

# **AMERICAN NOTES**

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American notes by Rudyard Kipling

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**RUDYARD KIPLING**

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## NOTE.

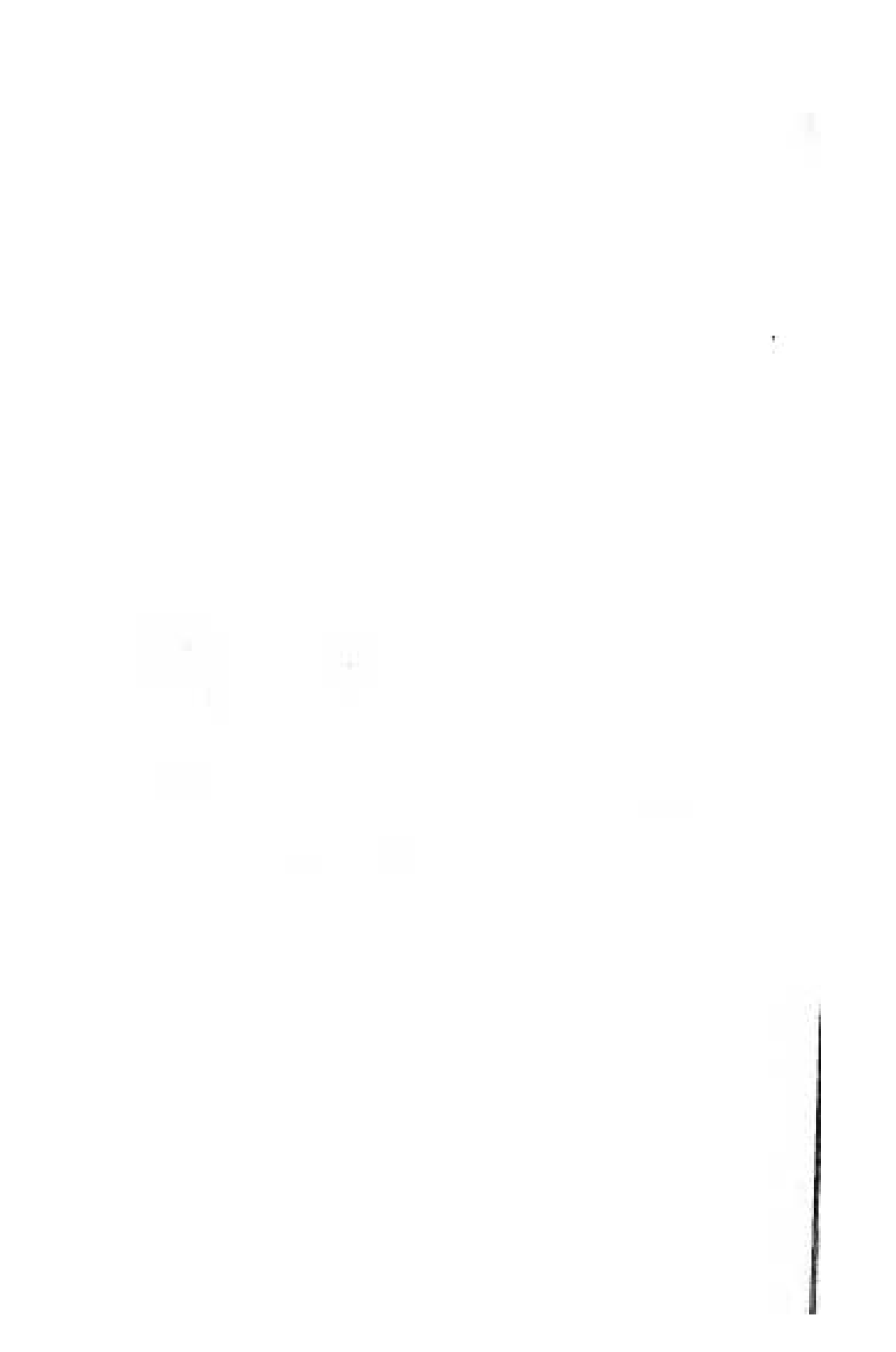
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THE following letters were written by Mr. Kipling in 1889, while on a trip from India to England by way of the United States.

They were published as special correspondence in the *Pioneer* of India at the time.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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## AMERICAN NOTES.

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### I.

" Then spoke der Captain Stossenheim  
Who had theories of God,  
' Oh, Breitmann, this is judgment on  
Der ways dot you have trod.  
You only lifs to enjoy yourself  
While you yourself agree  
Dot self-development requires  
Der religious Idee.' "

THIS is America.

They call her the *City of Peking*, and she belongs to the Pacific Mail Company, but for all practical purposes she is the United States.

We are divided between missionaries and generals—generals who were at Vicksburg and Shiloh, and German by birth, but more American than the Americans, who in confidence tell you that they are not generals at all, but only brevet majors of militia corps. The missionaries are perhaps the queerest portion of the cargo. Did you ever hear an English minister lecture for half an hour on the freight-traffic receipts and general working



of, let us say, the Midland? The Professor has been sitting at the feet of a keen-eyed, close-bearded, swarthy man who expounded unto him kindred mysteries with a fluency and precision that a city leader-writer might have envied. "Who's your financial friend with the figures at his fingers' ends?" I asked. "Missionary—Presbyterian Mission to the Japs," said the Professor. I laid my hand upon my mouth and was dumb.

As a counterpoise to the missionaries, we carry men from Manila—lean Scotchmen who gamble once a month in the Manila State lottery and occasionally turn up trumps. One, at least, drew a ten-thousand-dollar prize last December and is away to make merry in the New World. Everybody on the staff of an American steamer this side the Continent seems to gamble steadily in that lottery, and the talk of the smoking-room runs almost entirely on prizes won by accident or lost through a moment's delay. The tickets are sold more or less openly at Yokohama and Hong-Kong, and the drawings—losers and winners both agree here—are above reproach.

We have resigned ourselves to the infinite monotony of a twenty days' voyage. The Pacific Mail advertises falsely. Only under the most favorable circumstances of wind and steam can their under-engined boats cover the distance in fifteen days. Our *City of*

*Peking*, for instance, had been jogging along at a gentle ten knots an hour, a pace out of all proportion to her bulk. "When we get a wind," says the Captain, "we shall do better." She is a four-master and can carry any amount of canvas. It is not safe to run steamers across this void under the poles of Atlantic liners. The monotony of the sea is paralyzing. We have passed the wreck of a little sealing-schooner lying bottom up and covered with gulls. She weltered by in the chill dawn, unlovely as the corpse of a man; and the wild birds piped thinly at us as they steered her across the surges. The pulse of the Pacific is no little thing even in the quieter moods of the sea. It set our bows swinging and nosing and ducking ere we were a day clear of Yokohama, and yet there was never swell nor crested wave in sight. "We ride very high," said the Captain, "and she's a dry boat. She has a knack of crawling over things somehow; but we shan't need to put her to the test this journey."

\* \* \* \*

The Captain was mistaken. For four days we have endured the sullen displeasure of the North Pacific, winding up with a night of discomfort. It began with a gray sea, flying clouds, and a head-wind that smote fifty knots off the day's run. Then rose from the southeast a beam sea warranted by no wind that

was abroad upon the waters in our neighborhood, and we wallowed in the trough of it for sixteen mortal hours. In the stillness of the harbor, when the newspaper man is lunching in her saloon and the steam-launch is crawling round her sides, a ship of pride is a "stately liner." Out in the open, one rugged shoulder of a sea between you and the horizon, she becomes "the old hooker," a "lively boat," and other things of small import, for this is necessary to propitiate the Ocean. "There's a storm to the southeast of us," explained the Captain. "That's what's kicking up this sea."

The *City of Peking* did not belie her reputation. She crawled over the seas in liveliest wise, never shipping a bucket till—she was forced to. Then she took it green over the bows to the vast edification of, at least, one passenger who had never seen the scuppers full before.

Later in the day the fun began. "Oh, she's a daisy at rolling," murmured the chief steward, flung starfish-wise on a table among his glassware. "She's rolling some," said a black apparition new risen from the stokehold. "Is she going to roll any more?" demanded the ladies grouped in what ought to have been the ladies' saloon, but, according to American custom, was labeled "Social Hall."

Passed in the twilight the chief officer—a dripping, bearded face. "Shall I mark out