

**THE PROVINCIAL
AMERICAN AND
OTHER PAPERS**

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The provincial American and other papers by Meredith Nicholson

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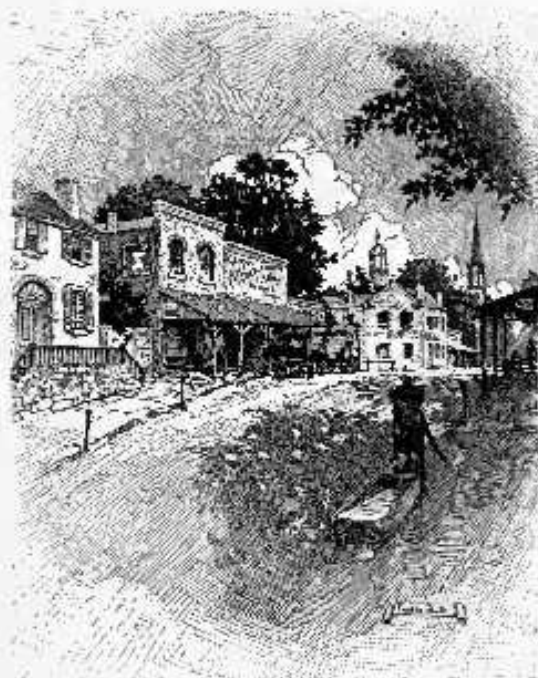
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The Provincial American And Other Papers

By
Meredith Nicholson

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1913



To
George Edward Woodberry
Guide, Counselor
And the most inspiring of Friends
This Volume is Dedicated
With grateful and affectionate
Regard

Indianapolis, September 1912.

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These papers, with one exception, have appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. A part of "Experience and the Calendar," under another title, was published in the *Reader Magazine*.

The Provincial American
And Other Papers

The Provincial American

Viola. What country, friends, is this?

Captain. This is Illyria, lady.

Viola. And what should I do in Illyria?

My brother he is in Elysium.

Twelfth Night.

I AM a provincial American. My forebears were farmers or country-town folk. They followed the long trail over the mountains out of Virginia and North Carolina, with brief sojourns in western Pennsylvania and Kentucky. My parents were born, the one in Kentucky, the other in Indiana, within two and four hours of the spot where I pen these reflections, and I had voted before I saw the sea or any Eastern city.

In attempting to illustrate the provincial point of view out of my own experiences I am moved by no wish to celebrate either the Hoosier commonwealth—which has not lacked nobler advertisement—or myself; but by the hope that I may cheer many who, flung by fate upon the world's byways, shuffle and shrink

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under the reproach of their metropolitan brethren.

Mr. George Ade has said, speaking of our fresh-water colleges, that Purdue University, his own *alma mater*, offers everything that Harvard provides except the sound of *a* as in "father." I have been told that I speak our *lingua rustica* only slightly corrupted by urban contacts. Anywhere east of Buffalo I should be known as a Westerner; I could not disguise myself if I would. I find that I am most comfortable in a town whose population does not exceed a fifth of a million, — a place in which men may relinquish their seats in the street car to women without having their motives questioned, and where one calls the stamp-clerk at the post-office by his first name.

I

Across a hill-slope that knew my childhood, a bugle's grieving melody used to float often through the summer twilight. A highway lay hidden in the little vale below, and beyond it the unknown musician was quite concealed, and was never visible to the world I knew. Those

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trumpetings have lingered always in my memory, and color my recollections of all that was near and dear in those days. Men who had left camp and field for the soberer routine of civil life were not yet fully domesticated. My bugler was merely solacing himself for lost joys by recurring to the vocabulary of the trumpet. I am confident that he enjoyed himself; and I am equally sure that his trumpetings peopled the dusk for me with great captains and mighty armies, and touched with a certain militancy all my youthful dreaming.

No American boy born during or immediately after the Civil War can have escaped in those years the vivid impressions derived from the sight and speech of men who had fought its battles, or women who had known its terror and grief. Chief among my playthings on that peaceful hillside was the sword my father had borne at Shiloh and on to the sea; and I remember, too, his uniform coat and sash and epaulets and the tattered guidon of his battery, that, falling to my lot as toys, yet imparted to my childish consciousness a sense of what war had been. The young imagination was kindled in