

ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

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Across the Atlantic by John Delaware Lewis

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JOHN DELAWARE LEWIS

**ACROSS
THE ATLANTIC**

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ACROSS
THE ATLANTIC.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"SKETCHES OF CANTABS."

LONDON:
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BERNERS STREET, OXFORD STREET.

1851.

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PREFACE.

Among the many advantages attending upon Prefaces to light works, I believe that, first and foremost, stands the fact that no one, by any chance, ever reads them. The wearied and worried author strings together a few sentences about the Public being really too benevolent, his health being really very bad, other avocations having prevented him from devoting such attention to the subject as he could have wished (all satisfactorily proving, *in limine*, that the book ought never to have been written at all), and, prefixing to the aforesaid sentences the title of "Preface," or "Address to the Reader," hurries them into a part of the volume, where they have the double merit of not being exposed to criticism, and of filling up a great deal of space.

This manifest advantage, of being able to write what one chooses, without the fear of being called to account for the absence of grammar, or of sense, will, I am afraid, be denied to my Preface. I even suspect that it will be the very first part to which those who take up the book will turn, if only to find out what excuse the Author can possibly allege for publishing a work about America at all. "At a time when we are nearly bored to death with Travels in the United States and the East," some one will exclaim, "what should induce this obscure individual to come forward and inflict his experiences upon the world? We have had enough about America." I believe, indeed, that a volume purporting to be written about the New World, enters upon life in the Old World, under the same disadvantages as a youth with carroty hair or a squint. It is an unprepossessing volume; the book-sellers shake their heads at it, and the public pass it by. It is in explanation of these circumstances that I have a few words to say.

Regular books of American Travel have, I con-

fess, been produced so plentifully, of late years, that we scarcely require any more. Increased facilities of communication have brought New York and Philadelphia, as near to us as Edinburgh and Dublin were, in the days of our grandfathers. We are no longer to be told that "Boston is a beautiful city, built upon a hill," and so on, through half-a-dozen pages of statistical information, such as travellers pick up. We have encyclopædias, and guide-books, and gazetteers, telling us all about Boston that we want to know. We have views of Boston; periodicals published at Boston; correspondents who write us letters from Boston; in fact, we know almost as much about Boston as we do about Manchester and Leeds.

But if it be contended, that because the time has gone by for writing Books of Travel in the United States, the time has also gone by for writing any kind of light work on the United States, there I take leave to disagree. I think, on the contrary, that the period when we have gained some knowledge of a foreign nation, its manners and institutions, will be that in which

we shall be most ready to read anything that is written about it ; the information that we already possess communicating an additional degree of interest to the subject. Only, that writers will have to take this increased information into account, and in treating on the particular country—as, in the present case, on America—will start with the supposition that it is already well-known, and that it is unnecessary to fatigue the reader with dry matters of detail. Take, for example, "The Sketch-Book." How interesting was that series of papers, even to the English reader. And yet it treated on subjects as "stale" as every-day experience can make them to the Englishman. If Mr. Irving had talked of arriving in "London, the capital of England, as well as of the small county of Middlesex. Its principal streets are Oxford Street, the Strand, Fleet Street," and so on, who would not have shut up his book with alarm ?

I have said thus much to indicate, to some extent, the nature of this book, which is not, indeed, a Book of Travels. It contains a series of "Sketches," or "Scribblings," or "Inklings,"

some of them written in America, and all having America for their groundwork. They are put together into a volume (perhaps it would have been wiser if they had been put together into the fire) principally from a note-book, which I kept during my ramble in that country. I have taken it for granted that every reader, with whom fortune may bless me, will have already gone through many books on the subject of the United States. I have, consequently, excluded everything in the shape of statistics or information. These will be found in other works.

I feel that some may object to the tone of this volume. "It is light and trivial," they will say. I have no answer to make to this charge. I admit that I would twenty thousand times rather be the author of a work, in fourteen volumes octavo, giving the best account of the New World and its institutions that had ever been presented to the Public—sound, dry, and useful; or of a Philosophical Treatise—deep and unintelligible. But as my powers do not extend to such productions, I have been induced to do all that I could ever aspire to do, and to submit to the