

**AMERICAN SOUNDINGS: BEING  
CASTINGS OF THE LEAD IN  
SHORE-WATERS OF AMERICA,  
SOCIAL, LITERARY AND  
PHILOSOPHIC**

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American soundings: being castings of the lead in shore-waters of America, social, literary and philosophic by John St. Loe Strachey

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**JOHN ST. LOE STRACHEY**

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AMERICAN SOUNDINGS

BOOKS BY  
JOHN ST. LOE STRACHEY



The River of Life  
The Adventure of Living  
Economics of the Hour  
American Soundings

HODDER AND  
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## DEDICATION

TO MY AMERICAN HOSTS AND HOSTESSES  
IN NEW YORK, IN WASHINGTON, IN BOS-  
TON, IN PHILADELPHIA, IN SWARTHMORE,  
IN VIRGINIA, IN YALE, IN GROTON, IN  
READVILLE AND ON THE SUSQUEHANNA  
TRAIL

I HAVE debated long and often what is the secret of American hospitality. What makes it at once so generous and so gracious, so overwhelming and so delicate, so ample and yet so intimate, so spacious and yet so kindly? No one would ever think that it was given in expectation of reciprocal hospitality on some coming visit to England. There is not a touch of the feeling commemorated in the Victorian saying that in London Society people should get "cutlet for cutlet."

I have no ground for imagining that the hospitality was due to some mistake in my personal value, or to a belief that I was a much more

distinguished person than I am, or than people are accustomed to think of me at home. Even in the intoxicating air of America I realized that I was very far indeed from being "the only pebble on the beach."

Then, as such things will, there came to me a sudden revelation—a sudden solution of the mystery. I realized that the ardour of American hospitality comes from the desire not to boast or to show off, or to get that sinister satisfaction which meaner spirits find in surprising or over-balancing people by over-praising or over-petting. What I had discovered was the possession by my entertainers of that simple and lovable trait which comes specially to eager, active and unself-conscious people—the desire to share their pleasures and delights with others—the joy that children and indeed all super-active-minded people take in going halves with others and especially with people who for some reason or other do not seem to be by nature glad, or optimistic, or imaginative. In an impulsive man or woman "I want to show you this" means not "I want to show off," but "I want to share."

I can best set forth what I mean by quoting from a delightful poem by the author of "Ionica." In "An Invocation" a modern Englishman

addresses an ancient Greek and begs to show him the new worlds of the mind and all their glories.

“ As when ancestral portraits look gravely from the walls  
Upon the youthful baron who treads their echoing halls,  
And whilst he builds new turrets, the thrice ennobled heir  
Would gladly wake his grandsire his home and feast to share ;  
So from Ægean laurels that hide thine ancient urn  
I fain would call thee hither, my sweeter lore to learn.”

Here was the position clear enough. I was the ancestral portrait. It was I who was being called down by the youthful baron to share in his joys and enthusiasms. He was going to exhibit before my eyes his “ new turrets ”—vast and splendid buildings soaring heavenwards above and anchored to the living rocks below. I was the grandsire reanimated to share the home and the feast. I was to learn his sweeter lore and to enjoy it with him. Indeed, that sharing and that enjoying made up more than half the joy to him.

With the alteration of a couple of words, the last lines of this exquisite piece of virtuosity, scholarship and psychology fit the situation:

“ Or in thy beechen prison thou waitest for the bee :  
Ah, leave that simple honey and take thy food from me.  
My sun is stooping westward. Entranced dreamer, haste ;  
There's fruitage in my garden that I would have thee taste.  
Now lift the stone a moment ; now, English shepherd, come ;  
Two souls shall flow together, one clear-voiced and one dumb.”