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Thomas William Hodgson Crosland

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THE ABOUNDING AMERICAN

BY

T. W. H. CROSLAND

Author of

“Lovely Woman” and “The Unspeakable Scot”

ONE SHILLING NET

THE ABOUNDING AMERICAN

BY

T. W. H. CROSLAND

Author of

"Lovely Woman" and "The Unspeakable Scot"

London :

A. F. THOMPSON & CO.

92 Fleet Street, E.C.

1907

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Figure 1: Cover image

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Figure 2: (decorative flower image)

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[7]

CHAPTER I The Proposition

“And what, prithee, hath overtaken Guy?”

“Guy—why Guy diced and drabbed and ruffled away his inheritance, and to save his neck took shipping for the tobacco plantations where, they say, he married a daughter of Lo, the poor Indian, and none hath since heard of him.”

This is the kind of talk that one could hear in the clubs of London a matter of, say, two hundred and fifty years ago. In plain terms, Guy, poor devil, being a wastrel,—and a broken wastrel at that—had betaken himself to America, there probably to found one of the “fine old Virginia families” of which American writers, and particularly American fictional writers, are so prone to babble.

America, of course, was really started not by the Indians or Columbus, but by the Pilgrim Fathers, assisted and backed up by several cargoes of blue-brained and cleverblooded spirits from the British Isles, whose minds were full of theology and whose souls were full of tea. I shall be told that it is unkind of me to make such remarks.

But, quite apart from all questions of [8] kindness, it is desirable that you know something of the antecedents of a man before you set about a proper estimate of him. If you wish to understand him thoroughly, you must never let sleeping dogs lie nor allow bygones to be bygones. It is notorious that the average frantic Fourth of July American is an adept at showing the best side of himself and his institutions to an admiring world. If you are to believe him the first American was Christopher Columbus, whose name in this connection I had hoped not to mention. But Don Columbus made the mistake of “discovering America.” For the accomplishment of this feat the Americans bestow upon his memory unqualified pæans. Really, of course, the fact that Columbus steered his leaky lugger desperately for Coney Island and Long Branch, when he had the rest of the world—including China and Gozo—before him where to choose, proves that so far from being a hero and a man of genius, he was a dull and evilly disposed person.

According to the bumptious, khaki-tinted gentleman from Indiana too, the Pilgrim Fathers already referred to were high-minded, blameless, and entirely disinterested saints, incapable of hurting a fly or causing butter to melt north of the colour line. They “inaugurated [9] America for conscience sake, sir, and you can bet your pile that I am proud to have them for ancestors.” In which connection I shall pass no rude observation, contenting myself rather with the hint that the reader who wishes to acquaint himself with the true inwardness of the Pilgrim Fathers and their doings in America should look up some of the serious literature on the subject. The Americans, be it noted, read that literature very privately, and neither in the basket nor in the store.

I might proceed indefinitely on these lines of disillusion for Master Phineas B.

Flubdub; but as it is not my particular business to amuse him inordinately, I shall desist.

In Europe, or at any rate in England, there is a disposition on the part of the sandblind to look upon the United States and the people who dwell in them with an eye of amused wonderment, as well as admiration. For reasons that are not difficult to appreciate America has never been taken quite seriously by the superior European. In spite of all her boasting and shouting, in spite of her e-normous population and her equally e-normous wealth, in spite of the fact that there is a U.S. Army and a U.S. Navy that can lick creation, and that the U.S. also boasts of a reeking,[10] shrieking press, together with the most gaudy and scintillating “Courts of Justice” that ever delighted civilisation, no person in Europe believes in the back of his mind that the land of hustle and bluff is a nation of any weight where nations count, or that she is capable of exercising the smallest direct or indirect influence upon the manners, customs, tendencies, or destiny of haughty feudal Europe.

The Americans are hot stuff. They go in for cut-throat finance and lime-light lynchings, their swindles are beautiful, their fortunes colossal, and their corruption is picturesque. They have a wonderful country. It is theirs and not ours, and they are welcome to do as they like in it. They can never hurt us. Knowing this, the Englishman sleeps snugly of nights, and when he meets a “Yank” in London or on the Riviera or in Paris, he smiles to himself, professes to be tickled, tolerates him if there be occasion for it, grapples him to his bosom with hooks of steel if there is money in it, and parts from him pretty much in the mood of a man who has been inspecting a new motor car.

And, truth to tell, in the guileless, sight-seeing, rush-about American whom the Englishman encounters on his own midden, there does not appear to be anything[11] which is either very outrageous or very formidable. All you see of him is a somewhat undersized, loosely built human biped, with a fat jowl, straight hair, a nobby suit, a little round white or brown felt hat—and a guide-book. Of course, there is also the smart swagger American, accompanied by a feminine entourage of peaches and dreams. But usually your man from Yankeeland has with him a plain, up-and-down, sad sort of woman who might have stepped out of Noah’s ark—and that is the end of it. When he engages you in conversation, which he commonly insists upon doing, he blows foolishly about his own Country, admits that yours “hez the bulge in antiques,” says that he is glad that he came over, and sticking out his finger in the direction of the woman, remarks: “This is Mrs. Sarah B. Gazabo, my wife.” The real “insides” of the man never strike you, partly because you are busy loathing his accent and admiring his ginger, and partly because he has left his vital concerns, his private essence and sheer Americanisms “way back to hum.” All Americans imported for us by Thos. Cook & Son and his imitators are of this order. For them England is a place in which to tread softly and speak low, or at any rate as low as possible. They visit us in the same spirit that a prize-fighter[12] might visit a cemetery, and though the casual observer would scarcely suspect it, their intention is to

be subdued, sober, decorous, and civil.

Eight times out of nine the American is a fine specimen of a manly man, but it is the ninth that is such a wonder. We, the obtuse and effete people of Great Britain, now and again wake up suddenly to the circumstance that we have been the victims of an American invasion. Such a ghastly conviction may at any moment overtake the best of us, for no class of society knows whose turn is likely to be next. There was an American invasion of the turf a year or two back, and English sport is sore and poor about it to this day. There have been sundry social invasions which those most directly concerned find it difficult to forget, and at the present moment we are in the thick of a theatrical invasion which is not doing us an appreciable amount of good. The fact of these invasions and of their always unpleasant consequences so far as the invaded are involved is, in my judgment, a fact of the most serious import to Englishmen.

I shall for a moment drop the American as he seems to be, and regard him as he actually is. What can one record of him that is to his credit? Imprimis: He[13] has devoted three hundred years more or less to the frantic and bloodthirsty pursuit of the Almighty Dollar. Item: During those three hundred years more or less he has done absolutely nothing but pursue dollars. Item: He is still pursuing them. Item: But he makes the best husband in the world, and places woman in the high place to which she is so amply entitled. I will put so much to the credit side, though I make no doubt that there are people in the world who will find themselves unable to commend me for doing it.

Now for the obverse or discredit side. I shall ask you to note:

- (1) That the Americans are the only nation who are ruled by a bureaucracy of millionaires and at the same time croon themselves into a state of vacuous coma to the touching strains of “vox populi, vox dei!”
- (2) That they are the originators of the yelling yellow press, the pioneers of the New Humour and the apostles of the New Pathos.
- (3) That they are the only civilised people who make a point of exporting the finest specimens of their womankind to foreign countries, included[14] in a consignment of cold dollars calculated pro rata with the antiquity, decay and general worthlessness of the name which the former take in exchange.
- (4) That having inherited, borrowed or stolen a beautiful language, they wilfully and of set purpose degrade, distort and misspell it apparently for the sole purpose of saving money in type-setting.
- (5) That out of twenty-six Presidents of the United States, three have met death at the hands of the assassin.[1]
- (6) That having by sheer accident or because of the care and forethought, which Providence has for fools, become possessed of a President who is a man among men and a ninety horse-power statesman with direct drive on all speeds, they allow him to be handicapped by a spectacular gang of undesirable citizens.

(7) That they consider no function, public or private, sacred or profane, to be complete without a newspaper correspondent, a lime-light photographer, and a sky-sign contractor.

[15]

(8) That willingly and of their own unfettered volition they have thrown back to the customs of their aboriginal ancestors in the matter of diet, which diet is rapidly reducing them morally, physically and intellectually to the level of primordial protoplasms.

(9) That they are the only nation who in civilised times rate noise above all else, save dollars, and who in their theatres acclaim as the greatest actor or play the one that in the shortest time makes the greatest uproar for the smallest reason.

(10) That they have resolved their sports and pastimes into business propositions in which the avowed aim and object of every competitor is the utter destruction of his opponent by any means that can be found, devised or conceived.

(11) That they are the only nation who in civilised times have been happy and content to sink their individuality in an all pervading and evil smelling atmosphere of hog and by-products.

The foregoing are merely a few of the main counts in the indictment. Behind every one of them lies a history of gaiety, graft, dyspepsia, bossism, fakery,[16] flamboyancy, hysteria, vociferation brain storms and dementia Americana of the most disconcerting and entertaining kind. The details are on record, and I do not propose to harrow the reader's feelings with examples of them. I shall suggest simply that it is questionable whether any other known race of men, white or black, has managed to pack into three centuries such a volume of unthinkable excitement and picturesque iniquity as can be rightfully and without exaggeration laid at the door of these abounding Americans.

A certain Western city has been described by a friendly visitor as "hell with the lid off." For the greater part of her existence as a nation that description might with justice have been applied to all America, and I am by no means sure that it is not still applicable. It would seem that under the inspiring ægis of the much-vaunted American constitution the whole of the vices of civilised man have become grossly and incredibly intensified. For unscrupulousness, insincerity, cynicism, and the pure worship of mammon the United States stands without rival among the nations to-day.

I believe the man lied who said there is not an institution in the country—political,[17] social, economic or even religious—that is not based on a species of ingrained rottenness and not infested with the worm of corruption and the scrawl of scandal. But there is no national aspiration that does not have at the back of it the root idea that the sole duty of an American man is to get rich and to get rich quick. There are few standards of American life that are not gold standards and few kinds of American effort that are not directed towards the rapid acquisition of other people's money.

It can be proved out of the history books that, broadly speaking, your average American is a nondescript and nefarious hybrid composed of three parts promoter, three parts missionary, three parts slave-driver, and one part Indian. On this unsavoury soil the worst passions of the soaring human animal have grown and run hoggishly to seed. Out of such blood nothing that is honest or of good report could be expected to rise. And when we in England, as has been the tendency in the past few years, condescend to the adoption of American methods and American notions, and applaud rather than rebuke American smartness and American impudence, there can be no question whatever that we are on the [18] toboggan. The gradual Americanisation of this grand old country is not only flattering to American vanity, but gratifying to American greed. As I shall presently show, America has no more love for England than would easily cover a threepenny-bit, and her insatiable cry is for markets, markets, markets—a howl in which she is dulcetly supported by her dear friend Germany. The causes for alarm in so far as they affect the larger concrete issues are as yet comparatively slight. But it behoves every Englishman to meditate on the possibility that Macaulay’s New Zealander may in the long run turn out to be an American.

[1] This is a greater percentage than has obtained in the case of the Czars of Russia, and in America there are no Nihilists or at any rate none who are actively opposed to the American Presidency.

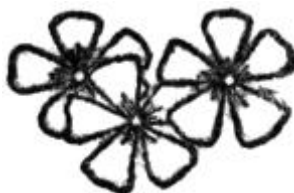


Figure 3: (decorative flower image)

[19]

CHAPTER II Millionaires

The population of the United States, according to the last census returns, is about a hundred millions. Names in American directories invariably begin with Aarons and end with Zaccharia, and millionaires are marked with a star—thus *. In a town, or—as the puffed up merchant in stars and stripes would call it a city—of fifty thousand inhabitants you will find that the local directory stars quite twenty-five thousand as millionaires.

It is pretty certain that fully ninety-nine per cent. of these bloated plutocrats do not know where the next dollar is coming from. I have it on the authority of an American that “in introducing a man in high American society the introducer

thinks it proper to say, ‘This is Obadiah S. Bluggs of Squedunk, Wis.—one of the richest men in the city. He’s worth his million dollars—ain’t you, Obadiah? And he’s president of a National Bank and owns a block of buildings on the main street. His wife has the largest diamonds in the northern part of the State, and his daughter, Miss Mamie Bluggs, gets her[20] gowns in Paris, and uses lorgnettes.’ Such words of recommendation, I am told, move Mr. Bluggs to a profound delight. Within five minutes half the men present—this is true even of the most exclusive circles—will cluster around Mr. Bluggs to sell things to him; champagne, a horse, shares in a bogus mining company, or to ask him if Miss Bluggs is engaged, whether she is a blonde or a brunette, and whether he, Bluggs, thinks it is worth the questioner’s while to run up to Squedunk, Wis., take Miss Bluggs out buggy riding and size her up one afternoon.”

It is highly probable that Mr. Millionaire Bluggs possesses no ready cash whatever, though he is prepared to discuss five-million dollar propositions in the loudest tones and in any quantity, and it is probable, too, that Miss Bluggs is neither a blonde nor a brunette that matters, but an ordinary good strong country girl whose principal diet is pumpkin pie and chewing gum, and whose single go-to-party gown was bought in Paris truly but fell to the lot of Miss Mamie Bluggs at third hand and at bed-rock bargain-day price, at the corner store in Squedunk, Wis.

I have no desire to suggest that the millionaires of America as a body are in straitened or difficult circumstances,[21] or that an American here and there has not succeeded in amassing vast sums of money. But I assert flatly that the great majority of them are not within a mile of being anything like so rich as they pretend to be, and that, taking millionaire for millionaire, they are an entirely Brummagem and specious company. They maintain all the appearances of riches, not on solid bullion or property, but on a little paper. They come like water and like wind they go. Since millionaireshood became fashionable, New York State alone must have produced, literally, thousands of them.

Of the real authentic untraversable American millionaire, one is inclined to speak with bated breath and whispered humbleness. There are three men of means in America at the time of writing who will probably be remembered for the wealth they possess as long as this weary world holds together. The virginal chaste names of them, need one say, are John D. Rockefeller, J. Pierpont Morgan, and Andrew Carnegie. No doubt there are others, such as the Vanderbilts and the Goulds, and Mr. Astor and Mr. Harriman, and that great patron of the drama, Mr. John Cory, whose wealth transcends the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind coming in together.[22] But it is on Messrs. Rockefeller, Morgan and Carnegie that the brunt and burden and glitter and glory of real unlimited and omnipotent millionaireshood has fallen. Mr. Rockefeller, indeed, is commonly credited with being the richest and most powerful capitalist in the world. So rich is he, and so enormous are his accumulations of earned and unearned increment, that he is rapidly becoming the overlord of all the other millionaires, who even now are, to a great extent, playing with his money and must, to a corresponding extent,

do his bidding.

Of Mr. Rockefeller the world knows next to nothing, excepting that he is fabulously and pitifully rich, that he has absolutely no hirsute covering for his stupendous brains, that he suffers from indigestion, and that he plays golf and teaches a Sunday school in a Nonconformist place of worship. Every other morning he appears to present to this or that American city a few odd millions “for educational purposes,” the which millions are promptly spurned by the local authority as “tainted money,” but ultimately accepted “in the interests of the industrial class.”

Probably Mr. Rockefeller is the best abused man on this footstool. He has been variously described as a thief,[23] a ghoul, a bloodsucker, a murderer, a miser, a cannibal, a wrecker, a tiger, a devastator, a jackal, and a wolf. All the notice he takes is blandly to play golf and unobtrusively to dodge the lawyers and officers of the law who desire to bring him to book for the alleged malpractices of the Standard Oil Trust. Yet you have to remember that this placid, smiling, hairless old gentleman of sixty-five, “with a glad hand for everyone,” takes out of the United States an income greater than the incomes of all the Royal Families of all Europe, and that, in addition to his controlling interest in the Standard Oil Trust, which last year paid dividends to the tune of fifty million dollars, he owns the entire Electric Light and Gas Plants of New York City, controls the American iron industry, has almost complete control of the railways and copper mines, and of the largest banks in New York and throughout the country. The which sad data go to show that he is at once a wicked man and a foolish, and that the American people are even wickeder and more foolish. You can never bring an American to see that there is no conceivable advantage in possessing too much money; and in spite of his “shattered nerves,” “enfeebled mind,” and “unenviable reputation,”[24] there is not a man in America who would not jump at the chance of standing in the shoes of Jawn D.

As for Mr. Pierpont Morgan, he is chiefly noted as the head and front of a Steel Trust that is making money at the rate of one hundred and forty million dollars per year, and as a gentleman who has a pretty taste in pictures and objects of art. Mr. Morgan is a man with a large and poetic imagination. It was he who conceived the noble idea of Americanising the British Transatlantic carrying trade by buying up the principal fleets engaged in it. In this deal, as in most other American-English deals, the American came forth to shear and got shorn. The woolly, bleating, unsuspecting Britisher sold his vessels at inflated figures, snickered in his sleeve, and built new ones with some of the money. Mr. Morgan is a frequent and welcome visitor to these shores, and the London picture dealers and their touts no doubt do very well out of him. But if you say “Liverpool” to him he goes hot all over.

For a *bonne-bouche* I have kept Mr. Andrew Carnegie, of Skibo Castle and sundry other addresses. Mr. Carnegie has the misfortune to be a Scotch American—surely the least admirable of the less admirable types of humanity. He[25] will live in men’s memories as the sturdy, forthright Scot who managed

one of the most desperate strikes that ever took place in America from the safe vantage ground of his native heath. It must be remembered that in spite of his ridiculous possessions Mr. Carnegie is an avowed democrat, and the author of a book that makes him out to be quite a benevolently minded philosopher. But during all the terrors of the Homestead lock-out, he lay snug at his shooting box of Rannoch, N.B., and refused to say a word that would tend to still the storm, although he knew that blood was being shed at Homestead, and that his own partner, Mr. Frick, had been seriously wounded.

Being a Scotchman it is impossible that Mr. Carnegie should have been a coward. Let me say rather that he was cautious and canny, and indisposed to take unnecessary risks. When the row was more or less over he told a representative of the Associated Press that “the deplorable events at Homestead had burst upon him like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. They had such a depressing effect upon him that he had to lay his book aside and resort to the lochs and moors, fishing from morning to night.” Which, on the face of it, is pawky Scots, and as who should[26] say “the deplorable news of the death of my wife had such a depressing effect upon me that I had to go to a fancy dress ball and dance and dance till cock-crow.”

It will be seen, therefore, that in the main the American millionaires do not shine with any startling or blinding effulgence. With here and there an exception, they are common, vulgar, snobbish, undistinguished men who happen to have come out top-dog in a series of financial bruising matches in which few persons above the quality of a savage would have cared to engage. For the possession and administration of even reasonable wealth their qualification would seem to be of the meagrest. Outside the dull mechanical reduplication of their mammoth fortunes, their stunted intellects permit them only two very doubtful joys, namely, sensational house building and sensational charity. Mr. Morgan may be taken as the type of the house-proud money-snatcher. Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Carnegie are the charity-proud; and they have reaped the reward of the charity-proud—the colleges of the one being a by-word and a mockery in America, just as the “Free Libraries” of the other are a by-word and a nuisance in England.

I do not believe that in their heart of hearts the Americans themselves—that[27] is, the great mass of the people—have any feeling of admiration for the gigantic money-grabbers who rule them. The American has just perception enough to discern that millionaires are not altogether the best possible kind of man. On the other hand, if you take away the country’s millionaires you have robbed her male population of one of its chief objects of envy and its chief subject of blurring conversation.

The shadow of each of the fascinating trinity that I have mentioned is as the shadow of a Colossus, and is so enormous that it is almost impossible to pick up an American newspaper or other publication in which they do not figure and figure prominently. Especially is this the case with respect to Mr. Rockefeller, upon whose doings or misdoings every scribbler in America has some comment

to offer or some theory to base. The other day I came across a book of essays published in Boston, which contained a review of Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace's "Man's Place in the Universe." And right in the middle of it I found this passage: "When a little child looks out on the Earth he at first thinks it infinite. He looks upon it as unorganised and unrelated. Only with increasing age and understanding can he realise that it is finite[28] and organised. So when Rockefeller as a lad went into the oil business it seemed to him that there was infinite scope for the extension of the oil business," and so on and so forth. Clearly it is a mighty business to be Rockefeller!

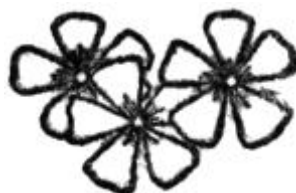


Figure 4: (decorative flower image)

[29]

CHAPTER III Humourists

American humour has come to be a bugbear in England, pretty much like American canned meats.

Twenty years ago, when anybody on this side of the Atlantic wished to be rather crudely and shockingly amused, he sent to the libraries for something American. In that day and generation Mark Twain was at the zenith of his fame and powers, and the names of Artemus Ward and Josh Billings were names to conjure with. *Autres temps autres moeurs*. The popularity of Mark Twain has suffered woeful eclipse, and Artemus Ward and Mr. Billings have gone clean out of vogue, and are remembered only as the originators of a very tiresome kind of humour which depends on phonetic spelling for its more excruciating effects.

The fact is that America and England alike have been dosed to death with the lucubrations of handy scribblers who caught something of Mark Twain's trick and pretended to something of his gift, and the label "American humourist" nowadays repels with an even greater insistence than it formerly attracted.[30] Mr. Twain made desperate and valiant efforts to retrieve his waning popularity with a book called "A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur." If ever there was a piece of writing nicely calculated to tickle and make purr the fat-necked American here was the article. But it fizzled in the pan, failed in short to bring 'em on again. And it now belongs to the category of books that people have

forgotten. So much for Mr. Twain, whom I admire, but of whom, nevertheless, I have taken leave to speak the truth.

Artemus Ward and Josh Billings are dead, and their souls, I trust, are with the saints; so that they will pardon me when I venture on the opinion that the humour they gave us was of the thinnest sort, and, taking into account the furore it created, extraordinarily ephemeral. However any person of sense came to accept the following for humour passes my comprehension:—

Experiences as an Editor

“In the Ortum of 18— my friend, the editor of the Baldissville Bugle, was obliged to leave perfeshernal dooties & go & dig his taters, & he axed me to edit for him doorin his absence. Accordinly I ground up his Shears and commenced. It didn’t take me a grate while to slash out copy enuff from the^[31] xchanges for one issou, and I thawt I’d ride up to the next town on a little Jaunt, to rest my Branes which had bin severely rackt by my mental efforts (This is sorter Ironical) So I went over to the Rale Rood offiss and axed the Sooprintendent for a pars.

‘You a editer,’ he axed, evinebtly on the point of snickerin.

‘Yes, Sir,’ sez I, ‘Don’t I look poor enuff?’

‘Just about,’ sed he, ‘but our Road can’t pars you.’

‘Can’t hay.’

‘No Sir—it can’t.’

‘Becauez,’ sez I, looking him full in the face with a Eagle eye, ‘it goes so darned slow it can’t pars anybody!’ Methink I had him thar. It is the slowest Rale Road in the West. With a mortified air, he tole me to get out of his offiss. I pittid him and went.”

The essence of this excursion into the realms of the Comic Spirit is about as cheap and small a thing in essences as one is likely to come across. Mr. Ward had made or heard somebody make a punning retort of an ultra-feeble quality, and straightway he rushes off to turn it into humourous lucubration. The Americans believed it was “darned funny,” it raised “gales of laughter” among them, and they^[32] shouted about its excellences till the English also began to recognise them. At best Artemus Ward is humour of the “Wot-the-orfis-boy-finks” order, and as such it has always been eschewed by persons blessed with a trifle more than the milk-maid order of intellect.

And lest I be accused of raking up what the Americans themselves choicely term “dead dog” I will ask your attention for the space of a paragraph or two to the brand of the New Humour generally consumed by the inhabitants of the United States in the present era of grace. In this connection it would be easy for one to take a distinctly bitter line; inasmuch as the books of humour as distinguished

from the humourous periodicals, nowadays published in America are not really books of humour at all, but aggregations of acrid and wicked cynicism. The authors of them either do not intend to be funny or have no conception of the meaning of fun. Sourness of spirit, meanness of thought, and savageness of expression are their principal standby. In the humourous periodicals, however, you discover a well-defined intention to be funny—though the cynicism and the vitriol are not of course forgotten.

I believe that these periodicals are[33] nicely adjusted to the public requirements, for the American is not out to produce even comic papers “for his health,” and being nothing if not practical, he gives his public exactly “what they want.” Here are some samples of “exactly what they want,” published so recently as May of the present year. First as to verse:

If

If all the trips I’ve had at sea
Should take effect at once on me,
In one huge, nauseated spell
Gee! wouldn’t I be sick! Well, well!

But possibly the fault is mine. You see I’m English. Perhaps the above example of the New Humour is really a choice sample of the New Pathos.

Again; and this smacks of genius:

Now Birdie Gets His

Of all the things that swim or run,
Man beats in easy pace;
He gives big odds to fin and fur,
And wins in every race.
He hops into his auto-car
And handicaps the horse;
Or takes the greyhound for a try
And licks him even worse.
Perhaps the whale or shark get gay
And want a little go.
Man dives into his submarine
And does them down below.

[34]

And now the chesty feathered chap
Must close his gay bazoo,
For man puts on his flying gear
And wallops birdie, too.
As to prose, here you are:

Want Too Much

“Some time ago two surgeons took a ten-pound tumor out of Dave Saunders, an’ to-day he got a terrible big bill for the operation.”

“Is Dave goin’ to pay it?”

“No; he sez, ‘they’ve got enough out of him already.’ ”

Monkish

Behold the tippler and mark how he tippeth in the streets. Whoso hath discolouration of the optic? Is it not the meddler? Yea. He that is a lunkhead condemneth that which he comprehendeth not.

Be thou not envious of them that have vacation in time of influenza.

I have not gone out of my way to search for these excerpts in the cheaper class of American comic publication. Nor have I been at special pains to search for blemishes through the files of the ten cent “high class journal” which is laid under contribution. In point of fact, I find them in the first number of that journal which came to my hands, namely, its latest issue obtainable[35] in London. How really foolish and vulgar these samples are! The first set of verses is about being sick; the second set is slangy, ill-expressed and contains a childish mistake in grammar; the first piece of prose is objectionable because of its reference to “a ten-pound tumor,” and the second piece is sheer banality, meaning nothing that is worth a smile.

The plain fact is that humour in America is the humour of fatty degeneration of the intellect. America’s funny man was at one time a fairly clean, healthy creature, with a droll outlook on the facts of life. That he was a trifle over-devoted to rye whiskey and effusive practical jokes, and had a tendency to rank irreverence, were among the defects of his qualities. The great American people speedily learnt to vote him slow, and into his shoes they hurried the hard-faced, terrier-toothed, cigarette-smoking, anæmic, fleering decadent. And at long and last they have set up for their humourous god the sheer hoodlum or larrikin, whose sense of what is comic is even more degraded than that of a Chinaman, and whose view of morality is the view of a naughty parrot. There can be

no possible hope for a country whose risible faculties are exercised only at[36] squalid moments or excited only by squalid writing.

No matter how wealthy and hard-headed your man, and no matter how beautiful or accomplished your woman, they are spiritually and morally topsy-turvy if they laugh at the wrong things, and I maintain that the twentieth-century American is consistently laughing at the wrong things, and quite incapable of appreciating the right and proper humour even when you have explained it to him. The Scotch cannot see a joke, the Americans can see only bad jokes.

Nearly all the vilest and most offensive jokes that creep into the third-rate English comics are of American origin. The Weary Willie and Tired Tim business is purely American, so are the Buster Brown and grinning Pup futilities, so are the idiotcies associated with the patronymic Newlywed; so are the disgusting buffooneries about whiskers. The English have learnt that American canned meat is a dubious viand. The sooner they learn that the current American humour is even more noxious the better it will be for the English.

[37]

CHAPTER IV The American Woman

The abounding gentleman from Idaho, or Cincinnati, or Nahant, will tell you that the American woman is a dream of beauty and goodness. If I am to credit the American he would not take eighty thousand dollars for her—no, sir! At least, he doesn't calculate that he would. The American woman, sir, is a peach. The American man believes in her down to the soles of his store boots, and has been educated to regard her as a being of angelic antecedents and destiny. Far be it from a simple scribbler to pluck from her, unless it were by way of a memento, one single angel feather. But at time and time I have seen a considerable deal of her, and I shall venture to put her down here as she seems to me, who am no judge and do not matter anyway.

In the first place I shall assert, though it were at the risk of my life, that the American woman is not always beautiful, and that even the beautiful American woman is not always beautiful. I shall go further and say that for one beautiful woman per thousand head of the population in America we can produce[38] at least three in England and four or five in Ireland. Furthermore, the English or the Irish beauty will last you three times as long as the American variety, and in point of fact it seldom really wanes, whereas, in America, feminine beauty nearly always passes, and passes quickly.

It should be clearly understood—and I say it with my hand on my heart—that this is not the fault of the American woman, with whom I have no quarrel, and upon whom I desire to pass no aspersion. The vulgar commentators on the American woman's physical blemishes and shortcomings have assured us that they are the direct result of her diet, which is said to consist of pea-nuts,

griddle cakes, oysters, pie, turkey, stewed terrapin, tinned mushrooms, fat ham, cheese, chocolates, and ice cream. As is usually the case, however, the vulgar commentators are entirely wrong. The real enemy of the American woman's beauty is the American climate. In the process of time it is climate that makes and mars everything. It is climate that has made the African black and the European white. It is climate that is rapidly transforming the American man into a sort of ignoble red man or Kickapoo Indian, and it is climate that may eventually make the American[39] woman resemble a squaw. The American climate produced the American Indian. The American climate is modifying the physique of the American man and marring and obliterating the great and undeniable beauty of the American woman.

Most male Americans that one meets nowadays have a curiously Indianised cast of figure and countenance. Their blood as we know is hybrid blood, but somehow you never find an American that looks like an Italian or a Spaniard or an Englishman. Always and inevitably there is that about him which reminds you of the Indian. Climate is stronger than blood, or at any rate, the American climate has proved stronger so far. Roughly speaking, it may be said to induce in the human male black straight hair, horse features, a swarthy complexion, inclining to a coppery redness, a thick neck, large hands and flat feet. Its effects upon women I shall refrain from rehearsing, but you will not fail to discern them if you look carefully at the next American woman you happen to come across, that is if she happens to be anything other than one of those splendid and alluring peaches for the production of which in such charming numbers all men should be eternally grateful.

[40]

I have further to reflect that the American woman's beauty and charm are, as a rule, very seriously discounted by the circumstance that she talks through her nose, with that atrocious intonation that is commonly called the American accent. I should defy Venus herself to impress with her beauty anybody above the quality of a dollar hunter or a pork-packer if she could be imagined to speak in the average American way.

Coming now to the question of goodness, which is a delicate question, it seems to me more than probable that the American woman is just as good, and no better, than the rest of womankind. She has been accused of all sorts of frightfulness—mainly on account of her unfortunate accent and her free and easy methods of talk. It is certain that she is capable of the higher forms of devotion and self-sacrifice, even if her views on divorce are entirely airy and liberal.

But I do not believe that her heart is wicked, and as women go in the virtue way, she is unsurpassed. In some other respects I must confess she is to be forgiven, although she is, so far as mind, disposition, and outlook are concerned, a great deal too much like her half-civilised Poppa, and affects a great[41] deal too much of the cheap smartness and abounding audacity that are the stock-in-trade of her still less civilised brother.

If you talk with an American girl for any length of time you will discover that among other defects she is troubled with what one may term a statistical, or, perhaps, more correctly, an arithmetical mind. Her male folk talk dollars and put everything into the terms of dollars. She, cute little bon-bon head, talks figures. She is as full of dates as a Scotchman, and as full of heights, depths, widths, dimensions, aggregations, and general computations as a guide-book. She will pour into your willing ear particulars as to the population of the city in which she was “raised,” and the next city to that, and the next. She is sure to tell you that she came over on such and such a liner, that they had exactly one thousand three hundred and forty-nine persons aboard, including three hundred officers and crew, two hundred and seventeen saloon passengers, and a precise number of second class and steerage people. “That ship has got eight thousand electric lights, five hundred portholes, eight thousand seven hundred and twenty-five tons of coal in her bunkers, when she leaves port; her stores include four thousand knives,[42] forks, and spoons, and ten thousand bottles of old rye whiskey; she is an American boat, and there are twenty performers in the band, and her captain has made the return trip two hundred and seventy-three times,” and so on, until you begin to feel as if you had fallen into a ready reckoner, and to wonder whether in some occult way the young lady receives a commission from the steamship company. Like every other American man, woman or child, Mark Twain included, she is plagued also with the “pass-a-given-point” mania. The Americans are literally eaten up with processions, and the glory of every one of them is determined by the circumstance that it took so many minutes to pass a given point. Of the latest records in this connection, the American girl is sure to prattle to you with amazing zest. In brief, her mind, besides containing much that is really valuable and certainly interesting, is a storehouse of unimportant and altogether gratuitous and unnecessary facts. Summed up, she is pert, provoking, chock full of information, moderately pretty, a good deal of a bore, and—an obvious peach.

Then there is the American married woman, who may or who may not have been married in several different places.[43] If you meet this lady casually in London or on the Continent, it will take you quite a week to discover which of the numerous men by whom she is always squired, happens to be her husband.

Of course, the Americans consider their women the pink of propriety. “The ladies of this State, sir,—and I am proud to say of every other State in the Union—are h—l upon propriety!” I do not doubt it, and I should not say so if I did. The American woman has her good points and her good qualities, otherwise American man, dazzler as he is, could not be so idiotically contented with her, or, as he himself phrases it, “sot on her.” At the same time she has, on the average, omelettes soufflées for brains and tenderloin steaks for hearts—and in spite of her charming curves she exhibits defects of mind, emotions, person, and breeding alike which, in my opinion, condemn her to obscure, or exalt her to take the highest, rank in the table of civilised feminine precedence according to the way you look at her. Always excepting, of course, the obvious peaches.

[44]



Figure 5: (decorative flower image)

[45]

CHAPTER V Literature

Mr. William Dean Howells, who is one of the leaders of that small band of American authors who have a right to literary consideration in England, has lately published an entertaining romance which he calls "Through the Eye of the Needle." With Mr. Howells's story as a story I have nothing to do. In the process of relating it Mr. Howells offers us some candid criticisms of his countrymen which will serve to illustrate the real opinion of the cultivated American as to himself, and all that to him appertains.

"My hero," writes Mr. Howells, "visited this country when it was on the verge of great economic depression extending from 1894 to 1898, but, after the Spanish War, Providence marked the Divine approval of our victory in that contest by renewing in unexampled measure the prosperity of the Republic. With the downfall of the Trusts, and the release of our industrial and commercial forces to unrestricted activity, the condition of every form of Labour has been immeasurably improved, and[46] it is now united with Capital in bonds of the closest affection."

Mr. Howells does not mean this passage satirically. He is really of opinion that Providence marked the Divine approval of America's victory over Spain "by renewing in unexampled measure the prosperity of the Republic." He believes, good easy man, that the Trusts have been humbled, and that "Labour is now united with Capital in bonds of the closest affection." Isn't it delicious? Mr. Howells further informs us that the servant problem in America has been "solved once for all by humanity," and that New York is no longer a city of violent and unthinkable noises.

“The flattened wheel of the trolley,” he says, “banging the track day and night, and tormenting the waking and sleeping ear, was, oddly enough, the inspiration of Reforms which have made our city the quietest in the world. The trolleys now pass unheard; the elevated train glides by overhead with only a modulated murmur, the subway is a retreat fit for meditation and prayer, where the passenger can possess his soul in a peace to be found nowhere else; the automobile whirrs softly through the most crowded thoroughfare, far below the speed limit, with a sigh of[47] gentle satisfaction in its own harmlessness, and, ‘like the sweet South, taking and giving odor.’” It is beside the mark to note that Shakespeare did not write “taking” but “stealing,” and he certainly did not spell odour Mr. Howells’s way.

Our author proceeds to assure us that American men are not now the intellectual inferiors of American women, “or at least not so much the inferiors”; that American men have made “a vast advance in the knowledge and love of literature,” and that “with the multitude of our periodicals, and the swarm of our fictions selling from a hundred thousand to half a million each, even our business men cannot wholly escape culture, and they have become more and more cultured, so that now you frequently hear them asking what this or that book is all about.”

Later he says of the New Yorkers: “They are purely commercial, and the thing that cannot be bought and sold has logically no place in their life. They applaud one another for their charities, which they measure by the amount given, rather than by the love which goes with the giving. The widow’s mite has little credit with them, but the rich man’s million has an acclaim that reverberates through their newspapers[48] long after his gift is made. It is only the poor in America who do charity—by giving help where it is needed; the Americans are mostly too busy, if they are at all prosperous, to give anything but money; and the more money they give, the more charitable they esteem themselves. From time to time some man with twenty or thirty millions gives one of them away, usually to a public institution of some sort, where it will have no effect with the people who are under-paid for their work, or cannot get work; and then his deed is famed throughout the Country as a thing really beyond praise. Yet anyone who thinks about it must know that he never earned the millions he kept, or the millions he gave, but somehow made them from the labours of others; that with all the wealth left him he cannot miss the fortune that he lavishes, any more than if the check (English, cheque) which conveyed it were a withered leaf, and not in any wise so much as an ordinary working man might feel the bestowal of a postage stamp.”

We have here, as I have said, views on America not by a shouting American bluffer or dealer in hyperbole, but by a man of recognised literary parts and judgment. Furthermore, Mr. Howells is plainly not one of those Americans who[49] affect a contempt for their country. When he speaks of American success he attributes it to the favour of Providence; he can perceive a “vast advance” in the American’s knowledge and love of literature, and while he reproves the

American millionaire, he does so more in sorrow than in anger. So that on the whole his testimony cannot fairly be traversed.

And reading between the lines of it, the intelligent observer will not be slow to discern that it amounts practically to a pretty severe indictment of the Americans. A man who has no place in his life for a thing that cannot be bought and sold, is not, after all, the kind of man one can be expected to admire, even though Providence may appear to smile upon him. Neither can I express myself violently taken with the man who is “not so much the intellectual inferior of our women”—and such women—even if you do frequently hear him asking what this or that book is all about. And Mr. Howells’s opinion of millionaires and their charity coincides pretty well with the opinion of Europe.

Mr. Howells, of course, is a well bred, well mannered and entirely discreet author; he sets down naught in malice, his tendency being rather in the direction of a little gentle extenuation. Irony,[50] sarcasm, reproach, and, least of all, flouts and jeers are not among his literary weapons.

It goes without saying, however, that America has been written about in much harsher tones than those of Mr. Howells. From an American book published pseudonymously two or three years back, a book that does not appear to have received anything like its due share of recognition either in England or America, I cull the following picturesque details:—

“From the moment he takes his seat in his office, until he goes home, an American’s business consists of a succession of swindles. He either picks the pocket of each man he interviews, or the men pick his.”

“The American gloats over his ability as a liar. He prides himself upon the fact that his lie is a plausible one and likely to deceive. If it does not come up to the specifications he regards it and himself as failures, and a shadow is cast upon his life.”

“The American who has just borrowed a dollar immediately rushes into the nearest bar room and announces that he has raised 500,000 dollars from a prominent millionaire who has become his partner, and will back him to any amount in any enterprise, sane or insane, in which he may[51] agree to embark. Then for the succeeding three hours he talks about himself so loudly that the entire neighbourhood throngs around him to join in the debate.”

“The American trader in Europe has created the same feeling that prevails among a party of honest cardplayers when the card-sharper appears at the table.”

“The American politician never speaks but always ‘orates.’ If the matter under discussion in the legislative body is a question whether five cents shall be expended on pencils, or whether Mrs. Bridget O’Neill, or Mrs. Patrick O’Reilly shall be appointed scrubwoman of the Senate House, he considers it beneath his dignity to say anything that will not recall the diction of Cicero or Demosthenes. If the ceiling is to be cleaned and a three-and-elevenpenny contract is to be given

out, he takes the floor and with a loud preliminary bellow announces that he is an American citizen, and anyone who says that he is not is a confirmed and hereditary liar.”

“If an American learns that a man has been bribed he does not hate him—he envies him.”

“In New York society no man is ever referred to as ‘Mr. Jones’ or ‘Mr. Smith.’ He is always referred to as ‘Mr. Jones, who is worth two million dollars,’ or ‘Mr. Smith, who is worth four million dollars and stole every cent of it.’ ”

[52]

“The average Chicagoan has not the faintest conception of the true meaning of right and wrong. Right is the method that succeeds in getting money. Wrong is the method that does not.”

I shall beg the reader to observe particularly that I do not myself make these stinging assertions. In the words of the late Sir William Harcourt, “I merely quote them.” In a sense, perhaps, they may be most correctly described as exaggerations. But they are exaggerations of a kind which have more than a substratum of truth in them. I commend them to the swaggering rubber-jawed American for what they are worth.

Did the scope of this book allow, it would be possible to cite numerous other animadversions upon American manners and customs by other pens.

No British author of standing has visited the United States and come back in love with the American people. Dickens loathed them, Thackeray could not put up with them, Mathew Arnold despised them, and Browning laughed at them, while as for Tennyson he absolutely refused to go near them. Even the sensational litterateurs of our own generation, such as Hall Caine or Bernard Shaw, have failed to find much or anything to shriek about. The[53] Bishop of London and Father Vaughan are not authors but diplomats. Rudyard Kipling has been in America more than once, and remains dumb as to the whole concern. Mr. Zangwill is equally travelled and equally silent. Mr. Wells, who went out for the purpose, has written his book and said practically nothing. All of them, and others who might be named, recognise that what ought to be said would be better unsaid—unpleasant for the Americans, and consequently likely to provoke bad feeling. It is gentlest to the Americans to write of them without paying a preliminary visit to their native air. What would happen if a person who wields a plain blunt pen were to make a call upon them and set forth his impressions in good cold type and without fear or pity, no man may tell. Probably the Americans would shoot him.

[54]

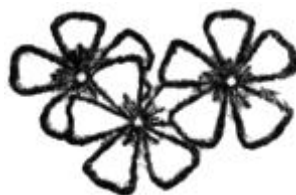


Figure 6: (decorative flower image)



Figure 7: (decorative flower image)

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CHAPTER VI The President

It is said that killing a man will not prevent him from going to Chicago, and you may be certain that nothing will prevent an American from getting himself elected President of the United States if he can possibly manage it.

The United States Presidency is believed by the patriotic American to be the very finest position that mortal man could possibly desire to occupy, outshining in glory and honour, if not exactly in importance, all “the effete thrones of Yurup” rolled into one paroxysm of purple. Tremendous and almighty as the United States Presidency may be, however, its real lustre and attraction for the American imagination lies in the fact that it is within the possible attainment of any and every United States citizen who does not happen to be a nigger. Of course, your United States President has sometimes been a very different affair from the United States Presidency. But that is neither here nor there; because a man who can write “President U.S.” after his name is, on the face of it, clearly[56] entitled to think that he casts a large shadow. And he does.

Though the history books will tell you otherwise, astute people—which phrase includes a fair handful of Americans—are of opinion that the Republic of the United States has had only a matter of three Presidents. The first of them was George Washington, who, let it be said, set the fashion of not relishing the

job; the second of them was Abraham Lincoln, rail splitter, lawyer, statesman and martyr; and the third American President—one blushes with pride to name him—is none other than Theodore Roosevelt, now more or less happily reigning.

I am no great hand at either history or biography, so that the reader of these pages will be spared the usual entertaining biographical details. I am not even aware if Mr. Roosevelt arrived at the White House by way of the traditional Log Cabin, or whether he took a pleasanter, less stony and less circuitous route. It is sufficient for me to have reasonable hearsay evidence that he is there, and that he has filled up frantically every hour of his time since he got there.

For the ruler of a great state Mr. Roosevelt is, to say the least, an appealing and exciting figure. He may be[57] said fairly to out-rival anything of the kind that has hitherto been offered us this side of the Atlantic—with one diverting and rhetorical Teutonic exception.

In Mr. Roosevelt you have the following popular and captivating elements:

He is:—

- A Dutchman.
- An American.
- A Diplomat.
- A Soldier.
- A Lawn-Tennis Champion.
- A Cow-boy.
- A Big Game Shooter.
- A Strong Man.
- An Anti-Malthusian.
- A Hand-Shaker-of-All-Comers.
- A Stump Orator.
- A Spelling Reformer.
- An Apostle of the Strenuous Life.
- A Husband.
- A Father.
- A Family Man.
- A Deacon.
- A Humourist.
- A Pugilist.
- A Harriman-hunter.
- A Hardy Horseman.
- A Dog Fancier.
- An Author.
- A Judge of White Mice.
- [58]A San Juan Hero.
- A Nobel Prize Winner.
- A Statesman of the First Order.
- A Hustler;

- and
- President of the United States of America.

Probably it has never been possible to compile such an inventory in favour of any other example of the human species, and when one looks down its massive proportions one is at no loss to understand why the American people consider themselves to be the very finest people on earth and entirely denuded of flies.

In a comparatively short if variegated career President Roosevelt has accomplished so much that is extraordinary that one never knows where he is likely to break out afresh. Before his term of office is out he may conceivably become many other things besides those I have listed. It would not surprise me if he turned Vegetarian or King. Nothing is too high for him, nothing too humble, nothing too exceptional or unconventional, nothing too imperial. And withal there is a rugged and stern and solid dignity about him. He wields the big stick throughout his vast dominions, and spans down evildoers as a housewife spans down wasps. At home[59] he stands no nonsense; abroad he wants peace, perfect peace, but equally stands no foolery. People of all nations admire him and wave banners over his head and cheer him to the echo. He is a sort of quick-firer, strong in the arm and lively in the head, and built by heaven to rule over the people of the United States.

In many respects President Roosevelt appears to be a sort of republican replica of no less a personage than Wilhelm II. of Germany. The parallel between the two potentates is interesting and diverting and to some extent disconcerting. That they are friends, that they think together on certain big subjects, that they have exchanged telegrams, that they love each other, and that they have both been a trifle flighty at times cannot be doubted.

The really interesting point about Mr. Roosevelt is that he may be reckoned to stand for the finest expression and exemplar of the American people. A nation that can manufacture such a President must be possessed of national characteristics altogether out of the common. He is the absolute personification of the United States. He is absolutely fearless, he is absolutely honest, he is absolutely magnificent. Someday he may be absolutely absolute.

[60]

You may be sure that President Roosevelt will go down to posterity as the beau ideal of American Presidents. In the eye of the Americans he has made few if any mistakes, and though there is a party in the States that can be very bitter about him and very rude to him, their bark is considerably worse than their bite, and secretly they glory in him. By dint of a good deal of adroitness he has succeeded in keeping his diplomatic end up in Europe and particularly in England, and nobody between Tipperary and the Great Wall of China has hard words for him. The world recognises in him a great genius—unparalleled in modern times.

If ever an American had sound reason to look back with satisfaction on a well-

spent life, Mr. Roosevelt is the man. And if ever republic had just cause to thank Providence for its luck in the matter of a President, the United States is that Republic.

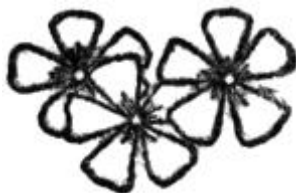


Figure 8: (decorative flower image)

[61]

CHAPTER VII Advertisement

“The man who would in business rise must either bust or advertise” is the American’s article of faith. In civilised countries advertising is confined to its proper limits, that is to say, it is part of the business of a tradesman. In America everybody advertises, and advertises through a megaphone.

The United States appears to have been created for the pure purpose of advertising itself and everything that occurs in it. In England of late we have been a little overtroubled with the persistent and flamboyant advertiser. His flaring posters, his disconcerting circulars, and particularly his promises of fabulous prizes if one will but buy his soap or his half-penny paper or his gaspipe bicycles have jarred upon most of us. The London hoardings blaze with all sorts of invitations to drink cocoa, swallow pills, go to the theatre, and demand bottled trouble of one label or another.

The plague is upon England, and probably we shall not get rid of it for a couple of generations or so. In the meantime, however, we may console ourselves with[62] the knowledge that gaudy and excruciating as London advertising may be, it is a mere tea-party compared to the orgie of announcement that is always in progress in every bright American city. Furthermore, while the English advertiser has admittedly done his best to destroy for us the mild delights of a railway journey by erecting in every second meadow funereal signs with the names of liver pills and cattle foods upon them he has not yet attained to the audacities of his American confrère who, in his delirium of publicity, paints the names of nostrums on the sides of innocuous cows and adorns the scenery with purple and yellow posters that are positively zoo-like in their noise.

The rocks and hills of America are daubed over with wild entreaties to the passerby to fix up his liver with some newly invented mixture, or to sow someone’s invaluable hair seed on his bald head. Each country barn is decorated with huge

signs bearing disinterested advice as to what sort of medicine a wayfarer should use in the spring. In no part of any State can one escape the huge advertisement. If you penetrate into the recesses of the highest mountain and find there the hut of a bewhiskered hermit, the chances are that when you approach him he will give you some[63] handbills containing details of the marvellous cures effected by So-and-So's sarsaparilla. The sails of yachts are adorned with statements as to medicines. Landscapes serve but to promulgate the claims of the quack. If a man plants a bed of geraniums the chances are that the flowers are arranged in such a way that they immortalise the fame of somebody's ipecachuana. The gardener is induced to do this by a present of free seeds.

In the trolley cars of New York one is always in danger of finding a seat under some such notice as, "The gentleman sitting beneath this sign is wearing a pair of our inimitable three dollar pants. They fit him beautifully. Don't you think they do?" Or, "The gentleman sitting below has a very yellow complexion this morning. He looks as if he had drunk too much last night. If he had had proper advice he would have taken a dose of Green Jackdaw Effervescent before breakfast, then he would feel very much better than he does now."

Pills, potions, pick-me-ups, blood purifiers, liver mixtures, lung tonics, corn cures, and preparations for tender feet appear to be the only articles of commerce that half the population of the United States trade in and manufacture. You[64] cannot move in America without having these nostrums cast violently into your teeth and shoved down your throat by every species of reminder that printers' ink and the ingenuity of the devil are capable of compassing.

With a view to the maintenance and upkeep of this extraordinary jumble of publicity the country is patrolled year in and year out by thousands of advertising vans, each accompanied by a considerable staff of "old hands." American papers commonly contain paragraphs like the following: "Advertising car No 2 of Pawnee Bill's Wild West has the following people: Al Osborn, manager; Doc Ingram, boss billposter; A. Clarkson, lithographer; J. Dees, banners; N. C. Murray, J. Judge and twelve other billposters; B. Balke, paste-maker; and R. Richardson, chef." That the boss billposter should rank after the manager and the chef after the paste-maker is a choice American touch.

When you turn to the question of newspaper advertising you encounter pretty much the same characteristics, supplemented by a great deal of top-speed bellying. In a high-class paper that lies before me as I write, a gentleman in the wholesale way announces in indecently tall black type that he is the "only live hardware man on earth," and that he[65] has "figured out a way to boost the business of his customers as well as build a good foundation." Another dweller in the land of brotherly love—an artiste this time, if you please—announces himself as "The Death Defying Daredevil King of the High Wire" and assures us not only that he has been "the Feature Attraction for Three Seasons in Succession at Luna Park, Coney Island," but that his "Reputation Talks for Itself."

The tone of these announcements is typical. Every American advertiser insists

that he is the greatest man of business alive, and that the article he is so anxious to get rid of is the only fine thing in the world. You note, too, with a certain restrained joy, that every second advertisement appearing in an American paper or magazine starts off with the magical words: "It Will Pay You." Thus if we are to believe the veracious publicity-monger it will pay you to wear So and So's Collegian clothes which "are the only garments made in this entire country with real dash to them"; it will pay you to buy Thingamy Suspenders because they will make your boy "comfortable and good-natured"; it will pay you to go about in Thingamy Shoes because when you pay three dollars for the Thingamy Shoe "you can know that all of your[66] money goes to the purchase of protection for your feet"; and it will pay you "to keep step with nature and tempt the fussy appetite with 'Ten Liberal Breakfasts for Ten Cents.'" The authors of these touching suggestions evidently understand the public with whom they have to deal. They have learnt the sublime lesson that the American has but a single inducement in his nightmare of a life, namely—the inducement of money or noise.

I shall now consider the advertising feats of that class of American persons who advertise not for financial gain, but for the sweet sake of notoriety. A great lady of American birth is said to have advised her sons that if they were to succeed in life they must make a point of getting their names into the papers at least once a day. The sons of the lady appear to have taken the hint, with the result that they have made themselves fairly snug out of very small beginnings.

In the United States the bare getting of one's name into the papers is a comparatively easy matter. Pretty well any American reporter will arrange that much for you in return for a ten cent drink, while for two such drinks he will run to a photo-block and a description of yourself as "a prominent society and club man who made his pile in Wall Street."

[67]

You must always remember, however, that the accomplished American private advertiser has a soul vastly above the mere elements of the game. Usually he is rich and often his life has contained episodes which an ingenious press can work up into scandals with half a column of sensational headlines—pin new and piping hot—on the shortest notice. Most wealthy advertising Americans, and indeed many of those who do not advertise, have been treated to this beautiful brand of publicity.

As a matter of fact it is an ancient and over-worn fetich, and as the newspaper-reading American is no longer to be excited by it, there is little or nothing in it for anybody. Consequently the American who is thirsty for advertisement is compelled to have resource to what are called "stunts." So far as one is able to make out you are considered by American society to achieve a "stunt" when you do something that nobody but a lunatic could possibly have thought of doing. For example, if you give a dinner party at a big New York hotel and let it be known that the guests were all of them chimpanzees you have done a

“stunt.” And the reporters of every paper in the city will rush to you as one man to find out the facts. They will describe you as a multi-millionaire and a[68] high-life club man whose existence is a sort of perennial grand slam. They will assert that your notion of bringing together a company of chimpanzees for dinner is wildly and unprecedentedly clever. They will go on to explain that the number of chimpanzees present was 47, that they turned up in the very smartest evening dress, that they ate and drank off plate of solid gold and that the champagne bottles were studded with rubies. And they will wind up by announcing that one of the most distinguished of the chimpanzees, who made his entrance to the dinner party out of a balloon made of fifty dollar bills, has just found a \$500,000,000 gold-brick mine in a remote district of Omaha, where he was “raised,” and is as a consequence about to be elected President of the National Bank.

Result: your dinner becomes the talk of America for at least a few hours, and you consider yourself a fortunate and public man. That is, if you are an ambitious American. Of course, this sort of advertising requires a good deal of coin to keep up the pace. And while there is not an hotel keeper in the Union who cannot supply you with a steady succession of idiotic freak ideas, the cost is a trifle heavy, and you soon find yourself growing rather tired.

But the American is nothing if not[69] clever. For a change, perhaps, he acquires an affinity or elopes with another man’s wife in a series of gorgeous motor cars and specially reserved steamships. He writes letters to his own wife explaining in ecstatic language what he has done; and she, good soul, serves them out to the reporters like so many doughnuts. Again, he gets his boosting—his roaring, rolling advertisement. Two months later the whole affair may turn out to have been a merry little “plant”; but your bright American has had his glad columns in the papers, and nothing in the world can take them from him.

Of course, the “stunts” I have here indicated are really of a rather out-of-the-way sort. The common or garden “stunt” usually takes the shape of an appendicitis dinner, pies with girls in them, fountains running champagne, or Adam and Eve suppers.

American women’s “stunts” are generally giddier still. One lady compassed social distinction by having her sunshade heavily embroidered with diamonds, another has tiny musical boxes fitted into the heels of her shoes that play when ever she puts her feet up—which is often—and a third wears a live newt in her hair, and has a boudoir full of snakes and lucky bears.

But the soul and essence of it all is[70] advertisement. “Be singular and you will get talked about; get talked about and you will be happy” is America’s golden rule.

[71]

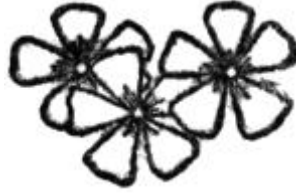


Figure 9: (decorative flower image)

CHAPTER VIII The Pea-nut Mind

I am in the happy position of never having gazed upon a pea-nut in my life. Therefore my notions of what the pea-nut may be are of the haziest.

But I gather as the result of some research that it is a species of provender, and that it is purchased and consumed by the American masses in pretty much the same spirit and on pretty well the same occasions that the common Cockney of our own happy British Islands purchases and devours barcelonas and whelks. In other words, a pea-nut is an inevitable concomitant of a lower-class American holiday. It is always with them. It is the one article that you may depend upon obtaining not only at every American dry goods store, but at every street-fair, park, beach, and entertainment ground throughout the country. It is a comestible beloved of old and young alike, and when the American boy or girl's mouth is not at work on chewing gum it is working overtime on pea-nuts.

When a working-class American wants a holiday—and sometimes when he would rather stay at home—he sets out[72] with his wife and family for the nearest park. In England, of course, a park means, for the working classes at any rate, a somewhat decorous and over-laid-out open space where there is a band-stand, a range of concrete promenades, a Swiss chalet where bad tea is provided, a policeman, and a number of hard seats. In America, however, the park is an entirely different affair. It is always a place in which you can buy pea-nuts. Not only so; it is a place in which the benevolent American entrepreneurs throw together aggregations of “attractions” such as are to be seen nowhere else on sea or land. I find, for example, that for Cream City Park, Lyons, Ill., the following amusement devices are to be provided during this present summer:—

“Old Mill, Merry-Go-Rounds, Penny Arcade, Circular Swing, Cave of the Winds, Billiard and Pool Parlours, Jap Ping-Pong Parlour, Cane Rack, Baby Rack, Illusion Shows, Baby Incubator, Pony Track, Razzle-Dazzle, and ‘other novelties.’ There are also to be Japanese Tea Gardens, Ice Cream Stands, Soft Drink Stands, Candy and Pop Corn Stands, and facilities for the sale of pea-nuts.”

Another of these parks at Aldoc Beach, near Buffalo, is described as[73] “running seven days a week” and as possessing “the most magnificent Pine Grove and Great Lake,” together with “a \$100,000 Summer Hotel, a \$15,000 Figure Eight, a \$5,000 Rustic Vaudeville Theatre, and a \$5,000 Dance Pavilion,” in addition

to a Blinding Array of Restaurants, Chubbuck Wheels, Houses of Mirth, Box-Ball Alleys, Shooting Galleries, Circle Swings, and Stands for the sale of Soft Drinks, Tobaccos, Sandwiches, Ice Creams, Frankfurters—and pea-nuts.

There are literally thousands of these parks scattered throughout the United States, and at all and each of them roaring provision is made for the people's enjoyment. Compared with our English parks, with their sad, uncertain County Council bands, they fire the imagination. Practically they represent the old English fair—which the drab English authorities have so ruthlessly stamped out—very much modernised, Americanised, and “notionised.” Here the pea-nut reigns supreme. You chew it on the Razzle-Dazzle and in the Baby Rack and the Old Mill and the House of Mirth and the Chubbuck Wheel, and even in the \$15,000 Figure Eight and the \$5,000 Rustic Vaudeville. It is pea-nuts, pea-nuts, pea-nuts all the time, and nobody hopes, and nobody[74] has the least desire to get away from them—from pea-nuts.

Now, as the parks are open throughout the year and run seven days a week, and are all situated within easy distance of large centres of population, it follows that the consumption of pea-nuts in America is something enormous. If the yearly supply were to be put into trucks and looped up into a procession, it would probably take that procession 368 days to pass a given point.

The big fact that I wish to bring out is that the Americans are a pea-nut-fed nation. With this simple statement it is possible to account for a great deal that is otherwise inexplicable in the American genius and character.

Nut-chewing is a habit which has been in vogue on the earth for an incredible period. Originally developed by the Simian races, it was at one time the only known dietetic habit that did not involve bloodshed. It fell into neglect in Europe with the coming of the white man, and throughout the dark ages which ensued nobody appears to have given it a thought. It remained for the genius of America to revive it, and there can be no doubt that the renaissance has been brought about in a thoroughly adequate and successful manner.

For, as I have shown, all America[75] now chews pea-nuts. As the result, they are a square-jawed, massy-faced race, martyrs to dyspepsia, fussy in the matter of appetite, and indiscriminate in the general selection of viands, their staples under this head consisting of fat pork and beans, corn mush and jungle-canned beef. Moreover, by dint of the assiduous and long-continued absorption of pea-nuts, they have acquired what may be reasonably termed a pea-nut mind.

If you can imagine the vast hordes of the original nut-chewers of antiquity suddenly set down in the midst of the machinery and advantages of twentieth-century civilisation, and imagine what they would proceed to do in the circumstances, you have gone a great way towards a true conception of the American people as they really are. Their habits and manners and aspirations and desires appear in effect to be based entirely on nut-chewing, which, as every naturalist is aware, tends to render the chewer acquisitive, cute, tricky, not given to reflection, tough and nimble of body, and reasonably devoid of soul. The habit

carries with it, also, an innate love of what is noisy and showy, and a vanity which passes ordinary human understanding. It is all based on the desire to dazzle.

So long as America has parks, so long[76] will she chew pea-nuts, and so long as she chews pea-nuts, so long will she continue to remain as artlessly, amazingly and convincingly American as she is at the present moment. To take a few pertinent instances, you will find that all American oratory is simply and solely pea-nut oratory. I append an extract from a speech delivered at the New York Board of Aldermen by a representative from the Borough of Brooklyn, as reported in an American paper:—

“I demand this ordinance to your attention fer the sake of humanity and fer the cause of freedom. Has introduced two ordinances on this subject before, and now I am submittin’ this Bill instead of them two. Maybe I don’t know nuthin’ about how things is over here on this side of the bridge, but I know just how it is in Brooklyn. An’ I wanter tell you that them motormen over in Brooklyn is grinded under the heels of their masters just as the slaves was drove in the olden times by his masters, an’ it’s time fer us to interfere in this here matter now.

“Now you may want to know why them motormen don’t come over here and speak up to you for their rights. If the is suffering such outrages as this, you asks, why don’t they come here and tell us that they is sufferin’ and ast us to life the yoke from offen them?

[77]

“I’ll tell yer why they don’t come. They dasn’t. That’s why.

“They’re afraid, because they’re slaves and dasn’t speak up fer themselves. If they was to come over here and say to this committee, ‘We want you to protect us in our rights for the reason that we’re sufferin’ and frozing in the winter,’ what would happen?

“Why, before them men got through speakin’ their names would be taken and telegraphed to their masters, and when they got back to their cars them masters would tell them they hadn’t no more use for ’em no more furever.”

Herein surely one may trace the effects of pea-nuts as easily as white paint can be seen on a negro.

Now let us turn to a sample of English “as she is wrote” and apparently spoken by the American who can read:—

The story about that fisherman wasn’t so bad. He was an old guy, and so poor he had a hard time getting three squares a day, and he had a wife and three kids to support. For some reason too deep for your uncle, he had a rule to pitch his nets in the sea only four times a day. One morning he went out fishing before daylight, and the first drag he made, he copped out a dead donkey. That made him pretty sore. Dead donks were a frost, and he was out one throw. He win

out a lot of mud, the next throw, and he was sick, and he makes a howl about fortune.

[78]

“Here I am,” says he, “hustling all day long and every day in the week; I got no other graft but this; and yet as hard as I wrestle I can’t pay rent. A poor man has no chance. The smooth guys get all the tapioca, and the honest citizen nit.”

Then he throws again, and finds another gold brick—stones, shells, and stuff. I guess he was pretty wild when he sees that. Three throws to the bad and nairy fish.

When the sun came over the hill, he flopped down on his knees and prayed like all good Mussulmens, and after that gave the Lord another song.

English of this description runs very badly to pea-nut. It is distorted and degraded and entirely ungrammatical. Yet no one will deny that, if it is not commonly written, it is at least commonly spoken, even in such centres as New York and Boston. To American ears and eyes there is nothing about it that can be quarrelled with. Every American knows what is meant by “guys,” “tapioca,” “nit,” “gold-brick,” “nairy,” “squares,” “hot-air,” and so forth; and he uses these and similarly squalid words and phrases in his daily speech and conversation. If you were to tell him that such a sentence as “he win out a lot of mud, the next throw” was grammatically unsound and impossible, he would ask you please to be[79] so kind “as not to pull his leg.” He is mentally incapable of distinguishing the kind of muss I have quoted from writing of a correct order, and when it creeps into his newspapers, and fictional publications, as it is continually doing, he never as much as suspects that there is anything wrong.

Such a pea-nutty view of language points its own moral. It is a view that is universal among Americans, and it can be proved to obtain even among the best of American authors, who habitually use some of the crudest Americanisms without knowing it.

I need scarcely add that the pea-nut flavour predominates in most American affairs. The advertising of the country is done wholly on pea-nut principles, its politics are run on pea-nut lines, and its professional men and financiers indulge in every species of pea-nut methods. No doubt one should be charitable enough to refrain from blaming them for it. They are to the manner born, and the pea-nut idiosyncrasy is so firmly implanted in their natures that it would be impossible for them to shake it out, even if they tried. So that they go on pea-nutting and pea-nutting from generation to generation, and in spite of the extraordinary number of colleges, free schools, reading clubs, and general[80] facilities for culture, they remain clear pea-nut right through.

As I do not happen to wish them any particular harm, I shall express the pious hope that they will long continue to pea-nut.

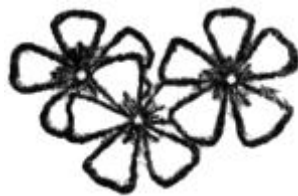


Figure 10: (decorative flower image)

[81]

CHAPTER IX The Drama

The Americans are nothing if not fiercely and incorrigibly theatrical. It is true that they have only one pose, namely, the pose of being gloriously and unaffectedly American. Yet in all the large issues of life they display a strong sense of the stage, they revel in the more obvious situations, and they have an innate love of a good curtain.

These facts are strikingly illustrated in the American law courts, where all small matters are managed on the lines of comedy, and all large matters on the lines of hot and lurid melodrama. The recent Thaw trial may be taken as a typical case in point, so far as melodrama is concerned. The speeches of counsel on both sides might have been written specially for the Adelphi Theatre, and every gesture of the rival declaimers would seem to have been modelled on the style of the adipose itinerant actor who plays “Othello” in penny gaffs.

So far as the real stage is concerned, the Americans are to be credited with quite a number of startling innovations. They were the sole inventors of the Deadwood Dick kind of play, which[82] involves the tooling on to the stage of an ancient and battered mail coach, accompanied by feats of unthinkable skill with the shooting irons. I believe, too, that they were the only begetters of the drama that has for its central attraction a real set-to between bona-fide bruisers, who fight with the gloves off and punish one another for all they are worth under American rules.

Then, of course, I must not forget to mention the world-renowned “Tank Drama.” It appears that an American manager happened once upon a time to find himself in a second-hand galvanised iron store. Here he discovered an enormous iron tank which he found could be purchased for a song. In a fit of abstraction, and in pursuance of the American tendency to buy anything and everything that can be had dirt cheap, he purchased the tank. And having it on his hands and no particular use for it, he hired a dramatist to write a play around it. To this woolly genius a tank of course suggested water and high dives and swimmers, and before you could say hey, presto! Mr. Manager found himself in possession of a sensational, if somewhat humid, melodrama, the like of which had never

before been seen on any road.

The Tank Drama toured the States for years on end, to the approval and delight[83] of American audiences, and for anything I know to the contrary, it is still running, the tank itself having by this time, no doubt, grown a little leaky.

In England the public is familiar with melodramas in which the principal part is taken by steam-rollers, circular saws, fire-engines, and other pieces of mechanism. The Tank Drama, however, was the progenitor of them all. It was from the Americans, also, that we learnt to grace our melodramas with the presence on the stage of real live cows, racehorses, ducks and geese, faithful dogs, dancing bears, blue monkeys, and educated asses.

The American public prides itself upon the rapidity with which the national dramatists, from Clyde Fitch or Augustus Thomas to David Belasco or Theodore Kremer, can turn out almost any species of dramatic work to order. On the production of a five-act tragedy recently in New York, it was announced that the author had written "the whole contraption" in under the twenty-four hours. I can well believe it. The majority of American plays that come to us on this side bear unmistakable indications of having been written in haste, and with a single eye to getting through with the labour. This is no doubt due to the circumstance that[84] American managers have a mania for producing new pieces, and that the average run of such pieces is exceedingly short. Authors do not feel it to be worth their while to take pains, particularly as the majority of them have to subsist by dressing up in dramatic guise some new and big mechanical invention or some cause célèbre or tragedy in real life or some stupid story, which happens to have caught on, but which they know cannot in the nature of things keep the stage for more than a few weeks.

Although one is continually hearing of the triumphs of this or that American actor or actress in Shakespearean parts, it is a solemn fact that the average of Shakespearean acting in America is very much below that of any other country in which Shakespeare is consistently played. I cannot, of course, forget that America produced the late Mr. Phelps and gave us Miss Mary Anderson, whom all the world admired. But these are the exceptions. The rule is that the American actor who plays Shakespeare is a bull-necked, unlettered mummer who has served his apprenticeship to the circus business or to the plumbing, and roars out Shakespeare's lines with a nasal intonation and an absolute lack of understanding. Nine out of ten[85] American actors ought to carry a net with them.

I am aware that it may be contended that the foregoing aspects of the American drama are things of the past, and that in all essential respects the theatre in America is nowadays on an equal footing with the theatre in England. In a considerable measure, this may be so, due, no doubt, to the mixed beneficence of the blessed brotherhood: Frohman, Klaw and Erlanger.

Yet there can be no getting away from the fact that the American plays and American companies that are from time to time brought to London for our

edification fail woefully to interest us.

In London, quite lately we have been presented with two plays of American extraction and rendered by American companies. One of them “Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch” to wit, at Terry’s Theatre, appears to have been a success, from a monetary point of view, and nobody can witness it without entertainment. On the other hand, it suffers from that pea-nutty exuberance and thinness of interest which are so characteristically American. The sentiment in it is of the floweriest and slobberiest sort, the comedy forced and jerky, and the setting squalid and depressing to a degree. It is said to be a transcript[86] of life among the American poorer classes, and herein conceivably it is instructive if not altogether uplifting; for it indicates only too plainly that the hackneyed American talk about “the full dinner-pail” and the general snugness and decency of the existence of the American poor has precious little foundation in fact. Of course, Mrs. Wiggs herself is made to exhibit singularly good qualities of heart, and a certain shrewd and humorous wisdom. But the rest of the characters—not even excluding the weepily-named Lovey-Mary and Mrs. Wiggs’s troops of wild-cat children—are the kind of people whom it sets one’s teeth on edge to meet. If, as I am told, America is full of Cabbage Patches, I can only say that America should hasten to the penitent form.

The other play of which London was adjured to expect great things was called “Strongheart.” It ran for a couple of weeks or more at the Aldwych Theatre, and was then taken off. “Strongheart” purported to give us some highly realistic glimpses of American college life. There was a great deal of American football in it, and a great deal of ra, ra, ra-ing about it. There were also unlimited quantities of ra, ra rant. But the plot exhibited the usual[87] thinness, the construction was slack and loose, and the characterisation feeble and colourless. If the company which supported the handsome Robert Edeson in this particular piece is to be taken as a fair sample, I feel free to conclude that in the lump American actors and actresses are a reasonably poor crowd. Play as they would, the men failed to convince us that they were persons of any particular breeding, and the women said their lines as if they were in pain, and walked through their parts like so many uninspired clothes horses. Of course I know America has many gifted actors and actresses such as William Faversham, James K. Hackett, E. H. Sothorn, Julia Merlowe, Olga Nethersole and Mery Mannering—but, as luck will have it, with the exception of the second-named, who is a Canadian, they’re all English. And so is even the inimitable Hap Ward. On the whole, I think America will have to make some very serious strides in the dramatic art before she can fairly hope to show England anything that is worth looking at.

When you turn to the music halls you find the American in equally sad case. There is no performer of note on the English music-hall stage whose training and experience have been American.[88] From the other side we get a few trick bicyclists, wire-walkers, high divers, and comic speech makers whose pea-nutty witticisms are obviously culled from the comic papers. They help to fill up the programme, without in any sense helping to fill up the house.

It is in this connection that the Americans have made a practical avowal of their pathetic inferiority; for they are said to have made contracts with some of the leading English stars for appearances in America, on terms which plainly indicate that the American managers must be singularly hard up for talent and quite incapable of finding it in their own country.

The fact is, that in this as in a variety of other matters, the American's cocksureness and unblushing faith in his personal beauty and powers have led him considerably astray. The American really possesses scarcely any talent. All he can do is to boast and shout and advertise. And having little or nothing behind him to boast and shout and advertise about, he is bound in the long run to find himself at a disadvantage. Half the actresses and female music-hall artists of America are successful not because they can do anything, but because they have been "boosted" into fame by the pushful, blatant[89] manager. The sole accomplishment of many of them is that they can undress prettily in full view of their audiences.

For the rest they bolster up their position by extraneous escapades rather than by art. They are harum-scarum, feather-brained young women who for the most part would find it exceedingly difficult to get a living by the exercise of their alleged smartness before an English public. And as for American actors and music-hall men, the best that can be said of them is that when they are not vulgar they are deadly dull, and the worst that their real sphere of life is the American circus. I wish they would all take to the Tank.

The average American theatrical man, invariably strikes me as being a born circus-man, intended by nature to go around in a gaudy procession by day and to fill up his nights showing off wild beasts and freaks and Deadwood coaches. Unconsciously he does all his business and manages all his affairs on circus principles. He is for ever beating the drum and inviting the crowd to walk up and see the finest show on earth. The ideal man of his private bosom is the late P. T. Barnum, who was the father of advertisement and the originator of the fine art of "boosting." [90] It was P. T. Barnum who said, or who got somebody to say for him, "When you have anything good, keep on letting on about it, and you will get rich."

The American business man has always considered that saying to be the extreme height of philosophy.

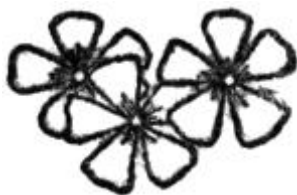


Figure 11: (decorative flower image)

[91]

CHAPTER X Sport

The Americans are all “sports.” But to their credit, they are one and all “dead games.” They have a sporting tradition which extends back to the time when their great-grandfathers gambled for negresses and went trailing for Indians in pretty much the same way that an Englishman goes shooting wild duck.

It is said, with what truth I know not, that the Americans hunt the fox in red coats and top-hats, and that they are yachtsmen and fishermen and big game killers. I have met a considerable number of Americans—well-to-do and otherwise—but I never yet came across one whom I could conscientiously figure in any of the latter connections. Of course, there is the America Cup Race to confound me, and there are the redoubtable doings of President Roosevelt on the rolling prairie and in the Rockies, and there is young Mr. Jay Gould’s defeat of our Mr. Eustace Miles at Rackets or Ping Pong or some such game. All the same, I will never believe that the modern American is leisurely[92] enough or uncommercial enough to know much about real sport.

That they play games in America even as we play games in England appears to be fairly evident. The game of white man’s games, namely, cricket, is, however, a game they do not understand. Baseball and football on the other hand are exercises which they are alleged to have cultivated out of all recognition. Baseball I know nothing about. And when I come to consider it closely, I could wish that I knew nothing about American football.

Pugilism without the gloves having been forbidden by law in America, the free and equal inhabitants thereof must e’en look round for a form of sport which would allow of their “lamming the hides off one another” without being pulled up short by the police; and they settled on football. The essence of American football is not to kick or punch the ball, but to kick, punch, break up, deface and destroy the next man. On all American football fields a squad of surgeons, bonesetters, and nurses have to be in continual attendance. The crushing of a player’s ribs, the gouging out of his eye, or the splitting open of his head are regarded as trifling matters among American sportsmen, and when the football player goes forth to the[93] fray, he makes a point of taking a fond farewell of his relations and friends in case of even more serious accident. Here, again, you have a distinct instance of the American tendency to outrage and excess. They have overdone football to such an extent that they themselves consider it in the light of something which approximates closely to a murderous affray. So much for games.

As Indians are no longer shootable, and negroes can no longer be hunted with dogs, and the buffalo is extinct, and the grizzly a “rare proposition” and difficult of access, the modern American sport has to be content with smaller deer, such

as possum and bobolink and wild turkey. And when he goes gunning for these trophies he is a sight to see. Nobody can rival him in the magnificence of his outfit. He insists upon donning cow-boy attire and proceeding to the field of action on a fiery mustang, with a magazine of guns slung all over him, and enough ammunition to take Port Arthur. The whole of this equipment has been purchased at store prices, and he acquires it not because it is likely to be useful to him but because he thinks that it makes him look smart. When it comes to yachting or fishing or racing you can depend upon him to display an equal gaiety of demeanour and to[94] “dress” and “swank” the part to perfection.

For the fox-hunting I shall say nothing. The indigenous American fox does not run straight, the imported fox has lost some of the best qualities of his English forbears, and the American variety of foxhound is a romping, ill-mannered, and indiscreet quadruped.

The national sport of America is horse racing, qualified with a considerable dash of trotting. And here, of course, the American temperament in all its aspects is made to shine. The head quarters of American horse racing—the Epsom, Ascot and Sandown of the United States—is a place called Saratoga, where the trunks come from. Here you find the American horse, the American racing man, and the American sport in their highest and lowest and most perfect expression. It is said that a Saratoga horse is poison-proof; being so accustomed to profound potations of laudanum, bromide, and other sedatives that he can quaff any quantity of them without turning a hair. The people who live at Saratoga are all horsey and dishonest. They speak the most degraded form of Anglo-Saxon—a sort of Americo-Negroid flash talk—and what they do not know in the way of knavery and[95] brutality has yet to be invented. It goes without saying that all American racing men do not necessarily dwell in this sublime spot. But a quite considerable contingent of them have learnt lessons out of the Saratoga book, and are consequently as dangerous to deal with as it is possible to conceive that white men could be.

The American sportsmen we are privileged to see in England have, with some notable exceptions, failed signally to secure our confidence. There are honest men among them—though never by any chance a “jay”—and there are sheep of a blackness which would do no discredit to the nether pit. On the whole their connection with the English turf has been unfortunate for the English turf. We are most of us quite old enough to remember the unpleasant things that happened when an organised gang of these gentry descended upon our innocent English rings and racecourses some three years ago. They got their hands well into the English pockets, depleted us of much glittering money, raised what they were pleased to consider “general h—l” in the scandal way, and left us outraged and aghast. Up to this period in our history the astute English racing-man had regarded himself as the last word in craft and wariness; but the[96] Americans despoiled him as easily as if he had been a “tenderfoot,” and when he discovered it, Mr. Englishman was very shocked. The racing interests of these realms is still suffering from the shaking it received during the exciting period to which I

refer. The only profit the poor Britishers got out of the deal was a new-fashioned way of riding, which still remains in vogue, and a lesson in caution which will last us a good century.

What the American jockey really means was forcibly borne in upon us by the vagaries of a Mr. Tod Sloan. By dint of the usual advertising and bluff, coupled indeed with no ordinary gifts as a horseman, Mr. Sloan made his early career in England a success at the first blush. He was soon in receipt of an income of ridiculous dimensions, and hob-nobbing with the best blood of the country. He got found out, as Americans will, and ended up feebly by smacking a waiter across the head with a champagne bottle. Luck does not appear to have looked his way since. He went back to America a disgraced man, even for America; and took to giving tips for a New York paper. At the present moment he is said to be engaged in the gentle art of billiard-marking at a salary running to at least ten dollars a week. I recite[97] the history of Mr. Sloan to encourage the others. Our experiences with the American racing-man in this country justify us in assuming that he is an exceptionally sad dog at home. America is overrun with him, and while she has done everything that lay in her power to corral and exterminate him he still continues merrily on his wicked way.

It only remains to point out that the Americans as a people are frantic gamblers, and that they are infatuated enough to regard gambling as a form of sport. Probably more gambling at cards goes on in the United States than in the whole of the countries of Europe put together. The proper American is everlastingly playing at poker, which is a bluffing game, and which he will assure you trains him for his business. The American card-sharper has been famous in song and story time out of mind. For sheer coolness, audacity, and skill at the job, he has never had an equal. Occasionally he lands on these shores, with a picturesque entourage, takes a flat in the West End of London, and relieves the adolescent gentry of the neighbourhood of their little alls. Then he is up and off, on the wings of the morning.

Among themselves, too, the Americans play a great deal of roulette, petit chevaux,[98] and kindred fascinations. They count also amongst the most enthusiastic patrons of Monte Carlo, where season after season many of them turn up with very little money and make a fat thing of it. Last season a long-haired gentleman from Kansas City scooped up between two and three hundred louis a night for twenty nights running by the simple process of walking from table to table and backing 17. He told me that he and his wife were there for a little trip, and that he had hit on the 17 idea because 17 was the number of their cabin on the liner which brought them over. Of course 17 can refuse to come up at Monte Carlo for hours at a time. But whenever this raw-boned large-handed citizen of Kansas chose to put money on it, up it came inside two or three spins.

There are American gamblers at Monte Carlo, however, who are not by any means so consistently lucky as my friend. The money some of them get through when they are having a bad time would probably astonish the old folks at home. But it is only fair to them to say that they take their losses with an unruffled,

if rather moist, brow and go off solemnly to cable for further supplies.

When a certain sort of American[99] millionaire turns up in the Mediterranean paradise there are sure to be merry doings. I have seen such a one mop his wet face after handing the bank a bundle of notes that would have made a tidy year's income for a man with a large family, and remark, a little feebly, "Gee whizz!" Then he was led gently away by a number of pretty ladies.

It is in what one may term hard gambles such as he gets at Monte Carlo that the American shows his most sportsmanlike qualities. At roulette, or trente et quarente, it is almost impossible for him to cheat, and consequently he wins or loses more or less calmly and with perfect honour. But at poker—tut—tut!

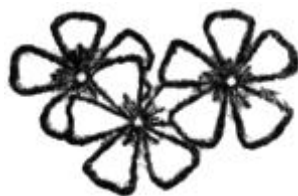


Figure 12: (decorative flower image)

[100]



Figure 13: (decorative flower image)

[101]

CHAPTER XI Hogs

The national peril of the United States is hogs. Of the peculiar and subtle influences which have driven most Americans into the pig business I find it impossible to formulate any reasonable account. Of course, there is the fact

that the pig business has large monies in it, and that America is a country in which it would seem you have only to tickle a little pig with a hoe to turn him into a fine fat porker.

There can be no doubt whatever that a very large percentage of Americans think, talk, and raise pig throughout the whole of their natural lives. This industry appears to be of such a fascinating character that when once you have got into it you cannot possibly get out of it. Even if you wax unrighteously rich and get elected to Congress and move your family to New York, you still stick to pork and lard as if they were your brother. I understand that many of the ball-rooms in the big brown stone mansions in Fifth Avenue are waxed with lard.

I do not know whether there were any pigs in America before the Pilgrim[102] Fathers landed. But it is certain that there are millions of them there now, and that they eat apples and grow wondrous frisky and have a good time of it—till killing day comes around. And it is precisely here that the frightful Americanism of the hog begins. For the wicked pig, like the wicked man, has a knack of finding his way to Chicago—which, as all the world now knows, is the most bloodthirsty, sultry, and unregenerate city on the face of the earth. In this place they kill pigs by the thousand daily. Hoggish shrieks rend all the air, the stores and warehouses groan with the pig's dismembered parts, and the odour of his frizzling adipose tissue is in every nostril.

It seems to me more than likely that the pig owes the beginnings of his present supremacy in the United States to the Irish, who are pretty thick upon the ground there. An Irishman without a pig in one form or another would in all likelihood take cold, or die of heart-ache. In his own distressful Island, the Irishman and his pig live on terms of freedom and fraternity that put the American Constitution to the distinct blush. Not only does the pig pay the greater proportion of rent that gets paid in Ireland, but he is the friend and playmate of the family, and is invariably accorded a cosy[103] corner for himself on the domestic hearth.

It seems only natural, therefore, that in emigrating to the States, the Irishman who could manage it would insist on taking with him one or more pigs, probably as much for company's sake as for any other reason. And behold the result! What was a simple and very human foible on the part of the Irishman, has become, with the American, a raging and soul-consuming obsession. Pork, pork, pork, pork, pork! That is the cry that rises daily and hourly to heaven from the greater part of the United-States-half of North America. Everybody is concerned in it; everybody has money in it; everybody wants to get more money out of it. The pig is rushed through his feeds, weighed every morning till he has assumed the right specific gravity, hurried off by car to his doom, killed and slain on the no-waiting-here principle, and turned into hams, sides, lard, brawn, and sausages for the delectation of a hungry world before he has a chance to say George Washington.

America as a country, and the Americans as a people, depend upon hogs for

their prosperity to an extent that is appalling. Upon the dead weight of him in the warehouses, and upon his firmness, or want of it, in the markets, hangs the[104] stability of all sorts of stocks, shares, bonds, debentures, and general securities. If pig is “up,” America is a land of contented households and smiling faces. If pig is “down,” she is plunged forthwith into the deepest woe and the meanest irritability.

All of which affords one further striking evidence that the Americans are really a wonderful people, and that they deserve the generous tributes of praise that they so consistently and lavishly draw upon themselves.

A nation whose principal diet is pea-nuts, and whose principal profit is derived from the sale of pigs, is obviously pretty low down in the scale of civilisation. A hog tender cannot by any chance be the finest kind of man, neither can a pork butcher or a wholesale ham merchant. And every American who is not a member of a trust, or a pastor of a church, or a boss billposter, or a missionary, or a comic singer, is either a hog tender, a pork butcher, or a wholesale ham merchant. At any rate, so one gathers from the authorised reports.

And just as nut-chewing is responsible for certain grave weaknesses in the American character, so is pig-dealing. The pig and the potato have made the Irishman the idlest man in the world. The pig takes no rearing, and the potato[105] is such a lively and prolific tuber that it will grow almost without planting. The Irishman has reaped the full disadvantages incident to these merits in the pig and the potato. And one feels sure that the American is suffering equally from the effects of the pig. I have no wish to reopen the box of horrors which was introduced to our notice some time back by the author of “The Jungle.” That gentleman did his work thoroughly, and the atmosphere is even yet redolent in consequence. It does not concern me that Chicago meats, tinned or cured, are not always entirely fitted for human consumption, or that the Chicago method of treating such meats are uncleanly, or that the Chicago idea of industrial efficiency is a perverted one. What does concern me is that Chicago is an American city, built by Americans, run by Americans, and made lurid by Americans—on pig.

To suggest to the American reformer that he should take steps for the immediate extermination of the pigs in America, steps, in fact, such as have been taken with a view to the extinction of the rabbit in Australia, would be to fill him with horror and amazement. He is all for the amelioration and improvement and cleaning up of Chicago; he does not see that it is the pig and the[106] great American people who are the root trouble. Prohibit the breeding and rearing of pigs throughout the United States, and you will have gone much further towards the cleaning up of Chicago, and, for that matter, the cleaning up of America, than you are ever likely to get by dealing simply with Chicago itself. So long as there are pigs, so long will Chicago reek. Abolish pigs, and you have abolished the worst features of the world’s foulest city.

The reformer will find that my suggestion is an impracticable one. He may even

go the length of calling it frivolous and ridiculous. But we shall see what we shall see. America will one day either have to forsake pig or come to very bitter grief. She is already in considerable straits as to the marketing of her porcine staples. She has shoved them down the necks of her own people till they can no more. She is pushing them down English throats with all the force that in her lies, and the limit is within a very little way of being reached. Do as one will, one cannot consume more than a certain amount of American pig in the course of the day's deglutition. Europe is taking far more than is good for her even now, and yet the American demand is for bigger sales and extended markets, to prevent the stuff from rotting[107] at home. The position is unfortunate in quite a number of senses; but it is precisely what any prescient American ought to have expected. America is overdoing it in the matter of pig, just as she is overdoing it in most other matters. When you have got the measure of people's hunger and purchasing capacity you cannot appreciably increase them by any amount of advertising or bluff.

The Americans boast that they can sell everything appertaining to a pig save and except the squeal. I don't wish to frighten them, but it would not surprise me in the least if within the space of a few years the large accumulation of squeals which they must, by this time, have on hand were to arise up as it were, and din their ears in a manner which they will not relish.

I may remark finally that in spite of everything that Chicago may say and publish in their praise, there can be no question that American pig products are of a most inferior and unappetising quality as compared with the real article. American hog meat exhibits a coarseness of grain and a crudeness of flavour which will incline any person of gustatory discrimination to the abstention of the Hebrew. Eggs and bacon constitute[108] the English national breakfast dish; ham and eggs are the sure rock and support of our country inns and cheap restaurants. Both these dishes have, however, fallen into sad disrepute during late years, and I have no hesitation in attributing this grave and heartrending circumstance to the fact that the bacon and ham nowadays served are almost exclusively American.

The gentlemen from the other side must excuse me if I appear as he would phrase it, "to tread somewhat too severely on his face"; but I really mean him no evil. Rather do I wish him all manner of good.

Besides which it is one's duty to be patriotic; and charity—even in the article of pig—should begin at home.

[109]

CHAPTER XII Verdict

Before I leave the jury of potent, grave and reverend Britishers to their own reflections on the subject before them, it may be well to indulge in a little

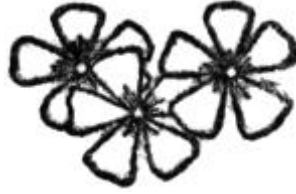


Figure 14: (decorative flower image)

summing-up.

I have shown that the fiery, untameable American is a creature of more than doubtful antecedents, and that he conceals beneath a veneer of smartness and originality several qualities of mind and heart that are not greatly to his credit. I have shown that his destiny would seem to lie in the direction of a reversion to a condition of pseudo-barbarism which will in many respects identify him with the aboriginal possessors of his country. Already the face, features and body of him are becoming plainly Red-Indianised. Already his talk contains hints and suggestions of “war-paint,” the “war-path,” the “tomahawk” and the getting of “scalps.” If I mistake not the rest is bound soon to follow.

I have shown also that the American woman, in so far as she is exhibited to us in London, and on the Continent of Europe, is a somewhat frivolous female, and not always comely; smart, possibly,[110] and lively, possibly, but on the whole disposed to be too smart and too lively. I have given you a peep at the American millionaire, and found him wanting in everything but money, and not invariably too well provided with that. I have pointed out that American advertising, whether for the sake of gain or of notoriety, is a shameless, blatant and undesirable affair. For the first time in history I have set it on record that the Americans eat too many pea-nuts. I have run the rule over their painful attempts at the dramatic art, and proved that in this important connection they have been responsible for many banalities and futilities, and that their average of performance is far below that of the rest of the theatre-using world. I have demonstrated, also, that their real metier is the giddy tenth-rate circus, ablaze with drums and the roaring of wild beasts, the snuffing of freaks, and the shrieking mirth of the vulgar. I have paid a passing tribute to the integrity and blamelessness of their sportsmen. And I have warned them solemnly about pork. What more can be expected of me?

It is more than likely that I shall be told that I have chosen for the subject of my remarks a rather stodgy type of American, which is rapidly giving place[111] to a saner, wholesomer, and pleasanter type, resulting from the spread of culture and a modification of manners on the best European plans. To this I reply that I have spoken of the American exactly as he seems to me to be, and judged him on the numerous samples which have hitherto come my way. That there must be some residuum of sound and serious people in the United States seems

probable, but I have never been to the United States.

Can anyone point to anything in the world that America is accomplishing which is purely and simply calculated to serve the highest interests of the human race? Can you look upon her trusts, her general methods of finance, her social and industrial system, her bosses, her political parties, the administration of her law, her press, her religious mountebanks, her quacks and charlatans of all conditions, and pronounce them to be good? Is it not the fact that these, in common with pretty well the whole of the remainder of her institutions, are not only defective, but a great deal more defective than one's right to expect in view of the exceptional natural resources of the country and her great energy and wealth?

You are at liberty to answer these questions in any way you please; but[112] the conviction of myself and a by no means inconsiderable number of other persons will remain the same.

It is clear that if the Americans are going to take that exalted position among the nations to which they are for ever laying claim, they will be compelled to get rid of a great many excrescences of temperament which they seem now only too busy developing and emphasising by every means in their power.

Is it possible for them, in the nature of things, so to disencumber themselves?

Will they ever become a really free country, dethrone the millionaire and the boss and acknowledge honesty as a political virtue?

Will they ever put silencers on the yellow press and elect a congressional committee to examine the gangrenous decay of their wit and the dropsical growth of their emotions?

Will they ever make a point of keeping their women at home and give practical proof of their pride in the peaches by marrying them themselves?

Will they ever learn the English language which was the best thing imported in the "Mayflower"?

Will they ever get rid of the climatic influences that compel them to speak and sing through their noses?

[113]

Will they ever quote their astounding President at anything but a discount or realise that he is their greatest national asset?

Will they ever place a prohibitive tariff on noise and lynch sensation-mongers as they do niggers?

Will their playwrights ever learn the difference between a phonograph record and a play and will their audiences ever learn to appreciate acting when they see it?

Will they ever discover that sport is not merely a business of record breaking and that business and football, I class the two together, are not the sports of the stone age in which the vanquished was not only overthrown but subsequently utterly consumed?

Will they ever give up pea-nuts?

Will they ever cease from the blind cultivation of pork?

I trow not.

And as these chapters are intended a great deal more for the English than for the Americans, I may say here and now that it is the Englishman's plain duty to himself and to the race to refrain as far as in him lies from the easy sin of imitation. In his admiration and envy for the magical and almost uncanny successes of his American brother, let him not be^[114] carried away with the stupid notion that it is possible for him to go forth and do likewise. For one thing, he hasn't got the climate; and for another he hasn't got either the peanuts or the pork.

Let the Englishman, therefore, be content to remain unreservedly and unsophisticatedly English. When he sees an American adaptation or invasion—whether commercial, social, religious, or otherwise—coming his way, let him frown it down, pass by it and flee from it. Such things may seem simple and innocuous and desirable enough in themselves, they may tickle the imagination, and they may even appear to be for the distinct betterment of mankind. But in the aggregate they must of necessity tend to the Americanisation of this Country—and that is an evil which every Britisher ought to be prepared to make any sacrifice to avoid.

If any profit worth having is to come out of the present welter it will come by the Anglicisation of America, and not by the Americanisation of England. The Americans themselves recognise the weight and importance of this fact. Some of them are already wearing eye-glasses. They smile in their sleeves at our readiness to adopt the least admirable of their multifarious foolish ways. When an American meets an Englishman who is^[115] trying to run his business or his household or other of his affairs after American models, and particularly when he meets an Englishman who looks upon the Americans as his superiors and masters at the game of life, he is sheerly, if unavowedly, amazed. He knows what America is, he knows in his heart what America means, and if it lay in his power to choose the place to which he will go when he dies, that place would not be Chicago, nor would it be even Paris, but a clean, free, un-Americanised England.

But with all their usually enormous and often brilliant faults—that amaze, even if they do not stagger humanity—the Americans are a nation of Cæsars. In every field of activity they have scored many triumphs. But they are not satisfied with acquisition and conquest on a colossal scale, they want to surpass all previous records in ancient or modern times. They are endowed with an inherent genius

for arriving at their destination, and the destination they have set down for themselves in the national time-table is one in keeping with their vast and great country, whose mission it seems to be to make Europe and the world sit-up. Therefore, within the next decade or two, I should not be surprised to see[116] a very much larger splash of purple on the map of the earth—and to see it called the American Empire.

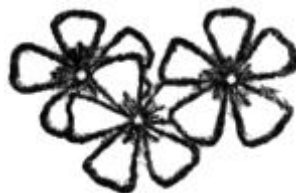


Figure 15: (decorative flower image)

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