

Chapter 1

A New Century Begins

ON THE morning of January 1, 1900, there was skating for New Yorkers in Van Cortlandt Park, and presently it began to snow. But the sharp cold had not chilled the enthusiasm of the crowds who, the night before, had assembled in Lower Broadway to celebrate either the beginning of the twentieth century or the beginning of the last year of the nineteenth: there was some disagreement as to the proper interpretation of the event, but none as to the size and liveliness of the gathering. The cable cars were jammed with people, Broadway in front of Trinity Church was well-nigh impassable, the crowds were dense in Wall Street as far down as the Subtreasury steps, and there was a great din of tin horns, punctuated from time to time by firecrackers. It had been a good year, and another one was coming.

In its leading editorial of January 1, the *New York Times* sounded an optimistic keynote. "The year 1899 was a year of wonders, a veritable annus mirabilis, in business and production. . . ." it proclaimed. "It would be easy to speak of the twelve months just passed as the banner year were we not already confident that the distinction of highest records must presently pass to the year 1900. . . . The outlook on the threshold of the new year is extremely bright."

Uptown, in the mahogany-paneled library of his big brownstone house at the corner of Madison Avenue and Thirty-sixth Street, John Pierpont Morgan, head of the mightiest banking house in the world and the most powerful man in all American business, sat playing

solitaire as the old year drew to an end. During the next twelve months Morgan would buy paintings and rare books and manuscripts in immense profusion on a European trip; would have a temporary ballroom built beside his house to accommodate twenty-four hundred guests at his daughter's wedding, and would begin negotiations with Andrew Carnegie—the twinkling little steelmaster whose personal income in 1900 would be over twenty-three million dollars, with no income tax to pay—for the formation of the United States Steel Corporation, the biggest corporation that the world had ever seen. Morgan could not foresee all this now as he ranged the cards before him, but he was content. In the words of his future son-in-law and affectionate biographer, describing that very evening of December 31, 1899,

Mr. Morgan's house was just where he wanted it to be and it suited his mode of life. Mrs. Morgan was well and they had their unmarried daughters, Louisa and Anne, living at home. His married children and grandchildren were all well and happy, and he himself was in good health. His friends were near by. The people in his social world were of his own kind, and the bankers and business men with whom he came into contact had, for the most part, the same standard of ethics and point of view that he himself had. New York was still a friendly, neighborly city and was a pleasant place in which to live. . . . At midnight, when the bells and horns proclaimed the beginning of the New Year, he was looking forward with the eagerness of a much younger man to the great possibilities of the century that was about to begin.

There were, to be sure, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers for whom the city was hardly "a pleasant place in which to live." On the Lower East Side there were poverty, filth, wretchedness on a scale which to us today would seem incredible. And in many other cities and industrial towns of America the immigrant families were living under comparable conditions, or worse; for at a time when the average wage earner in the United States got hardly five hundred dollars in a year—roughly the equivalent of fifteen hundred at present prices—most of the newcomers to the country scabbled for far less. Let Van Wyck Brooks summarize what Upton Sinclair incontrovertibly

disclosed a few years later about the state of the Poles and Lithuanians and Slovaks in the Chicago stockyard area:

Ignorant and stunted by European tyranny only to be utterly destroyed by American indifference, they were swindled by house-agents, political bosses . . . and judges who refused to recognize their rights. No one either knew or cared when their babies were drowned in the stinking green water that lay about their wretched shacks, when their daughters were forced into prostitution, when their sons fell into boiling vats because the employers had provided no safety devices.

"No one either knew or cared"—why not? Because it was a time of complacency. Since the end of the depression of the mid-nineties the voices of protest at the disparities of fortune in the United States had weakened. Populism was dead; the free-silver agitation had petered out; the once angry farmers of the Plains States were making out so well that in 1899 a traveler commented that "every barn in Kansas and Nebraska has had a new coat of paint." Not yet had the oncoming group of journalists whom Theodore Roosevelt, in a burst of irritation, labeled "muckrakers" begun to publish their remorseless studies of the seamy sides of American life. American fiction, like American journalism, was going through what old Ambrose Bierce called a "weak and fluffy period"; Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, published in 1900, went almost unnoticed and then was withdrawn from circulation as too sordid or pornographic. The best journals and the best people concerned themselves very little with the fortunes of the average man, and very much with the fortunes of ladies and gentlemen, with the pomp and circumstance of Society, and with the furthering of a polite and very proper culture for the elect. If in the language of Morgan's biographer, as he described the great banker's contentment, there was discernible a faint tone of smugness, this was characteristic of the general attitude of the well born and well endowed as they contemplated the bright future.

Morgan looked confidently forward to an era of stability and common sense, in which political leaders like Mark Hanna would see that no foolish equalitarian ideas got anywhere in government, and in which the regulation of American business would be undertaken, not

by politicians, but by bankers like himself, honorable men of wealth and judgment such as he liked to see in his favorite clubs.

Out in Terre Haute, in an upstairs bedroom of a high-ceilinged, eight-room house, a tall, gaunt, bald-headed Hoosier looked out over the railroad tracks and dreamed a quite different dream of the future. Eugene V. Debs was a one-time locomotive fireman. He had led the Pullman strike of 1894, had served a term in prison, had consumed Marxist literature in his cell, and had become an ardent Socialist. His exalted hopes were to take shape in the 1900 platform of the Social Democratic party, as whose candidate Debs would poll a meager 96,000 votes. But this was to be merely a beginning; had Debs but known it then, he was destined to have nearly a million followers by 1912. A friendly and merciful man with an insecure grasp of logic, Debs was hotly aware of the desperate plight of the immigrant workers, and he was sure he knew the one and only answer to their miseries. His platform called for public ownership of railroads, telegraphs, public utilities, and mines, and—somewhat more distantly—public ownership of the means of production and distribution generally. Nothing but this, thought Debs, would end the industrial horrors and inequities of the day.

Both Morgan and Debs would have been bewildered had they been able to foresee what the next half century would bring to the nation: how a combination of varied and often warring forces would produce an America which would not only be utterly unlike the America of 1900, but also would be utterly unlike the picture in either man's mind; yet an America in which an astonishing productive capacity would be combined with the widest distribution of prosperity ever witnessed in the world.

To understand the extent and nature of the big change that was to take place, we must first go back to 1900 and look about us—at the scene, the conditions of life, the people.

First, the scene.

II

If a neatly adjusted time machine could take you back to the Main Street of an American town in 1900, to look about you with your

present-day eyes, your first exclamation would probably be, "But look at all those horses!"

For in that year 1900 there were registered in the whole United States only 13,824 automobiles (as compared with over 44 million in 1950). And they were really few and far between except in the larger cities and the well-to-do resorts. For in 1900 everybody thought of automobiles as playthings of the rich—and not merely of the rich, but of the somewhat adventurous and sporting rich: people who enjoyed taking their chances with an unpredictable machine that might at any moment wreck them. There were almost no paved highways outside the cities, and of course there were no roadside garages or filling stations; every automobilist must be his own desperate mechanic. Probably half the men and women of America had never seen a car. When William Allen White organized a street fair in Emporia, Kansas, in 1899, the automobile which was brought there for the occasion—and proved to be the most exciting exhibit of the fair—came from Chicago by rail; it was the first automobile ever to have crossed the Missouri River.

But horses were everywhere, pulling surreys, democrats, buggies, cabs, delivery wagons of every sort on Main Street, and pulling harvesters on the tractorless farms out in the countryside.

The sights and sounds and sensations of horse-and-carriage life were part of the universal American experience: the clop-clop of horses' hoofs; the stiff jolting of an iron-tired carriage on a stony road; the grinding noise of the brake being applied to ease the horse on a downhill stretch; the necessity of holding one's breath when the horse sneezed; the sight of sand, carried up on the tires and wooden spokes of a carriage wheel, spilling off in little cascades as the wheel revolved; the look of a country road overgrown by grass, with three tracks in it instead of two, the middle one made by horses' hoofs; the special male ordeal of getting out of the carriage and walking up the steeper hills to lighten the load; and the more severe ordeal, for the unpracticed, of harnessing a horse which could recognize inexperience at one scornful glance. During a Northern winter the jingle of sleigh bells was everywhere. On summer evenings, along the tree-lined streets of innumerable American towns, families sitting on their

front porches would watch the fine carriages of the town as they drove past for a proud evening's jaunt, and the cognoscenti would wait eagerly for a glimpse of the banker's trotting pair or the sporting lawyer's 2:40 pacer. And one of the magnificent sights of urban life was that of a fire engine, pulled by three galloping horses, careening down a city street with its bell clanging.

It is hard for us today to realize how very widely communities were separated from one another when they depended for transportation wholly on the railroad and the horse and wagon—and when telephones were still scarce, and radios non-existent. A town which was not situated on a railroad was really remote. A farmer who lived five miles outside the county seat made something of an event of hitching up and taking the family to town for a Saturday afternoon's shopping. (His grandchildren make the run in a casual ten minutes, and think nothing of it.) A trip to see friends ten miles away was likely to be an all-day expedition, for the horse had to be given a chance to rest and be fed. No wonder that each region, each town, each farm was far more dependent upon its own resources—its own produce, social contacts, amusements—than in later years. For in terms of travel and communication the United States was a very big country indeed.

No wonder, furthermore, that the majority of Americans were less likely than their descendants to be dogged by that frightening sense of insecurity which comes from being jostled by forces—economic, political, international—beyond one's personal ken. Their horizons were close to them. They lived among familiar people and familiar things—individuals and families and fellow townsmen much of their own sort, with ideas intelligible to them. A man's success or failure seemed more likely than in later years to depend upon forces and events within his own range of vision. Less often than his sons and grandsons did he feel that his fortune, indeed his life, might hang upon some decision made in Washington or Berlin or Moscow, for reasons utterly strange to his experience. The world at which he looked over the dashboard of the family carriage might not be friendly, but at least most of it looked understandable.

III

Your second exclamation, if you found yourself on a Main Street sidewalk of 1900, would probably be, "But those *skirts!*"

For every grown woman in town would be wearing a dress that virtually swept the street; that would in fact actually sweep it from time to time, battering and begriming the hem, if its owner had not learned to hold it clear. From the high collar of her shirtwaist to the ground, the woman of 1900 was amply enveloped in material. (There were, to be sure, arbitrary limits to this envelopment. The evening dress of a woman of fashion might be as décolleté as that of the television star of the nineteen-fifties. But it also had a train, which she must hold up as best she could when dancing.) Even for country wear, in fact even for golf or tennis, the skirt must reach within two or three inches of the ground, and a hat—usually a hard sailor hat—must almost imperatively be worn. Pull out today a photograph album of the year 1900 and your first impression will be that even at the seashore or in the mountains all the women are wearing city clothes.

At any season a woman was swathed in layer upon layer of underpinnings—chemise, drawers, corset, corset cover, and one or more petticoats. The corset of those days was a formidable personal prison which did its strenuous best, with the aid of whalebones, to distort the female form into an hour-glass shape. Dresses almost invariably came in two pieces, and the discipline begun by the corset was reinforced by the bodice part of the dress, which was stiffened to complete the hour-glass effect. The bosom was compressed as nearly as possible into a single structure, and the correct posture called for a rearward-sloping "straight-front" effect from this eminence downward; the fashion-plate artists represented the well-dressed woman as almost falling forward—despite the counterbalancing effect of an unsubdued posterior—in the effort to achieve the perfect stance.

As for the men, their clothes, too, were formal and severe by today's standards. Collars were high and stiff. The man of affairs was likely to wear, even under his everyday sack suit (of three-button coat, obligatory waistcoat, and narrowish trousers), a shirt with hard

detachable cuffs and perhaps a stiff bosom too. If he were a banker or a businessman of executive stature he probably wore a frock coat to the office, and a silk hat instead of the less formal derby—except between May 15 and September 15, when custom decreed a hard straw hat (or, for the affluent, possibly a Panama). To go hatless, except in the wide open spaces, was for the well-dressed male unthinkable. If the weather were intolerably hot, he might remove his coat, and in certain informal offices—newspaper city rooms, for instance—he customarily did so. But his waistcoat *must not come off* (a rule which, considering the sort of shirt he was wearing, was not without aesthetic merit). The term "shirt sleeves" remains in our language as a survival of that custom.

In the country he might wear a blue serge coat with white flannel (or, more economically, white duck) trousers, or, under the proper circumstances, a tweed coat with riding trousers or knickerbockers. But when a man returned to the city, or a farmer put on town clothes for a visit to the county seat, he must invariably get into the severe three-piece suit, with starched collar and cuffs—even under a July sun.

These implacable costumes, male and female, reflected the prevailing credo as to the relations between the sexes. The ideal woman was the sheltered lady, swathed not only in silk and muslin but in innocence and propriety, and the ideal man, whether a pillar of rectitude or a gay dog, virtuously protected the person and reputation of such tender creatures as were entrusted to his care. If unmarried, a girl must be accompanied by a chaperone whenever she ventured out to an evening's entertainment in the city. If she were a daughter of the rich, a maid might take the place of the chaperone; it was never quite clear, under these circumstances, who was supposed to protect the maid's virtue. Eleanor Roosevelt has recorded in her autobiography her relief when, at the age of twenty or so, she found that her friend Bob Ferguson was considered close enough to the family to be permitted to escort her home from evening parties at the studio of Bay Emmett the painter. "Otherwise I always had to have a maid wait for me—that was one of the rules my grandmother had laid down." And James W. Gerard has added his testimony as to the iron code which

still governed New York Society in that period. "Even when I was thirty years old," wrote Gerard in his old age, "if I had asked a girl to dine with me alone, I would have been kicked down her front steps. If I had offered her a cocktail, I would have been tossed out of Society for my boorish effrontery." Needless to add that a woman must never be seen in a bar—or even a smoking car.

The chaperone was, to be sure, chiefly an urban institution. In the smaller places, especially west of the Alleghenies, and among city people vacationing in the country, the rules were greatly relaxed. As Henry Seidel Canby has said, there was developing

a free association of boys and girls in their teens and early twenties that perhaps never has existed on the same plane elsewhere in the history of the modern world. We had confidence in each other, and we were confided in. All through the Adirondack woods we climbed together in summer, sleeping in cabins, girls on one side, boys on the other, following by couples all day lonely and difficult trails, and in the winter skated far-off ponds, or sat all night in the spring on moonlit Delaware hills, falling in and out of love with never a crude pang of sex, though in a continual amorous excitement which was sublimated from the grosser elements of love.

But throughout these companionships one might almost say that an imaginary chaperone was always present. What was operating was in effect an honor system: these boys and girls knew they were expected to behave with perfect propriety toward one another, and only rarely did they fail to do so. As Mr. Canby adds, "The boys sought elsewhere for what they did not get in friendship and the respectful amorousness of equals. They raided the amusement parks or the evening streets in search of girls that could be frankly pursued for their physical charms. 'Chippies' was the cant name. . . ." But the boys preferred to think of "nice" girls of their own class in other terms, and under the code which they followed a kiss was virtually tantamount to a proposal of marriage.

The idea of the sheltered lady was of course difficult to maintain in a country in which 20.4 per cent of the female population were engaged in working for a living. This unhappy fact of life caused the

moralists of the day deep concern. If there was a steadily increasing number of women working in offices, it was understood that they were victims of unfortunate financial circumstance; their fathers, poor fellows, were unable to support them properly; and it was hoped that their inevitable contacts with rude men of business would not sully their purity. If women who had not had "advantages" worked by the millions in shops and factories—at wages as low as six or eight dollars a week, roughly equivalent to eighteen to twenty-five a week in 1950—this was understood to subject them to appalling temptations; one of O. Henry's most touching stories deals with a poor shopgirl who, though she kept a picture of Kitchener of Khartoum in her room as the embodiment of male knightliness, was pursued by a low character named Piggy who would one day have his way with her because she was starving on her meager wages.

There were also servant girls innumerable; but in the cities they were mostly of immigrant stock, or colored, and therefore, it was thought, could hardly hope for a better lot. And anyhow they were protected from temptation by being given very few hours off. In the country towns the servant girls were likely to be farmers' daughters who would presently marry a clerk or a man in the railroad office and set up housekeeping—with, one hoped, their innocence still unimpaired. (Incidentally, only among a minority of the wealthy were servants referred to as such, except in the South; however mean their status, an American deference to the democratic idea compelled them to be spoken of as "the girls," or, in less sophisticated circles, as "the help.")

If unhappy circumstances forced a "nicely brought up" young woman to work for a living, a career as schoolteacher, or music teacher, or trained nurse was considered acceptable for her. If she had the appropriate gift she might become a writer or artist or singer, even an opera singer. Some went on the stage; but at the grave risk of declassing themselves, for actresses were known to be mostly "fast." (Always, in discussions of the economic status and opportunities of women, the effect of a woman's occupation upon her sexual virtue was recurrent.) There were pioneers who, with flaming inten-

sity, took up other careers—as doctors, for instance—against every sort of opposition; but it was an unusual community in which they were not considered unfeminine cranks for doing so, and one of the most telling arguments marshaled against their decision was that a girl who set out to earn money was selfishly causing her father needless embarrassment: somebody might think that he couldn't support her. By common consent the best—and safest—thing for a girl to do was to sit at home and help her mother about the house and wait for the “right man.”

Such a code might be expected by people of this post-Freudian day to have produced a generation of inhibited neurotics. I think Mr. Canby is right when he argues, in *The Age of Confidence*, that on the whole it did not. If the rule of reticence and repression damaged many lives, it was not conspicuously harder for most people to live by than the rule of frankness and comparative sexual latitude. But it had its unhappy aspects. So inexorable were the silences that surrounded the sexual functions (except in men's smoking-room conversation) that a large majority of American women entered marriage with only the vaguest—and often the most terrified—notions of what it would involve. And it is possible, if not probable, that to an equally large majority of married women the sexual life remained, year after year, a distasteful necessity, to be submitted to only because men had beastly instincts which must be appeased (lest they be driven into adventures with bad women), and because it was one's right and duty to have children.

It is true that already the divorce rate was rising; in the year 1900 there was one divorce for every 12.7 weddings, as compared with one for every 2.6 weddings in the abnormal postwar year 1946 and for every 4.1 weddings in the more normal year 1949. But even the 1900 figures give no idea of the black disfavor in which divorce was held in the average American community. A marriage might be a nightmare to both partners, but it must go on and on: that was the decree of public opinion.

As a result, there was hardly an American town of any size in which one could not point to a middle-aged or elderly couple who had not

spoken to one another in years, so deep was their mutual enmity, but who continued to share the same house, eat at the same table, bring up a family of children, and even, perhaps, share the same bed—in the stubborn conviction that they were treading the only path of virtue.

IV

You could not travel far, on your return to the America of 1900, without noticing how much smaller the cities and towns were. For in that year the population of the continental United States was just about half what it would be fifty years later—a little less than 76 millions as against a little more than 150 millions in 1950. And although you would find open fields where there are now villages, and villages which have since grown into towns, it would be in the cities and their suburbs that the contrast would be most striking. Especially in the cities of the West Coast and Texas. For example, you would find Los Angeles a fast-growing little city of only 102,489 people—about one-nineteenth of its 1950 population; Baedeker's guide said in 1899 that within the preceding decade "its adobe houses have given place almost entirely to stone and brick business blocks and tasteful wooden residences." You would find Houston a pigmy city of 44,633 inhabitants, as against over thirteen times as many in 1950; Dallas, another pigmy with 42,638 people, as against over ten times as many in 1950.

Not only would the thinness of the Western population remind you how much farther east, in those days, was the center of gravity of American industry and American cultural institutions; even in the Eastern cities you would miss many of the commonplace features of modern city life. Skyscrapers, for instance: the tallest building in the country was the Ivins Syndicate Building on Park Row in New York, which rose 29 stories, with towers which brought its utmost altitude to 382 feet. Not yet did visitors to New York remark upon the "famous skyline." And in other cities a ten- or twelve-story building was a thing of wonder.

There was little electric street-lighting; a commonplace sight at dusk in almost any American city was the appearance of the city lamp-

lighter with his ladder, which he would set against a lamppost and climb to turn on the gas street-light. Nor was there, as yet, much illuminated advertising. New Yorkers could marvel at the great Heinz sign on the site of the future Flatiron Building at Fifth Avenue and Broadway and Twenty-third Street, a fifty-foot sign, with a huge pickle represented by green light bulbs, and HEINZ written across it in white bulbs, and slogans such as "57 Varieties" flashing on and off below; but this was a pioneer spectacle: not yet had Broadway truly become the Great White Way.

As for public transportation in the cities, there was only one completed subway, a short one in Boston, though in New York ground was broken for another during 1900; and if New York and Chicago had their thundering elevated railroads (New York was just electrifying its line, which had previously run by steam), most urban Americans got about town in trolley cars, the screaming of whose wheels, as they rounded a corner, seemed to the countryman the authentic note of modern civilization. Electric trolley lines were booming; the financial journals were full of advertisements of the securities of new trolley enterprises; to put one's money into street-railroad development was to bet on the great American future.

Each city had its outlying residential areas, within walking distance of the railroad or trolley lines: long blocks of single-family or two-family houses, rising bleakly among the vacant lots and fields; comfortable lawn-surrounded houses for the more prosperous. And there were many commuters who made a cindery railroad journey to work from suburban towns. But those outlying towns were quite different from what they were to become in the automobile age. For only if one could be met at the station by a horse and carriage—which was inconvenient unless one could afford a coachman—or was an exceptionally hardy pedestrian, was it practicable to live more than a mile or so from the railroad or trolley. So the suburbs were small, and backed by open country. Nothing would have been more incredible to the commuter of 1900 than the notion that within a generation the fields and woods in which he went walking of a Sunday

would be studded with hundreds of suburban cottages, all easily accessible in a motorized age.

As you traveled away from the cities into the countryside, one of the things that would have puzzled you, if you had been able to look about you with the eyes of the mid-century, would have been the comparative shortage of city people's summer cottages. The rich, to be sure, had their holiday resorts: Bar Harbor, Islesboro, and North Haven on the islands off the Maine coast; Nahant, Beverly, and Manchester on the shoreline north of Boston; Newport and Narragansett Pier in Rhode Island; Lenox in the Berkshires; in the New York area, Tuxedo Park, Lakewood, Cedarhurst, and the newly-fashionable north shore of Long Island; Atlantic City and Cape May; the Springs of Virginia and West Virginia; Saratoga Springs for the racing season; Palm Beach for the winter season; Santa Barbara on the West Coast. If the overwhelming majority of the places in this list seem to be in the northeast part of the country, the reason is obvious; most Southerners went north if they could, and most Westerners went east, for a prosperous holiday. And many places whose warm winter climate subsequently made them popular pleasure resorts were then chiefly known as health resorts. Said Baedeker's guide, 1899 edition:

The best known winter-stations are in Florida, California, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Virginia. A large proportion of the invalids visiting these regions are the victims of consumption, but sufferers from gout, rheumatism, neurasthenia, chlorosis, anaemia, diseases of the kidneys, affections of the heart, insomnia, chronic bronchitis, asthma, and overwork are often signally benefited. . . .

Baedeker especially recommended for invalids such places as Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Diego, and San Bernardino in California; Colorado Springs in the Rockies; and Thomasville, Georgia, and Aiken, South Carolina, for "weak-chested persons."

In most of the leading resorts there were fine country houses; in some of them, opulent ones. There were also many prosperous families whose special taste for the wilds would lead them to buy large tracts of Adirondack woodland and build luxurious "camps"; or

whose liking for the simplicities of Cape Cod, or the White Mountains, or the Lake Michigan shoreline, or the rugged Monterey coast, would lead them to build more modest cottages for a two or three months' stay. But their choice of places was limited by two things—accessibility to a railroad, and the limited holiday time available to all but a few. The boom in summer-cottage building was only just beginning; probably there were only something like a tenth as many cottages as in 1950. It was still the heyday of the big summer-resort hotel, to which well-to-do vacationists would come for a short stay, ranging usually from a week to a month: the shingled hotel with towers and turrets and whipping flags, with wide piazzas and interminable carpeted corridors, and with a vast dining room in which were served huge meals on the American plan, with a menu which took one from celery and olives through soup and fish and a roast to ice cream, cake, and nuts and almonds, with sherbet as a cooling encouragement in mid-meal.

For those who could not afford such grandeur, there were boardinghouses innumerable, with schoolteachers rocking on the porch and a group of croquet players on the lawn; and, here and there along the seashore or the lakeside, crowded colonies of tiny shingled shacks, each labeled clearly with its sentimental or jocose name—"Bide-a-Wee Cottage," "Doocum Inn," or the like. But the overwhelming majority of Americans outside the upper income brackets stayed at home, through the full heat of summer. And being carriageless, they had to satisfy their holiday dreams by taking a special reduced-rate railroad tour by day-coach to Niagara Falls or Atlantic City; or, more likely, an occasional trip out of town in an open trolley car to the Trolley Park, an amusement park at the end of the line.

So there was still lots of room to play in America—thousands of miles of shoreline, hundreds of lakes and rivers, hundreds of mountains, which you could explore to your heart's content, camping and bathing and hunting and fishing without asking anybody's permission, if you could only somehow reach them. Already there were farsighted conservationists pointing out that for generations Americans had been despoiling the land while subduing it; that forests were

being hacked to pieces, farm land misused and overused, natural resources plundered right and left; and that national parks would be needed, both to conserve these resources and to give the people room to play. But to most people such warnings just didn't make sense. If lumbermen destroyed one forest, there were others to enjoy; if cottagers bought up one beach, there were others open to any bathers. The bounties of nature seemed inexhaustible. As Stuart Chase was to remark long years later, the prevailing attitude was that of the Mad Hatter, who if he soiled one teacup simply moved on to the next one.

For the small minority who were lucky enough to have a summer cottage to go to, the ritual of departure was complex. First, the city house would be put through a thorough cleaning and dismantling, a process that lasted for days. On Departure-Day-Minus-One the expressman called for the trunks, which were many; it would have astonished a family of the 1900 era to be told that in later years vacationists would manage for weeks with nothing but suitcases. On the fateful morning the family would grasp bags, overcoats, umbrellas, and such other possible incumbrances as fishing tackle, golf clubs, dog, cat, and caged canary, and proceed to the station in one or more horse-drawn cabs. Then came the long journey—either by Pullman car, incredibly grand with its elaborate paneling of the Chester A. Arthur vintage, or by open-platform daycoach, very cindery. Arrived in the neighborhood of Elysium, the family would dismount on a sun-baked board platform, assemble its belongings, and proceed in a big three-seater wagon (for the family and personal equipment) followed by an even larger wagon (for the trunks). A six-mile drive would take an hour, for there was that sandy stretch by the cemetery where the horses moved at a straining walk, and there were a couple of long hills (now taken by all automobiles in high). It was a dirty and sticky family that finally watched the trunk wagon being backed up to the side porch of the cottage; whether they were more exhausted than their grandchildren, who now make the 300-mile journey packed tightly into the family Buick, is less certain.

To the city-bred children of that time, the farmers they met in the

country seemed a race apart, foreign in everything but language. And why shouldn't they have been? With no automobiles, no radio, no rural free delivery, no big mass-circulation magazines; with, in many places, no access to any schooling but the most elementary; and with rare chances, if any, to travel to a city, they were imprisoned in rural isolation. If, as we have already noted, the world they saw about them was moved by more understandable and therefore less terrifying forces than those which impinged upon their descendants, it was also unbelievably more limited.

V

As you continued your investigation of the United States of 1900 you would find yourself, again and again, struck by the lack, or the shortage, of things which today you regard as commonplace necessities.

Electrical services and devices, for instance. Most of the city houses of the really prosperous were now electrified; but the man who was building a new house was only just beginning to install electric lights without adding gas, too, lest the current fail suddenly. And the houses of the great majority were still lighted by gas (in the cities and towns) or oil lamps (in the country). Millions of Americans of the older generation still remember what it was like to go upstairs of an evening and then be consumed with worry as to whether they had really turned off completely the downstairs gas jets. A regular chore for the rural housewife was filling the lamps; and a frequent source of family pride was the possession of a Welsbach burner that would furnish adequate light for a whole family to read by as they gathered about the living-room table.

Of course there were no electric refrigerators—to say nothing of washing machines and deep-freeze units. Farmers—and summer cottagers—had icehouses in which big cubes of ice, cut during the winter at a neighboring pond or river, or imported by ship from north to south, lay buried deep in sawdust. When you needed ice, you climbed into the icehouse, scraped the sawdust away from a fine hunk of ice, and carried it in your ice tongs to the kitchen icebox. If

you lived in the city, the ice company's wagon showed up at the door and the iceman stowed a huge cube in your icebox.

For a good many years there had been refrigerator cars on the railroads, but the great national long-distance traffic in fresh fruits and vegetables was still in its infancy; and accordingly the prevailing American diet would have shocked deeply a visitor from 1950. In most parts of the United States people were virtually without fresh fruit and green vegetables from late autumn to late spring. During this time they consumed quantities of starches, in the form of pies, doughnuts, potatoes, and hot bread, which few would venture to absorb today. The result was that innumerable Americans were in sluggish health during the months of late winter and early spring, when their diet was short of vitamins. If as a visitor from 1950 you found yourself staying in an average American house in the winter season at the turn of the century, you would soon find yourself yearning for orange juice, tomato juice, fresh lettuce, or grapefruit—every one of them unobtainable then.

By the turn of the century running water, bathtubs, and water closets were to be found in virtually all the town houses of the prosperous, though many a fine house on a fashionable street still held only one bathroom. But not only did factory workers and farmers (except perhaps a few owners of big farms) still not dream of enjoying such luxuries, but even in the gracious houses of well-to-do people beyond the reach of city water lines and sewer lines, there was likely to be no bathroom at all. They washed with pitcher and basin in their bedrooms, each of them pouring his dirty water from the basin into a slop jar, to be emptied later in the day; and after breakfast they visited the privy behind the house. In his lively book, *The Age of Indiscretion*, Clyde Brion Davis tells how, if you lived in Chillicothe, Missouri, you might on occasion extend your political education by beholding the Governor of Missouri, a resident of Chillicothe, "without his silk hat or frock coat and with his fawn-colored vest unbuttoned and the tab of his stiff-bosomed shirt unbut-

toned and hanging outside his trousers . . . looking very thoughtful as he sauntered to the privy."

At a luxurious hotel you might, if you paid extra, get a room with private bath, but not until 1907 did Ellsworth M. Statler build in Buffalo the first hotel which offered every guest a room and private bath at a moderate price. And not until 1916 did the double-shell enameled bathtub go into mass production, replacing the painted cast-iron bathtub, with roll rim and claw feet, which was the standard article of the 1900 period.

As a visitor from the nineteen-fifties to the era of that cast-iron bathtub it might or might not occur to you that personal cleanliness was not so readily achieved then as in your own time, and that if the Saturday-night bath offered to millions of Americans their only weekly immersion in warm water, this was chiefly because bathrooms were few and far between. But pretty certainly there was one custom of those days which would strike you as filthy. In the Eastern cities well-bred people disapproved of spitting in mixed company, though the cuspidor was likely to be a standard office fixture beside the executive's desk; but in the West and South, and in the small cities and towns especially, spitting was a standard prerogative of the sturdy male; there were cuspidors everywhere, not only in offices, hotels, and public buildings, but in the leading citizen's parlor; and when it took too much of an effort to reach a cuspidor—which many men prided themselves on being able to hit with a stream of spittle at a considerable distance—many otherwise cleanly people considered it their privilege to spit in the fireplace or on the floor.

Perhaps the dwindling of this ancient American custom during the years since 1900 has been affected by the changing use of tobacco. In 1900, when the population of the United States was half what it was in 1950, Americans smoked a slightly larger number of cigars, consumed a much larger amount of pipe tobacco and a very much larger amount of chewing tobacco—and smoked only about one-hundredth of the number of cigarettes that they did fifty years later. (In 1900 about four billion cigarettes were manufactured in the United States; in 1949, 384 billions.)

Telephones, in 1900, were clumsy things and comparatively scarce; they were to be found chiefly in business offices and in the houses of such well-to-do people as enjoyed experimenting with new mechanical devices. In the whole country there were only 1,335,911 of them—as compared with over 43,000,000 at the end of 1950. In Muncie, Indiana, the local press warned people that, when using the telephone, they “should not ask for a name but refer to the number list.” And so strange, to most people, was still the idea of such an impersonal instrument of personal communication, that many a housewife would cry out politely as the telephone began ringing, “I’m coming, I’m coming!”

As for the instruments of mass communication which, in the years to come, were to do so much to provide Americans of all classes and conditions with similar information, ideas, and interests, these too were almost wholly lacking. There would be no radio for another twenty years; no television, except for a very limited audience, for over forty-five years. Crude motion pictures were occasionally to be seen at vaudeville theaters, or in peep-show parlors, but the first movie which told a story, *The Great Train Robbery*, was still three years in the future. There was as yet no magazine with a circulation of over a million. Already the days were ending when a group of splendid and sedate periodicals designed for polite readers with intellectual tastes—such as *The Century*, *Harper's*, and *Scribner's*—had dominated the magazine field. Munsey and Curtis and McClure had begun to show that many readers could be attracted by magazines which offered less literary but more human and popular fare, and that such magazines could as a result attract lucrative advertising. But although Cyrus Curtis had pushed the circulation of his *Ladies' Home Journal* to 850,000, he had only just begun his extraordinary demonstration of the way in which popular magazines could serve as a medium for national advertising on a huge scale. His *Saturday Evening Post* had only 182,000 readers in 1900, and an advertising revenue of only \$6,933.

Accordingly there were sharp limits to the fund of information and ideas which people of all regions and all walks of life held in

common. To some extent a Maine fisherman, an Ohio farmer, and a Chicago businessman would be able to discuss politics with one another, but in the absence of syndicated newspaper columns appearing from coast to coast their information would be based mostly upon what they had read in very divergent local newspapers, and in the absence both of the radio and of newsreels it is doubtful if any of them—except perhaps the Chicago businessman—had ever heard with his own ears the silver voice of William Jennings Bryan. There was no such common denominator of acquaintance as there would be in 1950 between people who could instantly recognize not only Harry Truman, but Bob Hope, Van Johnson, and Betty Hutton, who had laughed simultaneously at Jack Benny's colloquies with Rochester, and who knew Bing Crosby's voice the moment they heard it on the air.

And if the instruments of mass communication were lacking, so also were many social institutions which today Americans take for granted. A nation of individualists, accustomed to the idea that each person must fend for himself as an independent unit, was moving into an age of interdependence but was still slow to recognize the fact and slow to organize the institutions which such an age required. Consider, for example, what a small Midwestern town had to offer a boy by way of recreation and educational opportunity. Tradition said that boys must find their own chances for recreation—swimming at the old swimming hole of hallowed legend, playing baseball in the open fields, hunting and fishing in the neighboring woods and streams. But already industrialism was contaminating the rivers, the open country was being built up and cultivated, the natural playgrounds were being despoiled—and few substitute diversions had been provided.

I know of no better demonstration of the plight of a boy in such a town than is given in Clyde Brion Davis's *The Age of Indiscretion*. In Chillicothe, Missouri, says Mr. Davis, there was no place "where a youngster could enter the water except the really filthy ponds and the equally dirty and dangerous river where drownings occurred every

season. . . . We, in our district, had no place to play baseball except a wholly inadequate and ratty lot down by the Milwaukee tracks. . . . There was no tennis or golf or badminton or basketball. There was not a gymnasium in town or anything approaching physical education even in high school." There was no public library (unless you counted a small semipublic library in the high school). There was no Y.M.C.A., no Boy Scout organization, no 4-H organization, no school band, school orchestra, or school glee club.

It seems to be a continuing characteristic of American life that communities perpetually fail to catch up institutionally with their own growth; at any rate, it was glaringly true that the American town of 1900 had failed to adapt itself to the necessities of the onrushing industrial age.

VI

In the development of organized sports there was the same sort of lag. The frontier tradition and the old American individualism died hard. Most American boys and men were still expected to get their active amusement on a catch-as-catch-can basis out in the open countryside—hunting, fishing, camping, swimming, riding—or to get it out of contests (such as target-shooting) which grew directly out of the conditions of the open countryside. Baseball had long been the national game and millions of boys had learned to play it, but mostly on local sandlots, from which, if proficient, they might graduate to play on the town team against a neighboring town. As for girls, the traditional idea was that they were too weak, or at any rate too proper, to engage in such rough goings-on. Organized games which required special costumes and equipment were mostly considered affectations of the rich, and to the average small-town American any such notion as that of offering "supervised play" for boys and girls would have been quite bewildering.

Already this old-time tradition was breaking down. Organized games were growing rapidly in the schools and colleges: football, baseball (which was a college sport with much more prestige then than later), rowing, track, and on a minor scale soccer and lacrosse.

(Basketball was still known only to a comparative few. It had not even been invented until 1892.) Among the games which older people, too, could enjoy, golf and tennis were spreading fast in popularity; a considerable number of people bowled; and men and women by the hundreds of thousands bicycled for recreation. But as we look back on the sports of those days, the most striking thing is the extent to which they centered in the East—and also were still regarded as the prerogative of the well-to-do.

Tennis, for example, was overwhelmingly Eastern, and the annual championships were held as a matter of course at Newport, the center of summertime fashion. Golf had reached Chicago at the time of the World's Fair of 1893, and already there were no less than twenty golf clubs in California, but the best amateur players were mostly well-to-do Easterners, and the best professionals were nearly all Scotch. Red-blooded Americans outside the influence of urban wealth and fashion tended to regard golf as downright silly; any businessman could get a laugh by remarking that he couldn't see any sense in chasing a little white ball up and down a field.

And as for football—which in 1900 was a bone-breaking contest in which no forward passing was allowed and the teams crashed into one another and piled up in sweating heaps in the effort to gain five yards in three downs—it is instructive to look at the *New York Times* for Sunday, November 25, 1900. There, on the front page, right-hand column, you will learn that the Yale football team, the preceding afternoon, had become the undisputed "football champions" of the year—because, after having beaten Princeton, they had beaten Harvard, which had already beaten Pennsylvania. It was as simple as that. The Yale-Harvard game had been played at Yale Field, with 20,000 people in the bleachers, and speculators offering seats at prices from \$10 to \$20. Following the *Times's* account of the game itself you will find a headline reading SOCIETY AT THE GAME, informing you that "the society and club worlds of this city exhibited an intense interest in yesterday's game," and that "to give a list of the well-known men and women present would be to reprint whole pages of the Social Register."

It is only fair to add that in 1900 there were college football teams from coast to coast and that some of the Midwestern ones displayed considerable prowess. *Outing* magazine, reviewing the season, devoted separate sections of its survey to Midwestern, Southern, and Pacific Coast football. Yet, like the *New York Times*, it had no doubt as to where pre-eminence lay. It selected an All-America team consisting of four players from Yale, two from Harvard, and one each from Cornell, Columbia, Lafayette, Pennsylvania, and West Point. (Incidentally, when Frank Hering went to Notre Dame to coach football in the fall of 1896, he "had a hard time working up enough enthusiasm to get a squad on the field," according to Arthur J. Hope's history of the university.)

Even if one makes allowance for a certain degree of condescension on the part of Eastern chroniclers, the evidence is overwhelming that at the turn of the century athletic sports centered in the East and that the public thought of them as surrounded by an aura of fashion. Far ahead were the days of tennis champions from municipal courts, golf champions from the public links, expert college teams playing in huge stadiums so numerous that no one selecting an All-American eleven could see more than a few of the best ones play; Californians moving into the top ranks in sport after sport; high-school basketball teams organized by the thousands from one end of the country to the other; and Americans of both sexes, to the estimated number of well over ten millions, enjoying at least an occasional evening of bowling.