

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whittman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Harte  
Andersen London Descartes Cervantes Burton Hesse  
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke  
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Irving  
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# **The Land of Contrasts A Briton's View of His American Kin**

James F. (James Fullarton) Muirhead

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To  
The Land  
That has given me  
What makes Life most worth living



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## Author's Note

My first visit to the United States of America—a short one—was paid in 1888. The observations on which this book is mainly based were, however, made in 1890-93, when I spent nearly three years in the country, engaged in the preparation of "Baedeker's Handbook to the United States." My work led me into almost every State and Territory in the Union, and brought me into direct contact with representatives of practically every class. The book was almost wholly written in what leisure I could find for it in 1895 and 1896. The foot-notes, added on my third visit to the country (1898), while I was seeing the chapters through the press, have at least this significance, that they show how rapidly things change in the Land of Contrasts.

No part of the book has been previously published, except some ten pages or so, which appeared in the *Arena* for July, 1892. Most of the matter in this article has been incorporated in Chapter II. of the present volume.

So far as the book has any general intention, my aim has been, while not ignoring the defects of American [Pg viii] civilisation, to dwell rather on those features in which, as it seems to me, John Bull may learn from Brother Jonathan. I certainly have not had so much trouble in finding these features as seems to have been the case with many other British critics of America. My sojourn in the United States has been full of benefit and stimulus to myself; and I should like to believe that my American readers will see that this book is substantially a tribute of admiration and gratitude.

J.F.M.



# I

## Introductory

It is not everyone's business, nor would it be everyone's pleasure, to visit the United States of America. More, perhaps, than in any other country that I know of will what the traveller finds there depend on what he brings with him. Preconception will easily fatten into a perfect mammoth of realisation; but the open mind will add immeasurably to its garner of interests and experiences. It may be "but a colourless crowd of barren life to the dilettante—a poisonous field of clover to the cynic" (Martin Morris); but he to whom man is more than art will easily find his account in a visit to the American Republic. The man whose bent of mind is distinctly conservative, to whom innovation always suggests a presumption of deterioration, will probably be much more irritated than interested by a peregrination of the Union. The Englishman who is wedded to his own ideas, and whose conception of comfort and pleasure is bounded by the way they do things at home, may be goaded almost to madness by the gnat-stings of American readjustments—and all the more because he cannot adopt the explanation that they are the natural outcome of an alien blood and a foreign tongue. If he expects the same servility from his "inferiors" that he has been accustomed to at home, his relations with them will be a series of electric shocks; nay, his very expectation of it will exasperate the American and make him show his very worst side. [Pg 2] The stately English dame must let her amusement outweigh her resentment if she is addressed as "grandma" by some genial railway conductor of the West; she may feel assured that no impertinence is intended.

The lover of scenery who expects to see a Jungfrau float into his ken before he has lost sight of a Mte. Rosa; the architect who expects to find the railway time-table punctuated at hourly intervals by a venerable monument of his art; the connoisseur who hopes to visit a Pitti Palace or a Dresden Picture Gallery in every large city; the student who counts on finding almost every foot of ground soaked with historic gore and every building hallowed by immemorial

association; the sociologist who looks for different customs, costumes, and language at every stage of his journey;—each and all of these will do well to refrain his foot from the soil of the United States. On the other hand, the man who is interested in the workings of civilisation under totally new conditions; who can make allowances, and quickly and easily readjust his mental attitude; who has learned to let the new comforts of a new country make up, temporarily at least, for the loss of the old; who finds nothing alien to him that is human, and has a genuine love for mankind; who can appreciate the growth of general comfort at the expense of caste; who delights in promising experiments in politics, sociology, and education; who is not thrown off his balance by the shifting of the centre of gravity of honour and distinction; who, in a word, is not congealed by conventionality, but is ready to accept novelties on their merits,—he, unless I am very grievously mistaken, will find compensations in the United States that will go far to make up for Swiss Alp and [Pg 3] Italian lake, for Gothic cathedral and Palladian palace, for historic charters and time-honoured tombs, for paintings by Raphael and statues by Phidias.

Perhaps, in the last analysis, our appreciation of America will depend on whether we are optimistic or pessimistic in regard to the great social problem which is formed of so many smaller problems. If we think that the best we can do is to preserve what we have, America will be but a series of disappointments. If, however, we believe that man's sympathies for others will grow deeper, that his ingenuity will ultimately be equal to at least a partial solution of the social question, we shall watch the seething of the American crucible with intensest interest. The solution of the social problem, speaking broadly, must imply that each man must in some direction, simple or complex, work for his own livelihood. Equality will always be a word for fools and doctrinaires to conjure with, but those who believe in man's sympathy for man must have faith that some day relative human justice will be done, which will be as far beyond the justice of to-day as light is from dark. [1] And it would be hard to say where we are to look for this consummation if not in the United States of America, which "has been the home of the poor and the eccentric from all parts of the world, and has carried their poverty and passions on its stalwart young shoulders." We may

visit the United States, like M. Bourget, *pour reprendre un peu de foi dans le lendemain de civilisation*.

The paragraph on a previous page is not meant to imply that the United States are destitute of scenic, artistic, picturesque, and historic interest. The worst [Pg 4] that can be said of American scenery is that its best points are separated by long intervals; the best can hardly be put too strongly. Places like the Yosemite Valley (of which Mr. Emerson said that it was the only scenery he ever saw where "the reality came up to the brag"), the Yellowstone Park, Niagara, and the stupendous Cañon of the Colorado River amply make good their worldwide reputation; but there are innumerable other places less known in Europe, such as the primeval woods and countless lakes of the Adirondacks, the softer beauties of the Berkshire Hills, the Hudson (that grander American Rhine), the Swiss-like White Mountains, the Catskills, the mystic Ocklawaha of Florida, and the Black Mountains of Carolina that would amply repay the easy trouble of an Atlantic passage under modern conditions. The historic student, too, will find much that is worthy of his attention, especially in the older Eastern States; and will, perhaps, be surprised to realise how relative a term antiquity is. In a short time he will find himself looking at an American building of the seventeenth century with as much reverence as if it had been a contemporary of the Plantagenets; and, indeed, if antiquity is to be determined by change and development rather than by mere flight of time, the two centuries of New York will hold their own with a cycle of Cathay. It is, as Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes remarked to the present writer, like the different thermometrical scales; it does not take very long to realise that twenty-five degrees of Réaumur mean as great a heat as ninety degrees of Fahrenheit. Such a city as Boston amply justifies its inclusion in a "Historic Towns" series, along with London and Oxford; and it is by no means [Pg 5] a singular instance. Even the lover of art will not find America an absolute Sahara. To say nothing of the many masterpieces of European painters that have found a resting-place in America, where there is at least one public picture gallery and several private ones of the first class, the best efforts of American painters, and perhaps still more those of American sculptors, are full of suggestion and charm; while I cannot believe that the student of modern architecture will anywhere find a more inter-

esting field than among the enterprising and original works of the American school of architecture.

This book will be grievously misunderstood if it is supposed to be in any way an attempt to cover, even sketchily, the whole ground of American civilisation, or to give anything like a coherent appreciation of it. In the main it is merely a record of personal impressions, a series of notes upon matters which happened to come under my personal observation and to excite my personal interest. Not only the conditions under which I visited the country, but also my own disqualifications of taste and knowledge, have prevented me from more than touching on countless topics, such as the phenomena of politics, religion, commerce, and industry, which would naturally find a place in any complete account of America. I have also tried to avoid, so far as possible, describing well-known scenery, or in other ways going over the tracks of my predecessors. The phenomena of the United States are so momentous in themselves that the observation of them from any new standpoint cannot be wholly destitute of value; while they change so rapidly that he would be unobservant indeed who could not find something new to chronicle. [Pg 6]

It is important, also, to remember that the generalisations of this book apply in very few cases to the whole extent of the United States. I shall be quite contented if any one section of the country thinks that I cannot mean *it* in such-and-such an assertion, provided it allows that the cap fits some other portion of the great community. As a rule, however, it may be assumed that unqualified references to American civilisation relate to it as crystallised in such older communities as New York or Philadelphia, not to the fermenting process of life-in-the-making on the frontier.

In the comparisons between Great Britain and the United States I have tried to oppose only those classes which substantially correspond to each other. Thus, in contrasting the Lowell manufacturer, the Hampshire squire, the Virginian planter, and the Manchester man, it must not be forgotten that the first and the last have many points of difference from the second and third which are not due to their geographical position. Many of the instances on which my remarks are based may undoubtedly be called *extreme*; but even extreme cases are suggestive, if not exactly typical. There is a breed

of poultry in Japan, in which, by careful cultivation, the tail-feathers of the cock sometimes reach a length of ten or even fifteen feet. This is not precisely typical of the gallinaceous species; but it is none the less a phenomenon which might be mentioned in a comparison with the apteryx.

Finally, I ought perhaps to say, with Mr. E.A. Freeman, that I sometimes find it almost impossible to believe that the whole nation can be so good as the people who have been so good to me.

### **FOOTNOTES:**

[1] I have some suspicion that this ought to be in quotation marks, but cannot now trace the passage.

[Pg 7]



## II

### The Land of Contrasts

When I first thought of writing about the United States at all, I soon came to the conclusion that no title could better than the above express the general impression left on my mind by my experiences in the Great Republic. It may well be that a long list of inconsistencies might be made out for any country, just as for any individual; but so far as my knowledge goes the United States stands out as preëminently the "Land of Contrasts"—the land of stark, staring, and stimulating inconsistency; at once the home of enlightenment and the happy hunting ground of the charlatan and the quack; a land in which nothing happens but the unexpected; the home of Hyperion, but no less the haunt of the satyr; always the land of promise, but not invariably the land of performance; a land which may be bounded by the aurora borealis, but which has also undeniable acquaintance with the flames of the bottomless pit; a land which is laved at once by the rivers of Paradise and the leaden waters of Acheron.

If I proceed to enumerate a few of the actual contrasts that struck me, in matters both weighty and trivial, it is not merely as an exercise in antithesis, but because I hope it will show how easy it would be to pass an entirely and even ridiculously untrue judgment upon the United [Pg 8] States by having an eye only for one series of the startling opposites. It should show in a very concrete way one of the most fertile sources of those unfair international judgments which led the French Academician Joüy to the statement: "Plus on réfléchit et plus on observe, plus on se convainc de la fausseté de la plupart de ces jugements portés sur un nation entière par quelques écrivains et adoptés sans examen par les autres." The Americans themselves can hardly take umbrage at the label, if Mr. Howells truly represents them when he makes one of the characters in "A Traveller from Altruria" assert that they pride themselves even on the size of their inconsistencies. The extraordinary clashes that occur in the United States are doubtless largely due to the extraordinary mixture of youth and age in the character of the country. If ever an old head

was set upon young shoulders, it was in this case of the United States—this "Strange New World, that yit was never young." While it is easy, in a study of the United States, to see the essential truth of the analogy between the youth of an individual and the youth of a State, we must also remember that America was in many respects born full-grown, like Athena from the brain of Zeus, and coördinates in the most extraordinary way the shrewdness of the sage with the naïveté of the child. Those who criticise the United States because, with the experience of all the ages behind her, she is in some points vastly defective as compared with the nations of Europe are as much mistaken as those who look to her for the fresh ingenuousness of youth unmarred by any trace of age's weakness. It is simply inevitable that she should share the vices as well as the [Pg 9] virtues of both. Mr. Freeman has well pointed out how natural it is that a colony should rush ahead of the mother country in some things and lag behind it in others; and that just as you have to go to French Canada if you want to see Old France, so, for many things, if you wish to see Old England you must go to New England.

Thus America may easily be abreast or ahead of us in such matters as the latest applications of electricity, while retaining in its legal uses certain cumbersome devices that we have long since discarded. Americans still have "Courts of Oyer and Terminer" and still insist on the unanimity of the jury, though their judges wear no robes and their counsel apply to the cuspidor as often as to the code. So, too, the extension of municipal powers accomplished in Great Britain still seems a formidable innovation in the United States.

The general feeling of power and scope is probably another fruitful source of the inconsistencies of American life. Emerson has well said that consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds; and no doubt the largeness, the illimitable outlook, of the national mind of the United States makes it disregard surface discrepancies that would grate horribly on a more conventional community. The confident belief that all will come out right in the end, and that harmony can be attained when time is taken to consider it, carries one triumphantly over the roughest places of inconsistency. It is easy to drink our champagne from tin cans, when we know that it is merely a sense of hurry that prevents us fetching the chased silver goblets waiting for our use.

This, I fancy, is the explanation of one series of contrasts which strikes an Englishman at once. America [Pg 10] claims to be the land of liberty *par excellence*, and in a wholesale way this may be true in spite of the gap between the noble sentiments of the Declaration of Independence and the actual treatment of the negro and the Chinaman. But in what may be called the retail traffic of life the American puts up with innumerable restrictions of his personal liberty. Max O'Rell has expatiated with scarcely an exaggeration on the wondrous sight of a powerful millionaire standing meekly at the door of a hotel dining-room until the consequential head-waiter (very possibly a coloured gentleman) condescends to point out to him the seat he may occupy. So, too, such petty officials as policemen and railway conductors are generally treated rather as the masters than as the servants of the public. The ordinary American citizen accepts a long delay on the railway or an interminable "wait" at the theatre as a direct visitation of Providence, against which it would be useless folly to direct cat-calls, grumbles, or letters to the *Times*. Americans invented the slang word "kicker," but so far as I could see their vocabulary is here miles ahead of their practice; they dream noble deeds, but do not do them; Englishmen "kick" much better, without having a name for it. The right of the individual to do as he will is respected to such an extent that an entire company will put up with inconvenience rather than infringe it. A coal-carter will calmly keep a tramway-car waiting several minutes until he finishes his unloading. The conduct of the train-boy, as described in Chapter XII., would infallibly lead to assault and battery in England, but hardly elicits an objurgation in America, where the right of one sinner to bang a door outweighs the desire [Pg 11] of twenty just persons for a quiet nap. On the other hand, the old Puritan spirit of interference with individual liberty sometimes crops out in America in a way that would be impossible in this country. An inscription in one of the large mills at Lawrence, Mass., informs the employees (or did so some years ago) that "regular attendance at some place of worship and a proper observance of the Sabbath will be expected of every person employed." So, too, the young women of certain districts impose on their admirers such restrictions in the use of liquor and tobacco that any less patient animal than the native American would infallibly kick over the traces.

In spite of their acknowledged nervous energy and excitability, Americans often show a good deal of a quality that rivals the phlegm of the Dutch. Their above-mentioned patience during railway or other delays is an instance of this. So, in the incident related in Chapter XII. the passengers in the inside coach retained their seats throughout the whole experiment. Their resemblance in such cases as this to placid domestic kine is enhanced — out West — by the inevitable champing of tobacco or chewing-gum, than which nothing I know of so robs the human countenance of the divine spark of intelligence. Boston men of business, after being whisked by the electric car from their suburban residences to the city at the rate of twelve miles an hour, sit stoically still while the congested traffic makes the car take twenty minutes to pass the most crowded section of Washington street, — a walk of barely five minutes. [2]

[Pg 12] Even in the matter of what Mr. Ambassador Bayard has styled "that form of Socialism, Protection," it seems to me that we can find traces of this contradictory tendency. Americans consider their country as emphatically the land of protection, and attribute most of their prosperity to their inhospitable customs barriers. This may be so; but where else in the world will you find such a volume and expanse of free trade as in these same United States? We find here a huge section of the world's surface, 3,000 miles long and 1,500 miles wide, occupied by about fifty practically independent States, containing seventy millions of inhabitants, producing a very large proportion of all the necessities and many of the luxuries of life, and all enjoying the freest of free trade with each other. Few of these States are as small as Great Britain, and many of them are immensely larger. Collectively they contain nearly half the railway mileage of the globe, besides an incomparable series of inland waterways. Over all these is continually passing an immense amount of goods. The *San Francisco News Letter*, a well-known weekly journal, points out that of the 1,400,000,000 tons of goods carried for 100 miles or upwards on the railways of the world in 1895, no less than 800,000,000 were carried in the United States. Even if we add the 140,000,000 carried by sea-going ships, there remains a balance of 60,000,000 tons in favor of the United States as against the rest of the world. It is, perhaps, impossible to ascertain whether or not the actual value of the goods carried would be in the same proportion;