which is a protest against Philistinism. It admits writers and artists without fee, and proceeds then to kill them with kindness. It has blunted more than a few men of first-rate talent by acclaiming them to the clink of glasses, drowning them in an easy and bibulous success, censoring in them any impulse to self-expression not compatible with the *mores* and taboos of the Good Fellow. Each year it presents an elaborate masque in blank verse in a noble grove of giant redwoods. Words and music are written by members, and the most successful business and professional men of the town compete for part in the caste. The plays celebrate friendship or portray the burial of care. Usually they are rather conventional and dull, full of "What Ho!'s" and "Who Is Without?'s" but the members sit through the performance with a touching religious fidelity, proudly conscious of their role as patrons of the arts and further assuaged for the tedium of the performance by a warm hazy alcoholic glow. For all that it is a brave and handsome enterprise. But when Witter Bynner, sojourning in California and admitted to membership, signed a plea for the release of political prisoners, the heavens fell on him and there was such a club row as reverberated for days in the newspapers of the town.

Yet it is hard to be critical of a town where George Sterling is as popular as Edgar Guest in Detroit; where a tiny Spanish galleon with golden sails, set in the center of a public square between Chinatown and the Barbary Coast, commemorates Stevenson's sojourn, where successful business men even pretend an enjoyment of the arts. Many young people here are without that hard-boiled quality, that contemptuous sophistication, which blights so many

American youngsters of the prosperous middle class. The minority who have escaped the cultural sterility of a nation that worships salesmanship is perhaps a little larger, in proportion, among native Californians than among Americans generally.

But because Puritanism never did prevail here, one misses certain advantages of the Puritan temperament. In the East young people find it exhilarating to make their rebellion. There is passion and iron in it. California youngsters miss some of that thrill. They grow up in a society congenial enough to seduce them. Where good fellows are not barbarians there is a tremendous temptation to be one. In more than one respect living in California is like being happily married to a very beautiful woman, a placid, maternally wise, mentally indolent woman of the classic tradition, whose mere presence allays restlessness by making it seem gratuitous and a little ridiculous. In California one worries and squirms for fear one is not worrying and squirming enough. It is not only the need of a market that sends creative youngsters scampering to New York. From a California hill-top, much of the eager striving and rebellion afoot in the world get to seem mere stridency, much of the hard discipline of creative effort so much senseless drudgery.

Nor must anything here set down show San Francisco in too rosy a hue as a sparkling oasis in an America, in a world, that seems so often these days the desert of this metaphor. What Dana's outnumbered New Englanders could not accomplish in the fifties has been, to an extent, accomplished by the leveling and regimenting processes of our industrial civilization, so that here as elsewhere men and women go about too much as though listless and driven, as though bound on the wheel. And a nationalism that in this one of its effects seems suffocating and unnatural brings San Francisco within the workings of the Prohibition amendment, where its Latin spirit flutters, crippled and bewildered, like a bird in a church.

Not so the wide region at the other end of the State that calls itself the Southland. Wine was never honored in this heaven on earth set up and maintained by the great Mississippi Valley as a dazzling reward for thrift and piety. Southern California is an amazing achievement in colonization, an achievement not of California but of the Middle West. It stands there flaunting its testimony to the wealth and the overflowing population of what was yesterday our Middle Border. They discovered it when the first trains rolled westward over the newly completed Santa Fe and Southern Pacific in the eighties. It lay empty before them, except for a few negligible and benighted Spanish-Americans. Real estate speculators and health-seekers and the elderly retired came first. They were mostly New Englanders of modest savings, confirmed in their Puritanism by a generation or two of hard work and drab living in the Middle West. And they were not to be seduced by anything in the air of California or the ways of its shiftless caballeros. Among them there was no turning of backs on the familiar. They brought their household gods and all their mental baggage with them, and set them up in California without missing a prayer-meeting. They accepted the mountains and the sunshine as their due from God for being thrifty, Republican, Protestant, and American, but they did not neglect to give thanks regularly at the churches which they promptly erected. Most of their social life still centers about these churches, which remain amazingly untouched by any profane idea or discovery that has come into the

world in the past hundred years. Of the New England that flowered in the great Unitarians, in the Abolitionists, in Phillips Brooks, in Thoreau, in William James, there is scarcely a trace.

The preempting by these people of southern California, a land drenched in sunshine and fragrance and sensuous, languorous beauty, is poignant irony. Contemplating one of their towns, with its trim bungalows and shrewd Yankee faces and many churches, it is easy to conjure up the ghostly figure of an ancient caballero, sitting graceful in his saddle under the moon, a brown-paper cigarette in his lips, long tapaderos brushing the ground, the moonlight glistening on the heavy silver trimmings of his bridle, gazing scornfully, wonderingly, sadly down from a hill-top over the electric-lighted rectangles of these victorious aliens. In a short generation they have wiped out a Homeric society of Latins and Indians and replaced it with a Gopher Prairie de luxe.

To write thus of the Yankee strain that predominates for the moment in rapidly changing southern California is to fall into the literary habit of the hour. Some day, as the drubbing continues, those of us who come of that stock will feel a pricking of latent pride, a call to arms. And we shall find, then, and reaffirm in new terms, certain brave victories for the human spirit, certain unique conquests of happiness and even of beauty. Probably we shall always feel that they were bought at a frightful price of suppression and perversion, a price demanded not alone by the racial heritage of northern Europeans, but also by the hard conditions of pioneer American living. But the victories are real. They are to be seen today in southern California, where the orthodox American genius has proved itself not merely acquisitive, but creative as well, by bringing into being towns and countrysides that in homes, and schools, and gardens, and in every sort of community enterprise show a taking of thought, an intelligent care, a vast competence, a striving for a kind of life from which, if the free and diverse and inquiring impulses are banished, so also are the ogish and the sensual. One may not disregard the community taboos. But by regarding them one may feel the community enveloping one in a kind and neighborly and even gracious concern. Out of the agglomeration of diverse and unoriented elements that make up southern California came, a decade ago, the major impulse behind most of the political progress associated with the six years of Hiram Johnson's governorship. True, it was in essence the orderly and moralistic impulse of comfortable, privileged commoners intent on putting down the heathen. The same people seemed in 1920 utterly satisfied with Mr. Harding. They destroyed the corrupt, generous, disreputable old railroad machine that had ruled the State for forty years. But they jail radicals and squelch labor organizers with more gusto still, with the same pious resentment once detected by the writer in one of their typical individuals, a retired farmer, who had discovered a cat that didn't belong there under his garage, and forthwith brought out a shotgun with moral and sanguinary intent.

Along with the elderly and the moderately prosperous who represent the virtue of the Middle West, the climate has attracted a vast assortment of odds and ends of humanity—poor souls in sick bodies, victims of all manner of starvations and suppressions and perversions. Every weird cult and -ism flourishes on the patronage of these pitiful refugees. Large areas of the community are stamped with shoddiness—the shoddiness of "folksy" real-estate men who

station forlorn women on the sidewalks to hand cards to passers-by, or who advertise free turkey dinners at the opening of their new additions; of wornout farmers and their wives from the prairie States who move about blinking in the unaccustomed sunlight and take refuge in their churches; of a horde of petty venders and mountebanks who prey on them. Bible Institutes flourish, and the thousands who flock to them are aroused to excitement by the reaffirmation of such doctrines as the second coming of Christ. Here, too, have come in increasing numbers the camp-followers and veterans of such professional sports as baseball and boxing and automobile-racing and of less reputable trades, so that Los Angeles is acquiring an underworld and a half-world of startling proportions, which shades into the lower reaches of the movies.

That serpent crawled into this garden unnoticed, tawdry bands of adventurers from "the show business" who took up quarters at third-rate hotels, twelve or fourteen years ago, and began making "Westerns." Today there are ten thousand actors alone in and around Los Angeles, including all who are listed with the central casting bureau from millionaire stars to drug-addicts used for "atmosphere" in plays of the underworld. The movies spend hundreds of millions a year for salaries and materials. They have profoundly changed the tone of Los Angeles, a sprawling, formless city with an underlying population of Middle Western villagers, and their influence reaches into every home of the Southland where there are boys and girls. In Hollywood, Puritanism out of Iowa lives neighbor to this demimondaine of the arts.

But California, like any youngster, is chiefly interesting for what it may become. As they go about the State and comprehend its natural resources, men of any imagination at all are able to foresee here a great society. Other States no older have already begun to "settle down," but here the seventy-five years of American occupation have made only a beginning. Development has been slow because a fuller use of soil and climate has waited always upon finding and conducting new water at enormous expense, and upon adapting tropical or semi-tropical plants at the cost of endless experimenting. No decade passes now without an excited planting of hitherto neglected acres to a new fruit or nut or a new variety, discovered usually by some obscure putterer in experimental gardens maintained by the State or Federal Government and then promptly exploited by shoals of land salesmen. And ceaselessly, in the high mountains, first engineers and then workmen concentrated in great temporary camps perform prodigies of tunneling and damming to get more water for irrigation and more hydro-electric power for the cities and for pumping more water still from the beds of the valleys. Instead of the four millions who inhabit the State today, every Californian confidently looks forward to the time when there shall be twenty or thirty millions, and these visions are shared by the disinterested and the skeptical, by such authorities, for instance, as Dr. Elwood Mead. This sense of a great future is a challenge to every citizen with an instinct for state-building or social engineering. (One uses terms hateful to the individualist, who indeed will find it hard going for a long time to come in a State where even tilling the soil requires organized community enterprise in getting water and in marketing its peculiar crops.) The future is a challenge, equally to the conservative and the radical, each of whom wishes ardently to build the greater community

according to his pattern. Today California is eminently a child of privilege, the largess of its climate and soil increased at the expense of the rest of the country by means of high tariffs that give its growers almost a monopoly and so keep half a dozen delicacies off the tables of the poor. The benefits are promptly capitalized in land values, so that citrus and walnut orchards bring as much as \$5,000 an acre. Unimproved land fit for tillage is held at \$200. Nearly as much more is required to prepare it for planting and irrigating, to provide the minimum in equipment and living quarters, and to sustain life until the first returns. It is a situation that has already checked development and made of fruit-growing or farming of any sort a rich man's game. And the tariff corrupts the State's participation in national politics, by making of its congressmen so many log-rollers in collusion with special privilege everywhere.

One thing California has achieved already: a body of water law, in statutes and decisions, that establishes the principle of beneficial use as a condition to possession, and that decides as between users in favor of the greater number. And this year the private control of hydro-electric power by half a dozen great companies is being challenged by the influential and widely-supported sponsors of an initiative act substituting state development and operation—a socializing of this vital necessity that may be safely predicted for the near future even if it is defeated this year. There remains the land. A constitutional amendment limiting tenure by the single tax method, in accordance with the principle of beneficial use, received a quarter of a million votes in 1916. It has been more decisively beaten since then. If one were not hopeful, if one did not cling to the belief that it is too late in the day, one might foresee California becoming another Italy, the Italy of a generation or so ago, with beggars and an aristocracy. The beggars it would be easy to manage, in time. It requires more imagination to see our land speculators, with their Rotary badges and Elks buttons on belted khaki coats, metamorphosed into anything corresponding even dimly to the Italian aristocracy. To prevent that sort of thing there are a fair number of local H. G. Wells's—such men and women as are now pushing the Power Act—with a generous following. And, far off, new winds are blowing, and gently, oh, so gently, stirring the minds of the people of the Golden State.

## Sonata Da Chiesa

By MARGARET TOD RITTER

If I should suffocate and never find  
Escape from this cathedral, would they know  
That, being hurt, I crowded in behind  
This pillar, seeking comfort? Would they blow  
The colored lanterns out and light instead  
The muted candle flames? Should I explore  
These aisles and lose my way, would it be said  
That worse than darkness crept from door to door?  
Or would some lovely legend multiply  
Concerning that poor ghost, that broken reed?  
This vast, perpetual twilight would imply  
So much of sacristy to those in need.  
That organ . . . should I climb those stairs and pray  
For silence, would this fever drop away?

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