



AMERICAN NOTES

RUDYARD KIPLING

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BY
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American Notes By Rudyard Kipling.

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plank in the platform, but on the other hand deal lightly with certain forms of excess; keep the quality of the recruit down to the low mental level, and see that the best of all the agricultural science available is in the hands of the elders, and there you have a first-class engine for pioneer work. The tawdry mysticism and the borrowing from Freemasonry serve the low caste Swede and Dane, the Welshman and the Cornish cotter, just as well as a highly organized heaven.

Then I went about the streets and peeped into people's front windows, and the decorations upon the tables were after the manner of the year 1850. Main Street was full of country folk from the desert, come in to trade with the Zion Mercantile Co-operative Institute. The Church, I fancy, looks after the finances of this thing, and it consequently pays good dividends.

The faces of the women were not lovely. In-deed, but for the certainty that ugly persons are just as irrational in the matter of undivided love as the beautiful, it seems that polygamy was a blessed institution for the women, and that only the dread threats of the spiritual power could drive the hulking, board-faced men into it. The women wore hideous garments, and the men appeared to be tied up with strings.

They would market all that afternoon, and on Sunday go to the praying-place. I tried to talk to a few of them, but they spoke strange tongues, and stared and behaved like cows. Yet one woman, and not an altogether ugly one, confided to me that she hated the idea of Salt Lake City being turned into a show-place for the amusement of the Gentiles.

"If we 'have our own institutions, that ain't no reason why people should come 'ere and stare at us, his it?"

The dropped "h" betrayed her.

"And when did you leave England?" I said.

"Summer of '84. I am Dorset," she said. "The Mormon agent was very good to us, and we was very poor. Now we're better off—my father, an' mother, an' me."

"Then you like the State?"

She misunderstood at first.

"Oh, I ain't livin' in the state of polygamy. Not me, yet. I ain't married. I like where I am. I've got things o' my own—and some land."

"But I suppose you will—"

"Not me. I ain't like them Swedes an' Danes. I ain't got nothin' to say for or against polygamy. It's the elders' business, an' between you an' me, I don't think it's going on much longer. You'll 'ear them in the 'ouse to-morrer talkin' as if it was spreadin' all over America. The Swedes, they think it his. I know it hisn't."

"But you've got your land all right?"

"Oh, yes; we've got our land, an' we never say aught against polygamy, o' course—father, an' mother, an' me."

On a table-land overlooking all the city stands the United States garrison of infantry and artillery. The State of Utah can do nearly anything it pleases until that much-to-be-desired hour when the Gentile vote shall quietly swamp out Mormonism; but the garrison is kept there in case of accidents. The big, shark-mouthed, pig-eared, heavy-boned farmers sometimes take to their creed with wildest fanaticism, and in past years have made life excessively unpleasant for the Gentile when he was few in the land. But to-day, so far from killing openly or secretly, or burning Gentile farms, it is all the Mormon dare do to feebly try to boycott the interloper. His journals preach defiance to the United States Government, and in the Tabernacle on a Sunday the preachers follow suit.

When I went there, the place was full of people who would have been much better for a washing.

A man rose up and told them that they were the chosen of God, the elect of Israel; that they were to obey their priests, and that there was a good time coming.

I fancy that they had heard all this before so many times it produced no impression whatever, even as the sublimest mysteries of another faith lose

salt through constant iteration. They breathed heavily through their noses, and stared straight in front of them—impassive as flat fish.

7. AMERICA'S DEFENCELESS COASTS

JUST suppose that America were twenty days distant from England. Then a man could study its customs with undivided soul; but being so very near next door, he goes about the land with one eye on the smoke of the flesh-pots of the old country across the seas, while with the other he squints biliously and prejudicially at the alien.

I can lay my hand upon my sacred heart and affirm that up to to-day I have never taken three consecutive trips by rail without being delayed by an accident. That it was an accident to another train makes no difference. My own turn may come next.

A few miles from peaceful, pleasure-loving Lakewood they had managed to upset an express goods train to the detriment of the flimsy permanent way; and thus the train which should have left at three departed at seven in the evening. I was not angry. I was scarcely even interested. When an American train starts on time I begin to anticipate disaster—a visitation for such good luck, you understand.

Buffalo is a large village of a quarter of a million inhabitants, situated on the seashore, which is falsely called Lake Erie. It is a peaceful place, and more like an English county town than most of its friends.

Once clear of the main business streets, you launch upon miles and miles of asphalted roads running between cottages and cut-stone residences of those who have money and peace. All the Eastern cities own this fringe of elegance, but except in Chicago nowhere is the fringe deeper or more heavily widened than in Buffalo.

The American will go to a bad place because he cannot speak English, and is proud of it; but he knows how to make a home for himself and his mate, knows how to keep the grass green in front of his veranda, and how to fullest use the mechanism of life—hot water, gas, good bell-ropes, telephones, etc. His shops sell him delightful household fitments at very moderate rates, and he is encompassed with all manner of labor-saving

appliances. This does not prevent his wife and his daughter working themselves to death over household drudgery; but the intention is good.

When you have seen the outside of a few hundred thousand of these homes and the insides of a few score, you begin to understand why the American (the respectable one) does not take a deep interest in what they call "politics," and why he is so vaguely and generally proud of the country that enables him to be so comfortable. How can the owner of a dainty chalet, with smoked-oak furniture, imitation Venetian tapestry curtains, hot and cold water laid on, a bed of geraniums and hollyhocks, a baby crawling down the veranda, and a self-acting twirly-whirly hose gently hissing over the grass in the balmy dusk of an August evening—how can such a man despair of the Republic, or descend into the streets on voting days and mix cheerfully with "the boys"?

No, it is the stranger—the homeless jackal of a stranger—whose interest in the country is limited to his hotel-bill and a railway-ticket, that can run from Dan to Beersheba, crying:—"All is barren!"

Every good American wants a home—a pretty house and a little piece of land of his very own; and every other good American seems to get it.

It was when my gigantic intellect was grappling with this question that I confirmed a discovery half made in the West. The natives of most classes marry young—absurdly young. One of my informants—not the twenty-two-year-old husband I met on Lake Chautauqua—said that from twenty to twenty-four was about the usual time for this folly. And when I asked whether the practice was confined to the constitutionally improvident classes, he said "No" very quickly. He said it was a general custom, and nobody saw anything wrong with it.

"I guess, perhaps, very early marriage may account for a good deal of the divorce," said he, reflectively.

Whereat I was silent. Their marriages and their divorces only concern these people; and neither I travelling, nor you, who may come after, have any right to make rude remarks about them. Only—only coming from a land where a man begins to lightly turn to thoughts of love not before he is thirty, I own

that playing at house-keeping before that age rather surprised me. Out in the West, though, they marry, boys and girls, from sixteen upward, and I have met more than one bride of fifteen—husband aged twenty.

"When man and woman are agreed, what can the Kazi do?"

From those peaceful homes, and the envy they inspire (two trunks and a walking-stick and a bit of pine forest in British Columbia are not satisfactory, any way you look at them), I turned me to the lake front of Buffalo, where the steamers bellow to the grain elevators, and the locomotives yell to the coal-shutes, and the canal barges jostle the lumber-raft half a mile long as it snakes across the water in tow of a launch, and earth, and sky, and sea alike are thick with smoke.

In the old days, before the railway ran into the city, all the business quarters fringed the lake-shore where the traffic was largest. To-day the business quarters have gone up-town to meet the railroad; the lake traffic still exists, but you shall find a narrow belt of red-brick desolation, broken windows, gap-toothed doors, and streets where the grass grows between the crowded wharves and the bustling city. To the lake front comes wheat from Chicago, lumber, coal, and ore, and a large trade in cheap excursionists.

It was my felicity to catch a grain steamer and an elevator emptying that same steamer. The steamer might have been two thousand tons burden. She was laden with wheat in bulk; from stem to stern, thirteen feet deep, lay the clean, red wheat. There was no twenty-five per cent dirt admixture about it at all. It was wheat, fit for the grindstones as it lay. They manoeuvred the fore-hatch of that steamer directly under an elevator—a house of red tin a hundred and fifty feet high. Then they let down into that fore-hatch a trunk as if it had been the trunk of an elephant, but stiff, because it was a pipe of iron-champed wood. And the trunk had a steel-shod nose to it, and contained an endless chain of steel buckets.

Then the captain swore, raising his eyes to heaven, and a gruff voice answered him from the place he swore at, and certain machinery, also in the firmament, began to clack, and the glittering, steel-shod nose of that trunk burrowed into the wheat, and the wheat quivered and sunk upon the instant as water sinks when the siphon sucks, because the steel buckets

within the trunk were flying upon their endless round, carrying away each its appointed morsel of wheat.

The elevator was a Persian well wheel—a wheel squashed out thin and cased in a pipe, a wheel driven not by bullocks, but by much horse-power, licking up the grain at the rate of thousands of bushels the hour. And the wheat sunk into the fore-hatch while a man looked—sunk till the brown timbers of the bulkheads showed bare, and men leaped down through clouds of golden dust and shovelled the wheat furiously round the nose of the trunk, and got a steam-shovel of glittering steel and made that shovel also, till there remained of the grain not more than a horse leaves in the fold of his nose-bag.

In this manner do they handle wheat at Buffalo. On one side of the elevator is the steamer, on the other the railway track; and the wheat is loaded into the cars in bulk. Wah! wah! God is great, and I do not think He ever intended Gar Sahai or Luckman Narain to supply England with her wheat. India can cut in not without profit to herself when her harvest is good and the American yield poor; but this very big country can, upon the average, supply the earth with all the beef and bread that is required.

A man in the train said to me:—"We kin feed all the earth, jest as easily as we kin whip all the earth."

Now the second statement is as false as the first is true. One of these days the respectable Republic will find this out.

Unfortunately we, the English, will never be the people to teach her; because she is a chartered libertine allowed to say and do anything she likes, from demanding the head of the empress in an editorial waste-basket, to cheying Canadian schooners up and down the Alaska Seas. It is perfectly impossible to go to war with these people, whatever they may do.

They are much too nice, in the first place, and in the second, it would throw out all the passenger traffic of the Atlantic, and upset the financial arrangements of the English syndicates who have invested their money in breweries, railways, and the like, and in the third, it's not to be done. Everybody knows that, and no one better than the American.

Yet there are other powers who are not "ohai band" (of the brotherhood)—China, for instance. Try to believe an irresponsible writer when he assures you that China's fleet to-day, if properly manned, could waft the entire American navy out of the water and into the blue. The big, fat Republic that is afraid of nothing, because nothing up to the present date has happened to make her afraid, is as unprotected as a jelly-fish. Not internally, of course—it would be madness for any Power to throw men into America; they would die—but as far as regards coast defence.

From five miles out at sea (I have seen a test of her "fortified" ports) a ship of the power of H. M. S. "Collingwood" (they haven't run her on a rock yet) would wipe out any or every town from San Francisco to Long Branch; and three first-class ironclads would account for New York, Bartholdi's Statue and all.

Reflect on this. 'Twould be "Pay up or go up" round the entire coast of the United States. To this furiously answers the patriotic American:—"We should not pay. We should invent a Columbiad in Pittsburg or—or anywhere else, and blow any outsider into h—I."

They might invent. They might lay waste their cities and retire inland, for they can subsist entirely on their own produce. Meantime, in a war waged the only way it could be waged by an unscrupulous Power, their coast cities and their dock-yards would be ashes. They could construct their navy inland if they liked, but you could never bring a ship down to the water-ways, as they stand now.

They could not, with an ordinary water patrol, despatch one regiment of men six miles across the seas. There would be about five million excessively angry, armed men pent up within American limits. These men would require ships to get themselves afloat. The country has no such ships, and until the ships were built New York need not be allowed a single-wheeled carriage within her limits.

Behold now the glorious condition of this Republic which has no fear. There is ransom and loot past the counting of man on her seaboard alone—plunder that would enrich a nation—and she has neither a navy nor half a dozen first-class ports to guard the whole. No man catches a snake by the

tail, because the creature will sting; but you can build a fire around a snake that will make it squirm.

The country is supposed to be building a navy now. When the ships are completed her alliance will be worth having—if the alliance of any republic can be relied upon. For the next three years she can be hurt, and badly hurt. Pity it is that she is of our own blood, looking at the matter from a Pindarris point of view. Dog cannot eat dog.

These sinful reflections were prompted by the sight of the beautifully unprotected condition of Buffalo—a city that could be made to pay up five million dollars without feeling it. There are her companies of infantry in a sort of port there. A gun-boat brought over in pieces from Niagara could get the money and get away before she could be caught, while an unarmored gun-boat guarding Toronto could ravage the towns on the lakes. When one hears so much of the nation that can whip the earth, it is, to say the least of it, surprising to find her so temptingly spankable.

The average American citizen seems to have a notion that any Power engaged in strife with the Star Spangled Banner will disembark men from flat-bottomed boats on a convenient beach for the purpose of being shot down by local militia. In his own simple phraseology:—"Not by a darned sight. No, sir."

Ransom at long range will be about the size of it—cash or crash.

Let us revisit calmer scenes.

In the heart of Buffalo there stands a magnificent building which the population do innocently style a music-hall. Everybody comes here of evenings to sit around little tables and listen to a first-class orchestra. The place is something like the Gaiety Theatre at Simla, enlarged twenty times. The "Light Brigade" of Buffalo occupy the boxes and the stage, "as it was at Simla in the days of old," and the others sit in the parquet. Here I went with a friend—poor or boor is the man who cannot pick up a friend for a season in America—and here was shown the really smart folk of the city. I grieve to say I laughed, because when an American wishes to be correct he sets

himself to imitate the Englishman. This he does vilely, and earns not only the contempt of his brethren, but the amused scorn of the Briton.

I saw one man who was pointed out to me as being the glass of fashion hereabouts. He was aggressively English in his get-up. From eye-glass to trouser-hem the illusion was perfect, but—he wore with evening-dress buttoned boots with brown cloth tops! Not till I wandered about this land did I understand why the comic papers belabor the Anglomaniac.

Certain young men of the more idiotic sort launch into dog-carts and raiment of English cut, and here in Buffalo they play polo at four in the afternoon. I saw three youths come down to the polo-ground faultlessly attired for the game and mounted on their best ponies. Expecting a game, I lingered; but I was mistaken. These three shining ones with the very new yellow hide boots and the red silk sashes had assembled themselves for the purpose of knocking the ball about. They smote with great solemnity up and down the grounds, while the little boys looked on. When they trotted, which was not seldom, they rose and sunk in their stirrups with a conscientiousness that cried out "Riding-school!" from afar.

Other young men in the park were riding after the English manner, in neatly cut riding-trousers and light saddles. Fate in derision had made each youth bedizen his animal with a checkered enamelled leather brow-band visible half a mile away—a black-and-white checkered brow-band! They can't do it, any more than an Englishman, by taking cold, can add that indescribable nasal twang to his orchestra.

The other sight of the evening was a horror. The little tragedy played itself out at a neighboring table where two very young men and two very young women were sitting. It did not strike me till far into the evening that the pimply young reprobates were making the girls drunk. They gave them red wine and then white, and the voices rose slightly with the maidens' cheek flushes. I watched, wishing to stay, and the youths drank till their speech thickened and their eye-balls grew watery. It was sickening to see, because I knew what was going to happen. My friend eyed the group, and said:—"Maybe they're children of respectable people. I hardly think, though, they'd be allowed out without any better escort than these boys. And yet

the place is a place where every one comes, as you see. They may be Little Immoralities—in which case they wouldn't be so hopelessly overcome with two glasses of wine. They may be—"

Whatever they were they got indubitably drunk—there in that lovely hall, surrounded by the best of Buffalo society. One could do nothing except invoke the judgment of Heaven on the two boys, themselves half sick with liquor. At the close of the performance the quieter maiden laughed vacantly and protested she couldn't keep her feet. The four linked arms, and staggering, flickered out into the street—drunk, gentlemen and ladies, as Davy's swine, drunk as lords! They disappeared down a side avenue, but I could hear their laughter long after they were out of sight.

And they were all four children of sixteen and seventeen. Then, recanting previous opinions, I became a prohibitionist. Better it is that a man should go without his beer in public places, and content himself with swearing at the narrow-mindedness of the majority; better it is to poison the inside with very vile temperance drinks, and to buy lager furtively at back-doors, than to bring temptation to the lips of young fools such as the four I had seen. I understand now why the preachers rage against drink. I have said: "There is no harm in it, taken moderately;" and yet my own demand for beer helped directly to send those two girls reeling down the dark street to—God alone knows what end.

If liquor is worth drinking, it is worth taking a little trouble to come at—such trouble as a man will undergo to compass his own desires. It is not good that we should let it lie before the eyes of children, and I have been a fool in writing to the contrary. Very sorry for myself, I sought a hotel, and found in the hall a reporter who wished to know what I thought of the country. Him I lured into conversation about his own profession, and from him gained much that confirmed me in my views of the grinding tyranny of that thing which they call the Press here. Thus:—I—But you talk about interviewing people whether they like it or not. Have you no bounds beyond which even your indecent curiosity must not go?

HE—I haven't struck 'em yet. What do you think of interviewing a widow two hours after her husband's death, to get her version of his life?

I—I think that is the work of a ghoul. Must the people have no privacy?

HE—There is no domestic privacy in America. If there was, what the deuce would the papers do? See here. Some time ago I had an assignment to write up the floral tributes when a prominent citizen had died.

I—Translate, please; I do not understand your pagan rites and ceremonies.

HE—I was ordered by the office to describe the flowers, and wreaths, and so on, that had been sent to a dead man's funeral. Well, I went to the house. There was no one there to stop me, so I yanked the tinkler—pulled the bell—and drifted into the room where the corpse lay all among the roses and smilax. I whipped out my note-book and pawed around among the floral tributes, turn-ing up the tickets on the wreaths and seeing who had sent them. In the middle of this I heard some one saying: "Please, oh, please!" behind me, and there stood the daughter of the house, just bathed in tears—I—You unmitigated brute!

HE—Pretty much what I felt myself. "I'm very sorry, miss," I said, "to intrude on the privacy of your grief. Trust me, I shall make it as little painful as possible."

I—But by what conceivable right did you outrage—HE—Hold your horses. I'm telling you. Well, she didn't want me in the house at all, and between her sobs fairly waved me away. I had half the tributes described, though, and the balance I did partly on the steps when the stiff 'un came out, and partly in the church. The preacher gave the sermon. That wasn't my assignment. I skipped about among the floral tributes while he was talking. I could have made no excuse if I had gone back to the office and said that a pretty girl's sobs had stopped me obeying orders. I had to do it. What do you think of it all?

I (slowly)—Do you want to know?

HE (with his note-book ready)—Of course. How do you regard it?

I—It makes me regard your interesting nation with the same shuddering curiosity that I should bestow on a Pappan cannibal chewing the scalp off his mother's skull. Does that convey any idea to your mind? It makes me

regard the whole pack of you as heathens—real heathens—not the sort you send missions to—creatures of another flesh and blood. You ought to have been shot, not dead, but through the stomach, for your share in the scandalous business, and the thing you call your newspaper ought to have been sacked by the mob, and the managing proprietor hanged.

HE—From which, I suppose you have nothing of that kind in your country?

Oh! "Pioneer," venerable "Pioneer," and you not less honest press of India, who are occasionally dull but never blackguardly, what could I say? A mere "No," shouted never so loudly, would not have met the needs of the case. I said no word.

The reporter went away, and I took a train for Niagara Falls, which are twenty-two miles distant from this bad town, where girls get drunk of nights and reporters trample on corpses in the drawing-rooms of the brave and the free!
