

# THE CENTURY MAGAZINE.

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## WASHINGTON AS A SPECTACLE.

WITH PICTURES BY A. CASTAIGNE.



A POLITICIAN.

WASHINGTON is a city planned and built solely for the purposes of government. It is probably the only capital in the world which has had such an origin; which is named after a nation's first leader, laid out according to his individual views, and beautified, to some extent, according to his ideas of beauty. Washington, as it stands to-day, may be said to be the expression of George Washington's intention and personal taste, and, in a consequent way, of his character. The plan of the city reminds one of the man's face, with its large,

quiet features, its calm symmetry, and its singularly unobtrusive individuality. One might almost say that the face of Washington the man, like the face of Washington the city, was characterized by its "magnificent distances." We even feel a little, in spite of what we know of his youth, that the man himself was "planned and built solely for purposes of government."

Strangely enough, too, the features of the first President, as we know them from his many

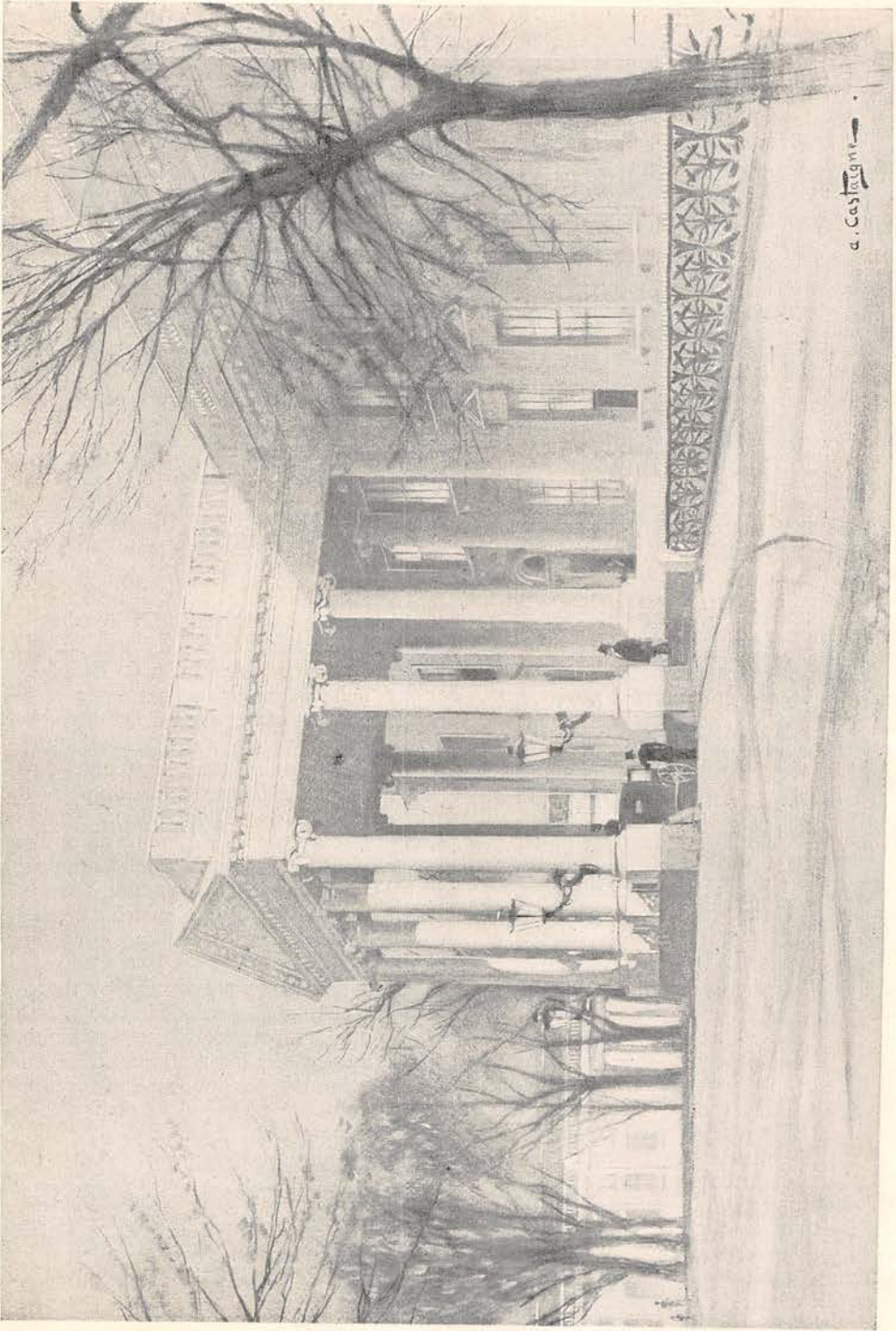
portraits, remind one irresistibly, by their almost supernal calm, of some of those beautiful heads of Buddha modeled in the far East by the hands of believing men; and his capital recalls very strongly the modern and English portions of such an Indian city as Allahabad, for instance. The beautiful trees, the endless, perfectly smooth roads, the red brick houses, the dark faces of the colored population, and, above all, the moist softness of the sunny air on summer days when it has lately rained, are points which Washington has in common both with Allahabad and Bombay, and which cannot fail to strike one who has lived long in all three places.

We Americans may say of ourselves that our qualities are real, but that our tastes are artificial. We may arrogate praise for what we have done, and deprecate foreign criticism of what we like. Our deeds are our own, but our tastes, as yet, are not. We have more really the desire for taste than taste itself. But the desire is enormous, and in seeking to satisfy it we have desperately attempted to throw an impossible bridge across the wide and deep gulf by which we are divided from former civilizations, and to drag the beau-



G.

FROM THE SUNNY SOUTH.



a. Castaigne

THE WHITE HOUSE — MAIN ENTRANCE.



tiful by force over that bridge, to stay with us. We have indeed a preëminent right to please ourselves in our own way; but we cannot help being concerned about pleasing other people besides Americans, as we have lately shown. Hence the curious, sporadic conventionalities which crop up in unexpected places all over our country—conventionalities of which the object seems to be to produce a good, though only a temporary, impression where genuine traditions have not as yet developed. They make one think of those sham fronts of wood and plaster which are sometimes put up before great buildings yet unfinished, but to which it is necessary to give the appearance of being completed for some special occasion. They answer the purpose, but we feel that they are not intended to last.

In Washington, however, almost everything is meant to be enduring, and in one sense, which is a good sense, there is perhaps no city in any part of the world where a conventional standard has been arbitrarily adopted with such determination, and adhered to with such consistency, throughout so long a period of time, and, on the whole, with such good results. There is no city in the world, I think, where so many public buildings are of Greek style, and yet so unobtrusive.

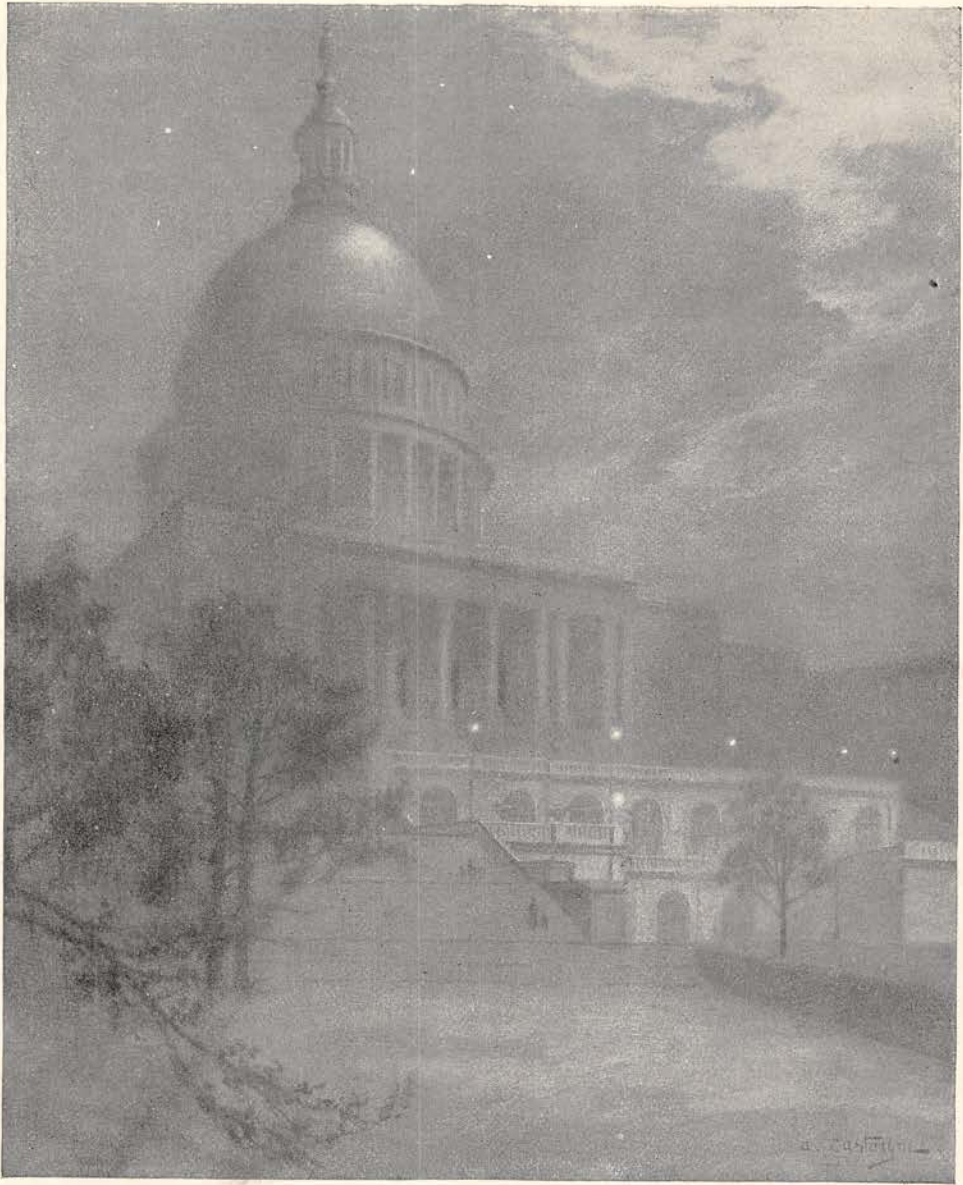
But in these days of specialism, it is for specialists to talk of architecture, and it is the province of the novelist to enjoy such fiction as he can find in the world, and to make it enjoyable for others. It must be in spite of its conventionalism that Washington suggests romance, and breathes the breath of dream-life into the nostrils of dead statues, and in through the windows of lifeless buildings, and through all the bright air of blazing modernness in which we, the living ones, have our being. There is romance—let us not define the pretty word—in the dim, soft dawn, when the mists of the river are surprised in their loves with the sleeping trees; in the fresh morning, when the quiet streets ring with the double trill of the song-birds as each in turn and all together, and none last, they lift up their little voices in a long, caroling cheer to the rising sun; in the broad day, wherein men work and struggle, and quarrel and make peace, and speak words which all the nation hears and judges, condemns, approves, or laughs at, as all humanity laughs or looks grave over its own centralized self; in the red evening light, when the perspective of the avenues grows long and fairy-like, and the brilliant equipages roll swiftly and smoothly through the sunset air that reddens the horses' bay coats, and enriches collar and harness with its fiery gold. And most of all at night, when the trees are all breathing again, and the broad streets are quiet; when the great army of work-

ers is gone to its boarding-house quarters, and the little regiment of do-nothings is broken up into squads to hunt the Beast of Boredom with laughter and sometimes with tears; when the stars play hide-and-seek with the moon round the corners of the silent Capitol, and kiss the great Liberty on either cheek, high in the cool, dark blue air; when the moonbeams run quivering through the rustling leaves, and weave white lace across the dark pavement; when the soft lights stream from the windows of the White House, across the broad lawn, and through the trees, to the high railings of the avenue; when the darky boy and girl, hand in hand, pour out their little tale of woe to the passing dandy, trotting beside him as he strolls along in white tie and black cloak, on his way from a dinner to a reception; when the herdic cab backs up under the trees against the curbstone, swinging wide its self-opening doors, and throwing its bright flash out upon a vision of fair hair, and satin, and white lace, and slim silk-clad ankles, just as the impassive English footman opens the door of the house, and lets out a blaze



AN OFFICE-SEEKER.





THE DOME OF THE CAPITOL.

of other light; when, now and then, the over-smooth, honey-sweet voices of colored men echo very softly from back streets to the resonant little drumming and twanging of a banjo. There is assuredly something in it all that suggests romance, something that delicately stirs the heart with a premonition, as it were, of some other heart waiting for it somewhere, in shadow, or moonlight, or noontday sunshine.

It has been, and is still, the fashion to laugh at our capital city, and to speak with a very libelous contempt of what is done there. Many fashions are set by the Europeanized Ameri-

can, and they are not, on the whole, good ones. There are, indeed, two distinct classes of transatlantic Americans—those who live most of their lives abroad because they are obliged to do so by circumstances not to be controlled, and those who spend half the year on the other side as a matter of taste. The former are often more patriotic than those who stay at home. For them there is a glamour over everything; they feel little patriotic thrills at the sight of the Stars and Stripes, and the bald eagle's screaming is as melodious to them as the song of the nightingale. But the other is an unpleasant person who affects strange



A. Castaigne

UNDER THE DOME.





THE WAR, NAVY, AND STATE DEPARTMENTS.

accents and quaint gestures, wears curiously elaborate garments of great price, and calls America a "beast of a hole," which is a coarse expression not susceptible of grammatical explanation. One chief object of this man's calumnies is Washington, under which general term he abuses the city, its inhabitants, and those whose thankless task it is to make laws for the general cases in which our federation must needs figure as one State. The American Parisian and the British New Yorker consider Washington a failure, its official society a band of ineffable cads, and the Government of the United States a fraud.

Even in New York it is amazing to see what

prejudice there is against Washington, and what indifference even where there is no prejudice. And yet, even as a mere spectacle, Washington is not by any means to be despised, while, as a study, it is one of the most interesting cities in the whole world.

There is this fundamental difference between the general aspects of Washington and New York. The latter, cramped for space on its narrow island, has increased by building higher. The former, unhampered by limits of nature, has spread over an enormous area of naturally fertile land. There is, indeed, an even greater regularity of plan in Washington than in New York, to which the ruler and square were applied, so to



say, after the city had grown out of infancy. But in the capital this regularity is not forced upon the eye by the unbroken succession of blocks succeeding blocks, for miles, in a wearisome similarity of architecture, and with such a monotonous absence of landmarks in some regions as to puzzle a Western pathfinder. On the contrary, the lines are everywhere broken by the variety of detachment where dwellings stand alone, and feathered all along their length with graceful trees. In New York, business is the main fact; idleness and its dwellings are incidents. In Washington it is the other way; for business is only incidental, government is

more sky, since the streets are wider, and the houses lower. And winter in Washington brings the white surprise of snow rather than the discomfort of sullen and dirty slush, and a sudden thaw and a quick-succeeding frost will cast the trees in brilliant ice, as it were, making of each twig a miracle in crystal, and of every gnarl and knob and withered berry a crown diamond set in virgin silver.

Especially after a sudden snowfall there is more joy than over many snow-storms in the North, coming as it does with the certainty that it cannot lie long on the ground, nor pile itself into hundredfold wet blankets on the roofs,



IN DIPLOMATIC SOCIETY.

the main occupation, leisure is the common right of many, and idleness is the privilege of not a few. More than New York, too, Washington is subject in its aspect to the influence of the seasons, in proportion as there is more of nature to be seen everywhere, more grass to turn brown and green again, more trees to lose their leaves in winter and to bud in spring,

nor heap itself in ten-foot drifts where it ought not. Snow in the North is a grim certainty; in Washington it is but the illuminating flash of a passing holiday, to be enjoyed quickly while it lasts, to disappear more quickly still in the sunshine that makes it beautiful. It is marvelous to see how the dashing sleighs turn out upon "the avenue,"—which is, of course





THE NEW BUILDING FOR THE CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY.

Pennsylvania Avenue,—to hear all at once the unceasing tinkle of the bells instead of the dull roll of carriage-wheels, to feel how in an instant the pace of the whole city quickens with noiseless speed upon the rare white carpet, to listen to new tones of voices echoing across the snow—to have all the magic of winter's beauty, without its grimness, for one short, joyous day.

It is natural that in its social aspect Washington should differ from most other cities. It is strangely cosmopolitan. There is in the ranks of society the greatest variety of race with the greatest variety of interest, or, at least, in the object of interest. There is, in things social, the greatest diversity together with a singular uniformity of principle. There is a notable simplicity existing side by side with something very like real magnificence of display, and a remarkable absence of that socially servile opinion which accepts display alone as an outward and visible sign of inward and social grace. The ubiquitous diplomat leavens

the whole, and lends it a slightly European savor. The curious English traveler comes, sees, and takes away an impression, but leaves none; the German of solid acquirements puts on an air of levity, the better to observe, to note, and mentally to digest; the Frenchman, generally new at wandering, sparkles in conversation, whether he be understood or not, and generalizes within himself as all Frenchmen do. For the French mind differentiates keenly, but integrates by one rule only, which is the Parisian.

You may see almost every type at a big afternoon tea in Washington, especially at one of those given, according to a pretty custom, to "bring out"—to present to society—a daughter of the house. There she stands, the young girl whose social eyes are to be opened, a type of the American maiden of to-day, unlike any other in the world. For we are the only one among the great nations of whom it must be said that we are a distinct result rather



than a distinct race, and this result is a type indefinitely varied by divers race characteristics. The "result" stands by her mother's side near the door of the first drawing-room through which guests pass—tall, slender, probably clad in white, probably having rather dark hair and a complexion to which the "national irritable heart," as the doctors call it, gives a brilliancy rarely seen abroad. Almost beyond a doubt, too, she has eyes which would seem unusual in Europe, with strong, fringing lashes, but rather too boldly bright, and restlessly, though innocently, curious. The mouth is very mobile; the hands are rarely quiet for a moment—slender hands, very narrow at the base, very closely webbed between the thumb and forefinger, very exquisitely kept under her long gloves; hands with which none but those of Frenchwomen can compare for the wise pains bestowed upon them.

By her side, upon a broad table, are endless flowers, chiefly if not altogether white. In her left hand are roses, white too, and as fresh as herself. Her right she gives frankly to stranger and friend alike, as her mother, splendid with historic jewels and maternal pride, introduces them all to her, one after the other. A word or two, not more, to each, and each passes on. It is a pretty custom, unlike any other in the world. They all pass on and join the international throng in the other rooms—senators, officials, diplomats; grave men who seize the quick opportunity to exchange words of moment, and other grave men, gray-haired, but not old in heart, who whisper the pleasant nothings they learned long ago to young ears that have perhaps not heard them yet. The air smells of tea and flowers, the rooms are

crowded, the heat is great, the good-will greater still toward the tall young girl by the door, who has shaken the hand of each, and looked into the face of each, wondering, perhaps, whether any face of them all is ever to be the one face of all the world for her.

We Americans are a wonderfully sentimental people, and the lily-white maiden who makes

her entrance into society on this day is as eager for sentiment as all the rest of us. Now sentiment is good when it is found, and is real, and there is little enough to care for in life without it. Why, then, should the pursuit of it be ridiculous? It is, and it is strange that it should be. Perhaps the heart is ashamed when the head knows what it is doing.

The Capitol is the heart of Washington, not topographically, but figuratively. As a matter of fact, the city has grown in a direction precisely opposite to that in which its founders expected growth, and what is really the front of the building faces away from the quarter of principal development. Fortunately, this has been an advantage, in so far as it presents the Capitol to the city in its most imposing aspect, from the side on which the land falls away, and on which broad flights of marble steps give access to the building. And from this side it cannot be denied that the great front of well-



IN ALL HIS GLORY.

proportioned colonnades, surmounted by the airy dome, which itself is crowned by Crawford's statue of Liberty, is both imposing and beautiful. To the architect, the fact that the dome is of iron is a flaw in the nobility of the whole, but no ordinary eye can detect the change of material at that elevation. There are hours of the day, especially toward evening in

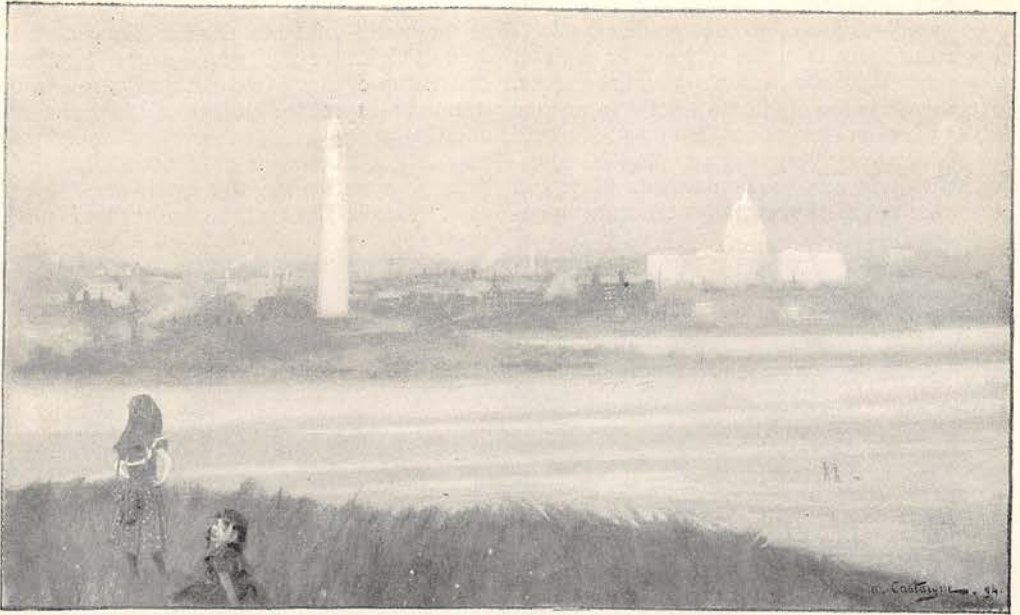




A. Castaigne

FIVE O'CLOCK TEA.





A QUIET EVENING — FROM THE VIRGINIA SHORES.

spring, when there is a wonderful fascination in the distant view, as one approaches the Capitol along Pennsylvania Avenue. It has a distinctness of proportion with a soft grace of outline, all in many tones of white against the misty evening sky, such as cannot be likened to anything in any other city. It suggests nothing ancient, nothing traditional, nothing old-fashioned, and yet it has nothing distinctly modern about it. Symbolical, it may be, for one may find symbols in all that man makes with a purpose, for all that man can think, and in nature for all that is beyond man's skill and craft. Let it be a symbol, then, and a good one of some good thing. Calm, lovely, high in air, with a beauty of its own, not beyond criticism, assuredly, but perhaps beyond imitation after its manner, crowned by the very handiwork of one of us,—of one whose hands worked lovingly,—let it be a symbol if it may be, not of the strife which has been striven under its shadow, but of that good state to which honest strife may bring us.

A strange life is going on within it, a wonderful, hive-like activity. All day long men and women stream in and out, their footsteps echoing through the stone passages below, their figures lean, fat, long, short, handsome, ugly, crooked, and straight, crowding the ever-ascending and -descending elevators; their voices, high, low, harsh and angry, or soft and persuasive, ringing in the rotunda, and through the corridors, all the way from the Senate to the House of Representatives; their faces as varied as their figures—the smooth wife of a fashionable senator elbowing the ungainly relative of

a “down-East” postmaster out of office; the scraggy, out-at-elbows office-seeker appealing by his very scragginess to the sleek rotundity of double-breasted success, in whom is exhibited all the symmetrical solemnity of the perfect sphere, which on a solid surface may roll but cannot fall. That lean, energetic man in decent black, who walks with quick stride from door to door of the House, sending in his name to one member after another for a brief interview, is “working a ‘committee’” for a private bill, business-like, direct, tactful. That beautifully dressed and compact young fellow with the bright eyes is the correspondent of a great paper, and knows his way even better than the man in black. That gray-headed giant with his noble head was once a fighter, and is a fighter still with words and ideas. That neat, one-armed man is one of a dozen or more doorkeepers, an old soldier, too, and he knows every member in the House by sight, besides a multitude of other personages great and small in the political world. There goes a bevy of smartly dressed girls who ask their way to the ladies' gallery of the Senate, and two old members, conversing in low tones in the deep embrasure of a window, look up at the sound of young laughter, with eyes that are sharp still under the bushy white brows. And past them all, backward and forward, with steps that hurry anxiously or drag despondently, the crowd unceasingly streams on its way, throughout the long hours, as motley a multitude as one may see together in any civilized place. There are idlers and travelers, too, as well as busy men, and here and there a little knot of people stands



"at gaze," while the mulatto guide expatiates upon the beauties of the rotunda, or explains the subjects of the pictures and the frescos. Nobody pays the slightest attention to any one else with whom he or she is not busy. It would need something very surprising indeed to excite the curiosity of such a crowd. Here and there in the halls and corridors the sturdy guar-

arch of all he surveys, whose slightest gesture could stop even a cable-car, and whose lofty stature and speckless clothes call forth the admiration of the colored nursery-maid, and can impose good behavior even upon fair-haired little boys, and make the soggy-faced, blue-eyed "toughs" look a little less as though they



THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT.

dians of the public peace, clad in immaculate uniforms, sit silent and indifferent, ruminating, to judge from the slow and regular action of their jaws, upon the destinies of the nation, though caring for none of these things. Fine specimens most of them are, too—broad-shouldered, healthy skinned, fair, quiet men, whose solid nerves nothing could surprise, whose firm but gentle mastication no political convulsion could retard. They are of a very different type from the burly New York policeman. One can hardly believe that they are really colleagues of the colored functionary, in similar blue cloth and brass buttons, who stands in all his glory

had bought the pavement for their own convenience and would refuse to let it even at a high price.

A famous living sculptor of ours has given us his opinion in condemnation of the Washington monument. It is sometimes called the Obelisk, for the comparatively simple reason that it is one, just as "they called him Peter, people said, because it was his name." With all due respect to the sculptor's right of judgment, which is unquestioned, we may differ with him, and yet not brand ourselves barbarians. To the present writer it seems not too much to say that in certain lights the Obelisk is the most im-



posing simple object of great dimensions in the whole world. Doubtless when seen, as it always can be seen by day, from a distance of two or three miles and from different parts of the city, cut off by a line of modern roofs across a pale sky, there is nothing remarkable or beautiful about it. It is then but the top of an obelisk, and nothing more; a slender straight line of stone visible in an uninteresting atmosphere. Even then it can hardly be said to be offensive, for it is too simple to offend.

Go to it at evening, when the sunset lights have faded and the full moon is rising. It is impossible not to see its beauty then. For some reason not immediately apparent the white light is not reflected from the lower half of it when the moon is not far above the horizon. The lines are all there, but the shaft is only a soft shadow below, gradually growing clearer as it rises, and ending in a blaze of silver against the dark sky. The enormous proportions are touched then with a profound mystery; the solidity of the symbol disappears, the greatness of the thought remains, the unending vastness of the idea is overwhelming. Block upon block, line by line, it was built up with granite from many States, a union of many into one simple whole, a true symbol of what we Americans are trying to make of ourselves, of our country, and of our beliefs. There is the solid foundation, proved and tried, which we know of and trust in. There is the dark and shadowy present, through which the grand straight lines are felt rather than seen. And there, high in the still air, points the gleaming future, perfect at all points, bright at all points, lofty as all but



A CORNER OF THE AGRICULTURAL GROUNDS.

heaven itself. There is the symbol. We may ask of ourselves whether we are to overtake the shadows and reach the light, we or our children, or our children's children; or whether the half-darkness will creep up with us always, and with them, for ages to come, and even to the end.

The Obelisk is beautiful not only by moonlight, as any one may see who will take the trouble to look at it with eyes human rather than critical—at evening, for instance, from the terrace of the Capitol, when all the world is sinking toward its mighty plunge into darkness through the foam of the cloud-breakers and the purple wash of night's rising tide; or at early morning, when the darkness sinks back, and the first blush of day warms the pinnacle of the lonely shaft—as though it had stabbed night in the sky and drawn the sweet blood of daylight upon its point. Most notably is it beautiful at such times when seen with the whole city from the great military cemetery on the heights of Arlington, than which few points in the world command a more lovely view.

There in the quiet earth the solemn dead lie side by side, the many who fought for us when we were but their children, and who, for ours, will fight their immortal battles again in the clouds like the warriors of old. Many of us have heroes of our own name and race lying there in the broad tree-hemmed meadows, and among the flowers, and in that chosen rank where the great generals lie, as they fought in the forefront of the enemy, facing now not enemies but friends, the deep sweet valley with the quiet river at their feet. And far away, beside the airy dome of the Capitol, the single shaft rises sunward, and tells in shadow-time for us, the living, the hours of the dead men's endless day.



SEEN FROM THE SENATE GALLERY.

*F. Marion Crawford.*





PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE IN MID-WINTER.