RUDYARD KIPLING

AMERICAN NOTES

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Содержание

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Introduction

In an issue of the London World in April, 1890, there appeared the following paragraph: “Two small rooms connected by a tiny hall afford sufficient space to contain Mr. Rudyard Kipling, the literary hero of the present hour, ‘the man who came from nowhere,’ as he says himself, and who a year ago was consciously nothing in the literary world.”

Six months previous to this Mr. Kipling, then but twenty-four years old, had arrived in England from India to find that fame had preceded him. He had already gained fame in India, where scores of cultured and critical people, after reading “Departmental Ditties,” “Plain Tales from the Hills,” and various other stories and verses, had stamped him for a genius.

Fortunately for everybody who reads, London interested and stimulated Mr. Kipling, and he settled down to writing. “The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot,” and his first novel, “The Light that Failed,” appeared in 1890 and 1891; then a collection of verse, “Life’s Handicap, being stories of Mine Own People,” was published simultaneously in London and New York City; then followed more verse, and so on through an unending series.

In 1891 Mr. Kipling met the young author Wolcott Balestier, at that time connected with a London publishing house. A strong attachment grew between the two, and several months after their first meeting they came to Mr. Balestier's Vermont home, where they collaborated on "The Naulahka: A Story of West and East," for which The Century paid the largest price ever given by an American magazine for a story. The following year Mr. Kipling married Mr. Balestier's sister in London and brought her to America.

The Balestiers were of an aristocratic New York family; the grandfather of Mrs. Kipling was J. M. Balestier, a prominent lawyer in New York City and Chicago, who died in 1888, leaving a fortune of about a million. Her maternal grandfather was E. Peshine Smith of Rochester, N. Y., a noted author and jurist, who was selected in 1871 by Secretary Hamilton Fish to go to Japan as the Mikado's adviser in international law. The ancestral home of the Balestiers was near Brattleboro', Vt., and here Mr. Kipling brought his bride. The young Englishman was so impressed by the Vermont scenery that he rented for a time the cottage on the "Bliss Farm," in which Steele Mackaye the playwright wrote the well known drama "Hazel Kirke."

The next spring Mr. Kipling purchased from his brother-in-law, Beatty Balestier, a tract of land about three miles north of Brattleboro', Vt., and on this erected a house at a cost of nearly $50,000, which he named "The Naulahka." This was his home during his sojourn in America. Here he wrote when in

the mood, and for recreation tramped abroad over the hills. His social duties at this period were not arduous, for to his home he refused admittance to all but tried friends. He made a study of the Yankee country dialect and character for "The Walking Delegate," and while "Captains Courageous," the story of New England fisher life, was before him he spent some time among the Gloucester fishermen with an acquaintance who had access to the household gods of these people.

He returned to England in August, 1896, and did not visit America again till 1899, when he came with his wife and three children for a limited time.

It is hardly fair to Mr. Kipling to call "American Notes" first impressions, for one reading them will readily see that the impressions are superficial, little thought being put upon the writing. They seem super-sarcastic, and would lead one to believe that Mr. Kipling is antagonistic to America in every respect. This, however, is not true. These "Notes" aroused much protest and severe criticism when they appeared in 1891, and are considered so far beneath Mr. Kipling's real work that they have been nearly suppressed and are rarely found in a list of his writings. Their very caustic style is of interest to a student and lover of Kipling, and for this reason the publishers believe them worthy of a good binding.

G. P. T.

I. AT THE GOLDEN GATE

"Serene, indifferent to fate,
Thou sittest at the Western Gate;
Thou seest the white seas fold their tents,
Oh, warder of two continents;
Thou drawest all things, small and great,
To thee, beside the Western Gate."

THIS is what Bret Harte has written of the great city of San Francisco, and for the past fortnight I have been wondering what made him do it.

There is neither serenity nor indifference to be found in these parts; and evil would it be for the continents whose wardship were intrusted to so reckless a guardian.

Behold me pitched neck-and-crop from twenty days of the high seas into the whirl of California, deprived of any guidance, and left to draw my own conclusions. Protect me from the wrath of an outraged community if these letters be ever read by American eyes! San Francisco is a mad city – inhabited for the most part by perfectly insane people, whose women are of a remarkable beauty.

When the "City of Pekin" steamed through the Golden Gate, I saw with great joy that the block-house which guarded the mouth of the "finest harbor in the world, sir," could be silenced by two

gunboats from Hong Kong with safety, comfort, and despatch. Also, there was not a single American vessel of war in the harbor.

This may sound bloodthirsty; but remember, I had come with a grievance upon me – the grievance of the pirated English books.

Then a reporter leaped aboard, and ere I could gasp held me in his toils. He pumped me exhaustively while I was getting ashore, demanding of all things in the world news about Indian journalism. It is an awful thing to enter a new land with a new lie on your lips. I spoke the truth to the evil-minded Custom House man who turned my most sacred raiment on a floor composed of stable refuse and pine splinters; but the reporter overwhelmed me not so much by his poignant audacity as his beautiful ignorance. I am sorry now that I did not tell him more lies as I passed into a city of three hundred thousand white men. Think of it! Three hundred thousand white men and women gathered in one spot, walking upon real pavements in front of plate-glass-windowed shops, and talking something that at first hearing was not very different from English. It was only when I had tangled myself up in a hopeless maze of small wooden houses, dust, street refuse, and children who played with empty kerosene tins, that I discovered the difference of speech.

"You want to go to the Palace Hotel?" said an affable youth on a dray. "What in hell are you doing here, then? This is about the lowest ward in the city. Go six blocks north to corner of Geary and Markey, then walk around till you strike corner of Gutter

and Sixteenth, and that brings you there."

I do not vouch for the literal accuracy of these directions, quoting but from a disordered memory.

"Amen," I said. "But who am I that I should strike the corners of such as you name? Peradventure they be gentlemen of repute, and might hit back. Bring it down to dots, my son."

I thought he would have smitten me, but he didn't. He explained that no one ever used the word "street," and that every one was supposed to know how the streets ran, for sometimes the names were upon the lamps and sometimes they weren't. Fortified with these directions, I proceeded till I found a mighty street, full of sumptuous buildings four and five stories high, but paved with rude cobblestones, after the fashion of the year 1.

Here a tram-car, without any visible means of support, slid stealthily behind me and nearly struck me in the back. This was the famous cable car of San Francisco, which runs by gripping an endless wire rope sunk in the ground, and of which I will tell you more anon. A hundred yards further there was a slight commotion in the street, a gathering together of three or four, something that glittered as it moved very swiftly. A ponderous Irish gentleman, with priest's cords in his hat and a small nickel-plated badge on his fat bosom, emerged from the knot supporting a Chinaman who had been stabbed in the eye and was bleeding like a pig. The by-standers went their ways, and the Chinaman, assisted by the policeman, his own. Of course this was none of my business, but I rather wanted to know what had happened

to the gentleman who had dealt the stab. It said a great deal for the excellence of the municipal arrangement of the town that a surging crowd did not at once block the street to see what was going forward. I was the sixth man and the last who assisted at the performance, and my curiosity was six times the greatest. Indeed, I felt ashamed of showing it.

There were no more incidents till I reached the Palace Hotel, a seven-storied warren of humanity with a thousand rooms in it. All the travel books will tell you about hotel arrangements in this country. They should be seen to be appreciated. Understand clearly – and this letter is written after a thousand miles of experiences – that money will not buy you service in the West. When the hotel clerk – the man who awards your room to you and who is supposed to give you information – when that resplendent individual stoops to attend to your wants he does so whistling or humming or picking his teeth, or pauses to converse with some one he knows. These performances, I gather, are to impress upon you that he is a free man and your equal. From his general appearance and the size of his diamonds he ought to be your superior. There is no necessity for this swaggering self-consciousness of freedom. Business is business, and the man who is paid to attend to a man might reasonably devote his whole attention to the job. Out of office hours he can take his coach and four and pervade society if he pleases.

In a vast marble-paved hall, under the glare of an electric light, sat forty or fifty men, and for their use and amusement

were provided spittoons of infinite capacity and generous gape. Most of the men wore frock-coats and top-hats – the things that we in India put on at a wedding-breakfast, if we possess them – but they all spat. They spat on principle. The spittoons were on the staircases, in each bedroom – yea, and in chambers even more sacred than these. They chased one into retirement, but they blossomed in chiefest splendor round the bar, and they were all used, every reeking one of them.

Just before I began to feel deathly sick another reporter grappled me. What he wanted to know was the precise area of India in square miles. I referred him to Whittaker. He had never heard of Whittaker. He wanted it from my own mouth, and I would not tell him. Then he swerved off, just like the other man, to details of journalism in our own country. I ventured to suggest that the interior economy of a paper most concerned the people who worked it.

"That's the very thing that interests us," he said. "Have you got reporters anything like our reporters on Indian newspapers?"

"We have not," I said, and suppressed the "thank God" rising to my lips.

"Why haven't you?" said he.

"Because they would die," I said.

It was exactly like talking to a child – a very rude little child. He would begin almost every sentence with, "Now tell me something about India," and would turn aimlessly from one question to the other without the least continuity. I was not angry,

but keenly interested. The man was a revelation to me. To his questions I returned answers mendacious and evasive. After all, it really did not matter what I said. He could not understand. I can only hope and pray that none of the readers of the "Pioneer" will ever see that portentous interview. The man made me out to be an idiot several sizes more drivelling than my destiny intended, and the rankness of his ignorance managed to distort the few poor facts with which I supplied him into large and elaborate lies. Then, thought I, "the matter of American journalism shall be looked into later on. At present I will enjoy myself."

No man rose to tell me what were the lions of the place. No one volunteered any sort of conveyance. I was absolutely alone in this big city of white folk. By instinct I sought refreshment, and came upon a barroom full of bad Salon pictures in which men with hats on the backs of their heads were wolfing food from a counter. It was the institution of the "free lunch" I had struck. You paid for a drink and got as much as you wanted to eat. For something less than a rupee a day a man can feed himself sumptuously in San Francisco, even though he be a bankrupt. Remember this if ever you are stranded in these parts.

Later I began a vast but unsystematic exploration of the streets. I asked for no names. It was enough that the pavements were full of white men and women, the streets clanging with traffic, and that the restful roar of a great city rang in my ears. The cable cars glided to all points of the compass at once. I took them one by one till I could go no further. San Francisco has been

pitched down on the sand bunkers of the Bikaneer desert. About one fourth of it is ground reclaimed from the sea – any old-timers will tell you all about that. The remainder is just ragged, unthrifty sand hills, to-day pegged down by houses.

From an English point of view there has not been the least attempt at grading those hills, and indeed you might as well try to grade the hillocks of Sind. The cable cars have for all practical purposes made San Francisco a dead level. They take no count of rise or fall, but slide equably on their appointed courses from one end to the other of a six-mile street. They turn corners almost at right angles, cross other lines, and for aught I know may run up the sides of houses. There is no visible agency of their flight, but once in awhile you shall pass a five-storied building humming with machinery that winds up an everlasting wire cable, and the initiated will tell you that here is the mechanism. I gave up asking questions. If it pleases Providence to make a car run up and down a slit in the ground for many miles, and if for twopence halfpenny I can ride in that car, why shall I seek the reasons of the miracle? Rather let me look out of the windows till the shops give place to thousands and thousands of little houses made of wood (to imitate stone), each house just big enough for a man and his family. Let me watch the people in the cars and try to find out in what manner they differ from us, their ancestors.

It grieves me now that I cursed them (in the matter of book piracy), because I perceived that my curse is working and that their speech is becoming a horror already. They delude

themselves into the belief that they talk English – the English – and I have already been pitied for speaking with "an English accent." The man who pitied me spoke, so far as I was concerned, the language of thieves. And they all do. Where we put the accent forward they throw it back, and vice versa where we give the long "a" they use the short, and words so simple as to be past mistaking they pronounce somewhere up in the dome of their heads. How do these things happen?

Oliver Wendell Holmes says that the Yankee school-marm, the cider and the salt codfish of the Eastern States, are responsible for what he calls a nasal accent. I know better. They stole books from across the water without paying for 'em, and the snort of delight was fixed in their nostrils forever by a just Providence. That is why they talk a foreign tongue to-day.

"Cats is dogs, and rabbits is dogs, and so's parrots. But this 'ere tortoise is an insect, so there ain't no charge," as the old porter said.

A Hindoo is a Hindoo and a brother to the man who knows his vernacular. And a Frenchman is French because he speaks his own language. But the American has no language. He is dialect, slang, provincialism, accent, and so forth. Now that I have heard their voices, all the beauty of Bret Harte is being ruined for me, because I find myself catching through the roll of his rhythmical prose the cadence of his peculiar fatherland. Get an American lady to read to you "How Santa Claus Came to Simpson's Bar," and see how much is, under her tongue, left of the beauty of the

original.

But I am sorry for Bret Harte. It happened this way. A reporter asked me what I thought of the city, and I made answer suavely that it was hallowed ground to me, because of Bret Harte. That was true.

"Well," said the reporter, "Bret Harte claims California, but California don't claim Bret Harte. He's been so long in England that he's quite English. Have you seen our cracker factories or the new offices of the 'Examiner'?"

He could not understand that to the outside world the city was worth a great deal less than the man. I never intended to curse the people with a provincialism so vast as this.

But let us return to our sheep – which means the sea-lions of the Cliff House. They are the great show of San Francisco. You take a train which pulls up the middle of the street (it killed two people the day before yesterday, being unbraked and driven absolutely regardless of consequences), and you pull up somewhere at the back of the city on the Pacific beach. Originally the cliffs and their approaches must have been pretty, but they have been so carefully defiled with advertisements that they are now one big blistered abomination. A hundred yards from the shore stood a big rock covered with the carcasses of the sleek sea-beasts, who roared and rolled and walloped in the spouting surges. No bold man had painted the creatures sky-blue or advertised newspapers on their backs, wherefore they did not match the landscape, which was chiefly hoarding. Some day,

perhaps, whatever sort of government may obtain in this country will make a restoration of the place and keep it clean and neat. At present the sovereign people, of whom I have heard so much already, are vending cherries and painting the virtues of "Little Bile Beans" all over it.

Night fell over the Pacific, and the white sea-fog whipped through the streets, dimming the splendors of the electric lights. It is the use of this city, her men and women folk, to parade between the hours of eight and ten a certain street called Cairn Street, where the finest shops are situated. Here the click of high heels on the pavement is loudest, here the lights are brightest, and here the thunder of the traffic is most overwhelming. I watched Young California, and saw that it was, at least, expensively dressed, cheerful in manner, and self-asserting in conversation. Also the women were very fair. Perhaps eighteen days aboard ship had something to do with my unreserved admiration. The maidens were of generous build, large, well groomed, and attired in raiment that even to my inexperienced eyes must have cost much. Cairn Street at nine o'clock levels all distinctions of rank as impartially as the grave. Again and again I loitered at the heels of a couple of resplendent beings, only to overhear, when I expected the level voice of culture, the staccato "Sez he," "Sez I" that is the mark of the white servant-girl all the world over.

This was depressing because, in spite of all that goes to the contrary, fine feathers ought to make fine birds. There was wealth – unlimited wealth – in the streets, but not an accent that

would not have been dear at fifty cents. Wherefore, revolving in my mind that these folk were barbarians, I was presently enlightened and made aware that they also were the heirs of all the ages, and civilized after all. There appeared before me an affable stranger of prepossessing appearance, with a blue and an innocent eye. Addressing me by name, he claimed to have met me in New York, at the Windsor, and to this claim I gave a qualified assent. I did not remember the fact, but since he was so certain of it, why, then – I waited developments.

"And what did you think of Indiana when you came through?" was the next question.

It revealed the mystery of previous acquaintance and one or two other things. With reprehensible carelessness my friend of the light-blue eye had looked up the name of his victim in the hotel register, and read "Indiana" for India.

The provincialism with which I had cursed his people extended to himself. He could not imagine an Englishman coming through the States from west to east instead of by the regularly ordained route. My fear was that in his delight in finding me so responsive he would make remarks about New York and the Windsor which I could not understand. And, indeed, he adventured in this direction once or twice, asking me what I thought of such and such streets, which from his tone I gathered to be anything but respectable. It is trying to talk unknown New York in almost unknown San Francisco. But my friend was merciful. He protested that I was one after his own

heart, and pressed upon me rare and curious drinks at more than one bar. These drinks I accepted with gratitude, as also the cigars with which his pockets were stored. He would show me the life of the city. Having no desire to watch a weary old play again, I evaded the offer and received in lieu of the devil's instruction much coarse flattery. Curiously constituted is the soul of man. Knowing how and where this man lied, waiting idly for the finale, I was distinctly conscious, as he bubbled compliments in my ear, of soft thrills of gratified pride stealing from hat-rim to boot-heels. I was wise, quoth he – anybody could see that with half an eye; sagacious, versed in the ways of the world, an acquaintance to be desired; one who had tasted the cup of life with discretion.

All this pleased me, and in a measure numbed the suspicion that was thoroughly aroused. Eventually the blue-eyed one discovered, nay, insisted, that I had a taste for cards (this was clumsily worked in, but it was my fault, for in that I met him half-way and allowed him no chance of good acting). Hereupon I laid my head upon one side and simulated unholy wisdom, quoting odds and ends of poker talk, all ludicrously misapplied. My friend kept his countenance admirably, and well he might, for five minutes later we arrived, always by the purest of chance, at a place where we could play cards and also frivol with Louisiana State Lottery tickets. Would I play?

"Nay," said I, "for to me cards have neither meaning nor continuity; but let us assume that I am going to play. How would you and your friends get to work? Would you play a straight

game, or make me drunk, or – well, the fact is, I'm a newspaper man, and I'd be much obliged if you'd let me know something about bunco steering."

My blue-eyed friend erected himself into an obelisk of profanity. He cursed me by his gods – the right and left bower; he even cursed the very good cigars he had given me. But, the storm over, he quieted down and explained. I apologized for causing him to waste an evening, and we spent a very pleasant time together.

Inaccuracy, provincialism, and a too hasty rushing to conclusions, were the rocks that he had split on, but he got his revenge when he said: – "How would I play with you? From all the poppycock Anglice bosh you talked about poker, I'd ha' played a straight game, and skinned you. I wouldn't have taken the trouble to make you drunk. You never knew anything of the game, but how I was mistaken in going to work on you, makes me sick."

He glared at me as though I had done him an injury. To-day I know how it is that year after year, week after week, the bunco steerer, who is the confidence trick and the card-sharper man of other climes, secures his prey. He clavers them over with flattery as the snake clavers the rabbit. The incident depressed me because it showed I had left the innocent East far behind and was come to a country where a man must look out for himself. The very hotels bristled with notices about keeping my door locked and depositing my valuables in a safe. The white man in a lump

is bad. Weeping softly for O-Toyo (little I knew then that my heart was to be torn afresh from my bosom) I fell asleep in the clanging hotel.

Next morning I had entered upon the deferred inheritance. There are no princes in America – at least with crowns on their heads – but a generous-minded member of some royal family received my letter of introduction. Ere the day closed I was a member of the two clubs, and booked for many engagements to dinner and party. Now, this prince, upon whose financial operations be continual increase, had no reason, nor had the others, his friends, to put himself out for the sake of one Briton more or less, but he rested not till he had accomplished all in my behalf that a mother could think of for her debutante daughter.

Do you know the Bohemian Club of San Francisco? They say its fame extends over the world. It was created, somewhat on the lines of the Savage, by men who wrote or drew things, and has blossomed into most unrepublican luxury. The ruler of the place is an owl – an owl standing upon a skull and cross-bones, showing forth grimly the wisdom of the man of letters and the end of his hopes for immortality. The owl stands on the staircase, a statue four feet high; is carved in the wood-work, flutters on the frescoed ceiling, is stamped on the note-paper, and hangs on the walls. He is an ancient and honorable bird. Under his wing 'twas my privilege to meet with white men whose lives were not chained down to routine of toil, who wrote magazine articles instead of reading them hurriedly in the pauses of office-

work, who painted pictures instead of contenting themselves with cheap etchings picked up at another man's sale of effects. Mine were all the rights of social intercourse, craft by craft, that India, stony-hearted step-mother of collectors, has swindled us out of. Treading soft carpets and breathing the incense of superior cigars, I wandered from room to room studying the paintings in which the members of the club had caricatured themselves, their associates, and their aims. There was a slick French audacity about the workmanship of these men of toil unbending that went straight to the heart of the beholder. And yet it was not altogether French. A dry grimness of treatment, almost Dutch, marked the difference. The men painted as they spoke – with certainty. The club indulges in revelries which it calls "jinks" – high and low, at intervals – and each of these gatherings is faithfully portrayed in oils by hands that know their business. In this club were no amateurs spoiling canvas, because they fancied they could handle oils without knowledge of shadows or anatomy – no gentleman of leisure ruining the temper of publishers and an already ruined market with attempts to write "because everybody writes something these days."

My hosts were working, or had worked for their daily bread with pen or paint, and their talk for the most part was of the shop – shoppy – that is to say, delightful. They extended a large hand of welcome, and were as brethren, and I did homage to the owl and listened to their talk. An Indian club about Christmas-time will yield, if properly worked, an abundant harvest of queer

tales; but at a gathering of Americans from the uttermost ends of their own continent, the tales are larger, thicker, more spinous, and even more azure than any Indian variety. Tales of the war I heard told by an ex-officer of the South over his evening drink to a colonel of the Northern army, my introducer, who had served as a trooper in the Northern Horse, throwing in emendations from time to time. "Tales of the Law," which in this country is an amazingly elastic affair, followed from the lips of a judge. Forgive me for recording one tale that struck me as new. It may interest the up-country Bar in India.

Once upon a time there was Samuelson, a young lawyer, who feared not God, neither regarded the Bench. (Name, age, and town of the man were given at great length.) To him no case had ever come as a client, partly because he lived in a district where lynch law prevailed, and partly because the most desperate prisoner shrunk from intrusting himself to the mercies of a phenomenal stammerer. But in time there happened an aggravated murder – so bad, indeed, that by common consent the citizens decided, as a prelude to lynching, to give the real law a chance. They could, in fact, gambol round that murder. They met – the court in its shirt-sleeves – and against the raw square of the Court House window a temptingly suggestive branch of a tree fretted the sky. No one appeared for the prisoner, and, partly in jest, the court advised young Samuelson to take up the case.

"The prisoner is undefended, Sam," said the court. "The square thing to do would be for you to take him aside and do the

best you can for him."

Court, jury, and witness then adjourned to the veranda, while Samuelson led his client aside to the Court House cells. An hour passed ere the lawyer returned alone. Mutely the audience questioned.

"May it p-p-please the c-court," said Samuel-son, "my client's case is a b-b-b-bad one – a d-d-amn bad one. You told me to do the b-b-best I c-could for him, judge, so I've jest given him y-your b-b-bay gelding, an' told him to light out for healthier c-climes, my p-p-professional opinion being he'd be hanged quicker'n h-h-hades if he dallied here. B-by this time my client's 'bout fifteen mile out yonder somewheres. That was the b-b-best I could do for him, may it p-p-please the court."

The young man, escaping punishment in lieu of the prisoner, made his fortune ere five years.

Other voices followed, with equally wondrous tales of riata-throwing in Mexico and Arizona, of gambling at army posts in Texas, of newspaper wars waged in godless Chicago (I could not help being interested, but they were not pretty tricks), of deaths sudden and violent in Montana and Dakota, of the loves of half-breed maidens in the South, and fantastic huntings for gold in mysterious Alaska. Above all, they told the story of the building of old San Francisco, when the "finest collection of humanity on God's earth, sir, started this town, and the water came up to the foot of Market Street." Very terrible were some of the tales, grimly humorous the others, and the men in broadcloth and fine

linen who told them had played their parts in them.

"And now and again when things got too bad they would toll the city bell, and the Vigilance Committee turned out and hanged the suspicious characters. A man didn't begin to be suspected in those days till he had committed at least one unprovoked murder," said a calm-eyed, portly old gentleman.

I looked at the pictures around me, the noiseless, neat-uniformed waiter behind me, the oak-ribbed ceiling above, the velvet carpet beneath. It was hard to realize that even twenty years ago you could see a man hanged with great pomp. Later on I found reason to change my opinion. The tales gave me a headache and set me thinking. How in the world was it possible to take in even one thousandth of this huge, roaring, many-sided continent? In the tobacco-scented silence of the sumptuous library lay Professor Bryce's book on the American Republic.

"It is an omen," said I. "He has done all things in all seriousness, and he may be purchased for half a guinea. Those who desire information of the most undoubted, must refer to his pages. For me is the daily round of vagabondage, the recording of the incidents of the hour and intercourse with the travelling-companion of the day. I will not 'do' this country at all."

And I forgot all about India for ten days while I went out to dinners and watched the social customs of the people, which are entirely different from our customs, and was introduced to men of many millions. These persons are harmless in their earlier stages – that is to say, a man worth three or four million dollars

may be a good talker, clever, amusing, and of the world; a man with twice that amount is to be avoided, and a twenty million man is – just twenty millions. Take an instance. I was speaking to a newspaper man about seeing the proprietor of his journal, as in my innocence I supposed newspaper men occasionally did. My friend snorted indignantly: – "See him! Great Scott! No. If he happens to appear in the office, I have to associate with him; but, thank Heaven! outside of that I move in circles where he cannot come."

And yet the first thing I have been taught to believe is that money was everything in America!

II. AMERICAN POLITICS

I HAVE been watching machinery in repose after reading about machinery in action.

An excellent gentleman, who bears a name honored in the magazine, writes, much as Disraeli orated, of "the sublime instincts of an ancient people," the certainty with which they can be trusted to manage their own affairs in their own way, and the speed with which they are making for all sorts of desirable goals. This he called a statement or purview of American politics.

I went almost directly afterward to a saloon where gentlemen interested in ward politics nightly congregate. They were not pretty persons. Some of them were bloated, and they all swore cheerfully till the heavy gold watch-chains on their fat stomachs rose and fell again; but they talked over their liquor as men who had power and unquestioned access to places of trust and profit.

The magazine writer discussed theories of government; these men the practice. They had been there. They knew all about it. They banged their fists on the table and spoke of political "pulls," the vending of votes, and so forth. Theirs was not the talk of village babblers reconstructing the affairs of the nation, but of strong, coarse, lustful men fighting for spoil, and thoroughly understanding the best methods of reaching it.

I listened long and intently to speech I could not understand – or but in spots.

It was the speech of business, however. I had sense enough to know that, and to do my laughing outside the door.

Then I began to understand why my pleasant and well-educated hosts in San Francisco spoke with a bitter scorn of such duties of citizenship as voting and taking an interest in the distribution of offices. Scores of men have told me, without false pride, that they would as soon concern themselves with the public affairs of the city or state as rake muck with a steam-shovel. It may be that their lofty disdain covers selfishness, but I should be very sorry habitually to meet the fat gentlemen with shiny top-hats and plump cigars in whose society I have been spending the evening.

Read about politics as the cultured writer of the magazine regards 'em, and then, and not till then, pay your respects to the gentlemen who run the grimy reality.

I'm sick of interviewing night editors who lean their chair against the wall, and, in response to my demand for the record of a prominent citizen, answer: "Well, you see, he began by keeping a saloon," etc. I prefer to believe that my informants are treating me as in the old sinful days in India I was used to treat the wandering globe-trotter. They declare that they speak the truth, and the news of dog politics lately vouchsafed to me in groggeries inclines me to believe, but I won't. The people are much too nice to slangander as recklessly as I have been doing.

Besides, I am hopelessly in love with about eight American maidens – all perfectly delightful till the next one comes into the

room.

O-Toyo was a darling, but she lacked several things – conversation for one. You cannot live on giggles. She shall remain unmarried at Nagasaki, while I roast a battered heart before the shrine of a big Kentucky blonde, who had for a nurse when she was little a negro “mammy.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.