

***ISABELLA  
L. BIRD***



***THE ENGLISHWOMAN  
IN AMERICA***

**Isabella L. Bird**

# **The Englishwoman in America**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II](#)

[CHAPTER III.](#)

[CHAPTER IV.](#)

[CHAPTER V.](#)

[CHAPTER VI.](#)

[CHAPTER VII.](#)

[CHAPTER VIII.](#)

[CHAPTER IX.](#)

[CHAPTER X.](#)

[CHAPTER XI.](#)

[CHAPTER XII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIV.](#)

[CHAPTER XV.](#)

[CHAPTER XVI.](#)

[CHAPTER XVII.](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIX.](#)

[CHAPTER XX.](#)

## **CHAPTER I.**

Prefatory and explanatory—The voyage out—The sentimental—The actual—The oblivious—The medley—Practical joking—An unwelcome companion—American patriotism—The first view—The departure.

## **CHAPTER II.**

An inhospitable reception—Halifax and the Blue Noses—  
The heat— Disappointed expectations—The great departed  
—What the Blue Noses might be—What the coach was not—  
Nova Scotia and its capabilities—The roads and their  
annoyances—A tea dinner—A night journey and a Highland  
cabin —A nautical catastrophe—A joyful reunion.

## **CHAPTER III.**

Popular ignorance—The garden island—Summer and winter contrasted—A wooden capital—Island politics, and their consequences—Gossip—"Blowin- time"—Religion and the clergy—The servant nuisance—Colonial society—An evening party—An island premier—Agrarian outrage—A visit to the Indians—The pipe of peace—An Indian coquette—Country hospitality—A missionary—A novel mode of lobster-fishing—Uncivilised life—Far away in the woods—Starvation and dishonesty—An old Highlander and a Highland welcome—Hopes for the future.

## **CHAPTER IV.**

From St. George's Cross to the Stars and Stripes—  
Unpunctuality— Incompetence—A wretched night—Colonial  
curiosity—The fashions—A night in a buffalo robe—A stage  
journey—A queer character—Politics— Chemistry—  
Mathematics—Rotten bridges—A midnight arrival—Colonial  
ignorance—Yankee conceit—What ten-horse power chaps  
can do—The pestilence—The city on the rock—New  
Brunswick—Steamboat peculiarities —Going ahead in the  
eating line—A storm—Stepping ashore.

## **CHAPTER V.**

First experiences of American freedom—The "striped pig" and "Dusty Ben"

—A country mouse—What the cars are like—Beauties of New England—The

land of apples—A Mammoth hotel—The rusty inkstand exiled—Eloquent eyes

—Alone in a crowd.



## **CHAPTER VI.**

A suspected bill—A friend in need—All aboard for the Western cars—

The wings of the wind—American politeness—A loquacious conductor—

Three minutes for refreshments—A conversation on politics—A

confession—The emigrant car—Beauties of the woods—A forest on fire—

Dangers of the cars—The Queen City of the West.

## **CHAPTER VII.**

The Queen City continued—Its beauties—Its inhabitants, human and equine—An American church—Where chairs and bedsteads come from—Pigs and pork—A peep into Kentucky—Popular opinions respecting slavery— The curse of America.

## **CHAPTER VIII.**

The hickory stick—Chawing up ruins—A forest scene—A curious questioner —Hard and soft shells—Dangers of a ferry—The western prairies— Nocturnal detention—The Wild West and the Father of Rivers—Breakfast in a shed—What is an alligator?—Physiognomy, and its uses—The ladies' parlour—A Chicago hotel, its inmates and its horrors—A water-drinking people—The Prairie City—Progress of the West.

## **CHAPTER IX.**

A vexatious incident—John Bull enraged—Woman's rights—Alligators become hosses—A popular host—Military display—A mirth-provoking gun —Grave reminiscences—Attractions of the fair—Past and present—A floating palace—Black companions—A black baby—Externals of Buffalo— The flag of England.

## **CHAPTER X.**

The Place of Council—Its progress and its people—English hearts— "Sebastopol is taken"—Squibs and crackers—A ship on her beam-ends— Selfishness—A mongrel city—A Scot—Constancy rewarded—Monetary difficulties—Detention on a bridge—A Canadian homestead—Life in the clearings—The bush on fire—A word on farming—The "bee" and its produce—Eccentricities of Mr. Haldimands—A ride on a troop-horse—Scotch patriotism—An English church—The servant nuisance—Richard Cobden.

## CHAPTER XI.

"I've seen nothing"—A disappointment—Incongruities—Hotel gaieties and "doing Niagara"—Irish drosky-drivers—"The Hell of Waters"—Beauties of Niagara—The picnic party—The white canoe—A cold shower-bath—"The Thunder of Waters"—A magic word—"The Whirlpool"—Story of "Bloody Run"—Yankee opinions of English ladies—A metamorphosis—The nigger guide—A terrible situation—Termination Rock—Impressions of Niagara—Juvenile precocity—A midnight journey—Street adventures in Hamilton.

## CHAPTER XII.

A scene at starting—That dear little Harry—The old lady and the race  
—Running the Rapids—An aside—Snow and discomfort—A new country—An  
extemporised ball—Adventure with a madman—Shooting the cataract—  
First appearance of Montreal—Its characteristics—Quebec in a fog—  
"Muffins"—Quebec gaieties—The pestilence—Restlessness—  
St. Louis and  
St. Roch—The shady side—Dark dens—External characteristics—Lord  
Elgin—Mistaking a senator.

## CHAPTER XIII.

The House of Commons—Canadian gallantry—The constitution—Mr. Hincks—The ex-rebel—Parties and leaders—A street row—Repeated disappointments—The "habitans"—Their houses and their virtues—A stationary people—Progress and its effects—Montmorenci—The natural staircase—The Indian summer—Lorette—The old people—Beauties of Quebec—The *John Munn*—Fear and its consequences—A gloomy journey.



## **CHAPTER XIV.**

Concluding remarks on Canada—Territory—Climate—  
Capabilities—Railways  
and canals—Advantages for emigrants—Notices of  
emigration—Government—  
The franchise—Revenue—Population—Religion—Education—  
The press—  
Literature—Observations in conclusion.

## **CHAPTER XV.**

Preliminary remarks on re-entering the States—  
Americanisms—A little slang—Liquoring up—Eccentricities in  
dress—A 'cute chap down east— Conversation on eating—A  
Kentucky gal—Lake Champlain—Delaval's—A noisy  
serenade—Albany—Beauties of the Hudson—The Empire  
City.

## **CHAPTER XVI.**

Position of New York—Externals of the city—Conveyances—Maladministration—The stores—The hotels—Curiosities of the hospital—Ragged schools—The bad book—Monster schools—Amusements and oyster saloons—Monstrosities—A restaurant—Dwelling-houses—Equipages—Palaces—Dress—Figures—Manners—Education—Domestic habits—The ladies—The gentlemen—Society—Receptions—Anti-English feeling—Autographs—The buckram Englishman.

## **CHAPTER XVII.**

The cemetery—Its beauties—The "Potter's Field"—The graves of children— Monumental eccentricities—Arrival of emigrants—Their reception—Poor dwellings—The dangerous class—The elections—The riots—Characteristics of the streets—Journey to Boston—The sights of Boston—Longfellow— Cambridge University.

## **CHAPTER XVIII.**

Origin of the Constitution—The Executive—Congress—Local Legislatures— The army and navy—Justice—Slavery—Political corruption—The foreign element—Absence of principle—Associations—The Know-nothings—The press and its power—Religion—The church—The clergy.

## **CHAPTER XIX.**

General remarks continued—The common schools—Their defect—Difficulties

—Management of the schools—The free academy—Hallways

—Telegraphs—

Poverty—Literature—Advantages for emigrants—Difficulties of emigrants—

Peace or war—Concluding observations.

## CHAPTER XX.

The *America*—A gloomy departure—An ugly night—Morning at Halifax—Our new passengers—Babies—Captain Leitch—A day at sea—Clippers and steamers—A storm—An Atlantic moonlight—Unpleasant sensations—A gale—Inkermann—Conclusion.

THE ENGLISHWOMAN IN AMERICA. [Footnote: It is necessary to state that this volume is not by the Authoress of the '*Englishwoman in Russia*!']

# CHAPTER I.

## Table of Contents

Prefatory and explanatory—The voyage out—The sentimental—The actual—  
The oblivious—The medley—Practical joking—An unwelcome companion—  
American patriotism—The first view—The departure.

As a general dislike of prefaces is unmistakeably evidenced by their uncut leaves, and as unknown readers could scarcely be induced to read a book by the most cogent representations of an unknown author, and as apologies for "rushing into print" are too trite and insincere to have any effect, I will merely prefix a few explanatory remarks to my first chapter.

Circumstances which it is unnecessary to dwell upon led me across the Atlantic with some relatives; and on my return, I was requested by numerous friends to give an account of my travels. As this volume has been written with a view to their gratification, there is far more of personal narrative than is likely to interest the general reader.

With respect to the people of the United States, I have given those impressions which as a traveller I formed; if



they are more favourable than those of some of my predecessors, the difference may arise from my having taken out many excellent introductions, which afforded me greater facilities of seeing the best society in the States than are usually possessed by those who travel merely to see the country.

Where I have offered any opinions upon the effect produced by the institutions of America, or upon any great national question, I have done so with extreme diffidence, giving *impressions* rather than *conclusions*, feeling the great injustice of drawing general inferences from partial premises, as well as the impossibility of rightly estimating cause and effect during a brief residence in the United States. I have endeavoured to give a faithful picture of what I saw and heard, avoiding the beaten track as much as possible, and dwelling principally on those things in which I knew that my friends were most interested.

Previously to visiting the United States, I had read most of the American travels which had been published; yet from experience I can say that even those who read most on the Americans know little of them, from the disposition which leads travellers to seize and dwell upon the ludicrous points which continually present themselves.

We know that there is a vast continent across the Atlantic, first discovered by a Genoese sailing under the Spanish flag, and that for many years past it has swallowed up thousands of the hardiest of our population. Although our feelings are not particularly fraternal, we give the people inhabiting this continent the national cognomen of "*Brother Jonathan*," while we name individuals "*Yankees*." We know

that they are famous for smoking, spitting, "gouging," and bowie-knives—for monster hotels, steamboat explosions, railway collisions, and repudiated debts. It is believed also that this nation is renowned for keeping three millions of Africans in slavery—for wooden nutmegs, paper money, and "fillibuster" expeditions—for carrying out nationally and individually the maxim

"That they may take who have the power,  
And they may keep who can."

I went to the States with that amount of prejudice which seems the birthright of every English person, but I found that, under the knowledge of the Americans which can be attained by a traveller mixing in society in every grade, these prejudices gradually melted away. I found much which is worthy of commendation, even of imitation: that there is much which is very reprehensible, is not to be wondered at in a country which for years has been made a "cave of Adullam"—a refuge for those who have "left their country for their country's good"—a receptacle for the barbarous, the degraded, and the vicious of all other nations. It must never be forgotten that the noble, the learned, and the wealthy have shrunk from the United States; her broad lands have been peopled to a great extent by those whose stalwart arms have been their only possession.

Is it surprising, considering these antecedents, that much of arrogance, coarseness, and vulgarity should be met with? Is it not rather surprising, that a traveller should meet with so little to annoy—so few obvious departures from the rules of propriety?

An Englishman bears with patience any ridicule which foreigners cast upon him. John Bull never laughs so loudly as when he laughs at himself; but the Americans are nationally sensitive, and cannot endure that good-humoured raillery which jests at their weaknesses and foibles. Hence candid and even favourable statements of the *truth* by English travellers are received with a perfect outcry by the Americans; and the phrases, "shameful misstatements," "violation of the rights of hospitality," &c., are on every lip.

Most assuredly that spirit of envious rivalry and depreciating criticism in which many English travellers have written, is greatly to be deprecated, no less than the tone of servile adulation which some writers have adopted; but our American neighbours must recollect that they provoked both the virulent spirit and the hostile caricature by the way in which some of their most popular writers of travels have led an ungenerous onslaught against our institutions and people, and the bitter tone in which their newspaper press, headed by the *Tribune*, indulges towards the British nation.

Having made these few remarks, I must state that at the time of my visit to the States I had no intention of recording my "experiences" in print; and as my notes taken at the time were few and meagre, and have been elaborated from memory, some inaccuracies have occurred which it will not take a keen eye to detect. These must be set down to want of correct information rather than to wilful misrepresentation. The statistical information given is taken from works compiled by the Americans themselves. The few matters on which I write which did not come under my own

observation, I learned from trustworthy persons who have been long resident in the country.

Of Canada it is scarcely necessary to speak here. Perhaps an English writer may be inclined to adopt too eulogistic a tone in speaking of that noble and loyal colony, in which British institutions are undergoing a Transatlantic trial, and where a free people is protected by British laws. There are, doubtless, some English readers who will be interested in the brief notices which I have given of its people, its society, and its astonishing capabilities. [Footnote: I must here record my grateful acknowledgments to a gentleman in a prominent public position in Canada, who has furnished me with much valuable information which I should not otherwise have obtained.]

The notes from which this volume is taken were written in the lands of which it treats: they have been amplified and corrected in the genial atmosphere of an English home. I will not offer hackneyed apologies for its very numerous faults and deficiencies; but will conclude these tedious but necessary introductory remarks with the sincere hope that my readers may receive one hundredth part of the pleasure from the perusal of this volume which I experienced among the scenes and people of which it is too imperfect a record.

\* \* \* \* \*

Although bi-weekly steamers ply between England and the States, and many mercantile men cross the Atlantic twice annually on business, and think nothing of it, the voyage seems an important event when undertaken for the first time. Friends living in inland counties, and those who have been sea-sick in crossing the straits of Dover,

exaggerate the dangers and discomforts of ocean travelling, and shake their heads knowingly about fogs and icebergs.

Then there are a certain number of boxes to be packed, and a very uncertain number of things to fill them, while clothing has to be provided suitable to a tropical summer, and a winter within the arctic circle. But a variety of minor arrangements, and even an indefinite number of leave-takings, cannot be indefinitely prolonged; and at eight o'clock on a Saturday morning in 1854, I found myself with my friends on the landing-stage at Liverpool.

Whatever sentimental feelings one might be inclined to indulge in on leaving the shores of England were usefully and instantaneously annihilated by the discomfort and crush in the *Satellite* steam-tender, in which the passengers were conveyed, helplessly huddled together like a flock of sheep, to the *Canada*, an 1850-ton paddle-wheel steamer of the Cunard line, which was moored in the centre of the Mersey.

An investigation into the state-rooms, and the recital of disappointed expectations consequent on the discovery of their very small dimensions, the rescue of "regulation" portmanteaus from sailors who were running off with them, and the indulgence of that errant curiosity which glances at everything and rests on nothing, occupied the time before the arrival of the mail-boat with about two tons of letters and newspapers, which were consigned to the mail-room with incredible rapidity.

Then friends were abruptly dismissed—two guns were fired—the lashings were cast off—the stars and stripes flaunted gaily from the 'fore—the captain and pilot took their places on the paddle-boxes—the bell rang—our huge

paddle-wheels revolved, and, to use the words in which the same event was chronicled by the daily press, "The Cunard royal mail steamer *Canada*, Captain Stone, left the Mersey this morning for Boston and Halifax, conveying the usual mails; with one hundred and sixty-eight passengers, and a large cargo on freight."

It was an auspiciously commenced voyage as far as appearances went. The summer sun shone brightly—the waves of the Mersey were crisp and foam-capped—and the fields of England had never worn a brighter green. The fleet of merchant-ships through which we passed was not without an interest. There were timber-ships, huge and square-sided, unmistakably from Quebec or Miramichi—green high-sterned Dutch galliots—American ships with long black hulls and tall raking masts—and those far-famed "Black Ball" clippers, the *Marco Polo* and the *Champion of the Seas*,— in short, the ships of all nations, with their marked and distinguishing peculiarities. But the most interesting object of all was the screw troop-ship *Himalaya*, which was embarking the Scots Greys for the Crimea—that regiment which has since earned so glorious but fatal a celebrity on the bloody field of Balaklava.

It is to be supposed that to those who were crossing the Atlantic for the first time to the western hemisphere there was some degree of excitement, and that regret was among the feelings with which they saw the coast of England become a faint cloud on the horizon; but soon oblivion stole over the intellects of most of the passengers, leaving one absorbing feeling of disgust, first to the viands, next to those who could partake of them, and lastly to everything