

# **AMERICAN AND THE AMERICANS**

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American and the Americans by William Edward Baxter

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**WILLIAM EDWARD BAXTER**

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## PREFATORY NOTICE.

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THE substance of this work was delivered in the form of Lectures, at Dundee, last autumn. The Author has added little, and made few alterations of any consequence; but every sentence has undergone a careful revision, with a view of preventing misapprehension, and securing that confidence on the part of the public which, notwithstanding difference of opinion, accuracy and impartiality generally command.

*London, March 24th, 1855.*

# AMERICA AND THE AMERICANS.

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## CHAPTER I.

Introductory remarks—English Tourists on the Continent of Europe—Qualifications of a good traveller—Advantages of visiting foreign countries—Claims of America in this respect—Statement of my plan and purpose—The Cunard and Collins steamers—Voyages on the North Atlantic—Approach to New York—A glimpse at the future of the Great Republic.

THACKERAY, in one of his amusing novels, remarks, "To see with one's own eyes, men and countries, is better than reading all the books of travels in the world." So think the majority of English parents in affluent circumstances, and accordingly the education of young men who have attended the classes at our great seminaries of learning, is not considered as complete until they have made what we usually style "the grand tour." In lands celebrated by poets and philosophers of the olden time, they finish their classical studies, and begin their observations on the aspect of things in the world. Having in the halls of the university repeated the burning language of Cicero, and pored over the finished strains of the Mantuan bard, they set out on a pilgrimage to the ruins of that forum which once rung with the plaudits of excited Romans; and to those scenes of rural beauty which Virgil, in his *Georgics*, so accurately describes. Among orange and olive trees they trace the site of the Academia where Plato taught wisdom to the youth of Athens; and from the top of Hymettus, the mountain of the honey bees, they look down on Marathon and Salamis, on spots which will be sacred to the goddess of liberty, until Grecian heroes cease to

add interest to the historic page. One can now see almost any day under-graduates of Oxford ascending the Pyramid of Cheops, and Cambridge men smoking their nargilehs on the banks of Abana and Pharphar, rivers of Damascus. After a year thus spent in the ancient seats of civilization, they return to be introduced at court, and assume their position in society, but not to remain permanently at home; for the tastes acquired in more luxurious climates generally induce them, before long, again to visit the shores of the Mediterranean, and to linger in the unrivalled galleries of Italian art. Formerly they quoted Horace, and sought with eager eye the localities celebrated in the elegant pages of Livy, now with Tasso they sing of "the pious arms and the great commander who liberated the sepulchre of Christ," and bow almost reverently before Raphael's Transfiguration, in the Vatican. Painting and sculpture have usurped the places in their ardent minds which the poetry and eloquence of Greece and Rome once occupied, and the odes of Petrarch supersede the tender strains of Anacreon. Watch them as they saunter by the banks of the Arno, or lounge below the fig-trees on the Palatine; these men will wander far and wide over Europe before they settle down to cultivate their paternal acres, for they have felt the charms of novelty among a strange people, and under a southern sky, and they will always hear, even in busy London, the voice of sirens drawing them towards warmer regions, where the mulberry and the palm-tree grow. Nor do the more ambitious rest here. They are not contented with the beaten track of mere loungers in search of pleasure or the fine arts; but long to explore countries less known than Tuscany—to get beyond the reach of ordinary tourists, and whilst young and active, to lay up for themselves a stock of knowledge, from which they may derive lasting satisfaction in after years. With some of these men the love of travelling becomes a rage, and before they have reached middle life, like Alexander, they sit down and deplore the absence of new kingdoms

to conquer. Not a city in Europe but they have seen, not a river which they do not know, not a mountain with whose outlines they are not familiar, not a potentate to whom they have not lifted their hats, not a people whose dress or manners to them is new. A secret power seems to drive them ever onward, till nothing can be found to excite curiosity or gratify the desire for change. They set out on journeys without knowing whither they are bound, and all places are alike interesting to them, because they have seen them all before. They remind me of the vagabond Lamas of Tartary, who may be found, now in the tea-growing districts of China, and a few months afterwards in the tents of nomadic Arabs on the plains of Turkistan. Once and again I have met such men, and listened to their hairbreadth escapes and wonderful tales. They can scarcely be called citizens of any particular country, but from long habit and with restless impulses, they roam over the earth without "a local habitation," or a home to receive them when in the sear and yellow leaf. There is another class of tourists, appropriately designated by Sir Walter Scott, "Englishmen in search of the comfortable," who have afforded me no small amusement when they happened to cross my path. They are usually to be found in Switzerland or on the Rhine, poring over bills of fare, written in puzzling French, or clamorous for beefsteaks and egg-cups. One cannot spend half an hour more profitably than in listening to their conversation when two or three parties have met at supper, to compare notes of their day's experiences. Not a word is said about noble ruins, architectural triumphs, or mountains and rivers, whose vastness raises the mind to Deity. Far different themes suffice for them. The first never got a better dinner in his life than at the Hotel D'Angleterre; the second could not drink the sherry which he ordered yesterday; the third can't conceive what pleasure there is in travelling in countries where the beds are so small; the fourth laments the ignorance of certain individuals who could not answer his interrogations in English; the fifth



objects to the cooking at Chamouni ; the sixth threatens to inform the editor of the *Times* that the landlord at the Hospice where he remained to dine, kept no tolerable port. Occasionally a man of this kind is led by some unexplained fatality, to wander out of the well-worn paths, and then like a swimmer beyond his depth, he betrays excessive agitation, and bawls lustily for assistance.

To travel profitably, it has always appeared to me that a person, in addition to habits of observation, a candid spirit and an amiable temper, must have some previous acquaintance by means of books with the countries whose scenery, manners and institutions he desires to see. He then knows what to look for, and does not fail to notice peculiarities which might otherwise escape him. He can thus more easily make comparisons, form true estimates, and hit upon the points of most general interest. As the Spanish proverb says, "He who would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry the wealth of the Indies with him." A friend of mine told me that last autumn he met in the highlands of Scotland two men from the English midland counties, of gentlemanly aspect and demeanour, who were so ignorant of our social state, that they had brought with them an immense box containing bread, meat, cheese, and beer for their sustenance in a country where they expected to find only kilted Celts fed on cakes and porridge. Even Dr. Johnson, wise as he was, before setting out on his tour to the Hebrides, provided himself with a pair of pistols, some gunpowder and a quantity of bullets : and nothing is more common than to find educated people about to visit parts of the world, of whose history, geography and resources they know absolutely nothing. No wonder they commit most egregious mistakes, and after all return very little wiser than they were at starting.

I need not dwell at any length on the advantages derived from personal observation in foreign countries, where one shakes off the limited notions, the crude opinions, the prejudices, the exclusiveness and the

mantle of illiberality which he is apt to contract at home, and by careful attention to the manners and customs of other nations, by contrasting one state of society with another, and by intercourse with the wise and good abroad, learns to see things in their proper bearings, and to look beyond the contracted limits of a territory or a sect. A narrow circle of acquaintanceship, a life of comparative exclusion, an unwearied repetition of the same opinions, must tend to limit the operations of the mind; but the man whose natural powers fit him to rise above such restraints, when he begins to mix with the great world around him, will soon see the glimmerings of light through the dense mists which have hitherto enveloped him; and if his disposition be one of real goodness, he will become as tolerant as enlightened, as patient as profound; conscious how far he himself had erred, he will look with a kindlier eye on the frailties of others; reminded of his former ignorance at every step of his progress, he will judge his neighbours more leniently, cherish a spirit of charity and meekness, and "so fulfil the law of Christ."

The rapid extension of railroad and steamboat communication of late years throughout the Continent, has brought near to us places which our fathers looked upon as at the uttermost ends of the earth, and enabled many to visit countries little known and remote, who but for it would have been obliged to content themselves with less distant journeys. In the orange groves of the Grecian Archipelago, in the bazaars of Constantinople, on the rocks where the two seas met and stranded the bark of St. Paul, seated at a frugal meal on the top of the Apennines, riding over the dreary plains of Castile, among vines overhanging the Tagus, on board little vessels on the Swedish lakes, driving in carriages across the Fjeldes of Norway, wherever anything new is to be seen, there you may be assured of meeting a countryman with his shooting-jacket, map and note-book, one who can talk of Venetian gondolas and Finnish sledges, and who knows the various kingdoms between Gibraltar and

Archangel as well as a Scottish cotter knows the parish where he was bred.

Now it has frequently occurred to me whilst conversing in these out-of-the-way places with intelligent youths of this class, that there is one country which modern science has brought almost to our very doors, but which they in their commendable desire to enlarge their minds by foreign experience seem most unaccountably to have overlooked. Without in the least depreciating the advantages to be derived from visiting the galleries of Italy, the Vega of Granada, the passes of the Alps or the wild fiords on the Norwegian coast, I am inclined to think that the time of many keen observers of men and manners might be much better spent in the United States of America. True there are in that great republic no ruins of arches, and towers, and mighty palaces,

“Remnants of things that have passed away,  
Fragments of stone reared by creatures of clay;”

no grim castles perched on rocky heights, no glaciers on which the natural philosopher can pitch his tent, no legends to be told in the moonshine as it blends with the lights of eve, no costumes reminding one of ages long gone by, no gloomy cathedrals, or brilliant courts, or regal thrones; but there are things much more interesting in this progressive age: cities starting up like mushrooms on the banks of lakes but lately explored—prairies awakened into new life by an advancing multitude of busy men—church-spires appearing above the forests which a few years ago sheltered the wigwam of the savage—locomotives snorting on the pasture grounds of the buffalo—new ideas in social economics carried into practice with a vigour unknown in older lands—the experiment of self-government being tried on a scale which excites the wonder of the world—independent commonwealths springing into existence complete, well-ordered, ready for energetic action, like Minerva, full armed from the head of Capitolian Jove.

The thoughtful and practical mind, interested in the