

**CHARACTER AND OPINION IN  
THE UNITED STATES; WITH  
REMINISCENCES OF WILLIAM  
JAMES AND JOSIAH ROYCE AND  
ACADEMIC LIFE IN AMERICA**

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Character and opinion in the United States; with reminiscences of William James and Josiah Royce and academic life in America by George Santayana

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**GEORGE SANTAYANA**

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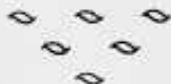
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# CHARACTER & OPINION

IN THE

## UNITED STATES

WITH REMINISCENCES OF  
WILLIAM JAMES AND JOSIAH ROYCE  
AND ACADEMIC LIFE IN AMERICA

BY

GEORGE SANTAYANA

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## PREFACE

THE major part of this book is composed of lectures originally addressed to British audiences. I have added a good deal, but I make no apology, now that the whole may fall under American eyes, for preserving the tone and attitude of a detached observer. Not at all on the ground that "to see ourselves as others see us" would be to see ourselves truly; on the contrary, I agree with Spinoza where he says that other people's idea of a man is apt to be a better expression of their nature than of his. I accept this principle in the present instance, and am willing it should be applied to the judgements contained in this book, in which the reader may see chiefly expressions of my own feelings and hints of my own opinions. Only an American—and I am not one except by long association<sup>1</sup>—can speak for the heart

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps I should add that I have not been in the United States since January 1912. My observations stretched, with some intervals, through the forty years preceding that date.



of America. I try to understand it, as a family friend may who has a different temperament; but it is only my own mind that I speak for at bottom, or wish to speak for. Certainly my sentiments are of little importance compared with the volume and destiny of the things I discuss here: yet the critic and artist too have their rights, and to take as calm and as long a view as possible seems to be but another name for the love of truth. Moreover, I suspect that my feelings are secretly shared by many people in America, natives and foreigners, who may not have the courage or the occasion to express them frankly. After all, it has been acquaintance with America and American philosophers that has chiefly contributed to clear and to settle my own mind. I have no axe to grind, only my thoughts to burnish, in the hope that some part of the truth of things may be reflected there; and I am confident of not giving serious offence to the judicious, because they will feel that it is affection for the American people that makes me wish that what is best and most beautiful should not be absent from their lives.

Civilisation is perhaps approaching one of

those long winters that overtake it from time to time. A flood of barbarism from below may soon level all the fair works of our Christian ancestors, as another flood two thousand years ago levelled those of the ancients. Romantic Christendom—picturesque, passionate, unhappy episode—may be coming to an end. Such a catastrophe would be no reason for despair. Nothing lasts for ever; but the elasticity of life is wonderful, and even if the world lost its memory it could not lose its youth. Under the deluge, and watered by it, seeds of all sorts would survive against the time to come, even if what might eventually spring from them, under the new circumstances, should wear a strange aspect. In a certain measure, and unintentionally, both this destruction and this restoration have already occurred in America. There is much forgetfulness, much callow disrespect for what is past or alien; but there is a fund of vigour, goodness, and hope such as no nation ever possessed before. In what sometimes looks like American greediness and jostling for the front place, all is love of achievement, nothing is unkindness; it is a fearless people, and free from malice, as you

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might see in their eyes and gestures, even if their conduct did not prove it. This soil is propitious to every seed, and tares must needs grow in it ; but why should it not also breed clear thinking, honest judgement, and rational happiness ? These things are indeed not necessary to existence, and without them America might long remain rich and populous like many a barbarous land in the past ; but in that case its existence would be hounded, like theirs, by falsity and remorse. May Heaven avert the omen, and make the new world a better world than the old ! In the classical and romantic tradition of Europe, love, of which there was very little, was supposed to be kindled by beauty, of which there was a great deal : perhaps moral chemistry may be able to reverse this operation, and in the future and in America it may breed beauty out of love.