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Men and Manners in America

VOLUME 1

THOMAS HAMILTON



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**MEN AND MANNERS
IN AMERICA.**

BY THE AUTHOR OF CYRIL THORNTON, ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Ἴδεν ἄσπερα καὶ νόον ἔγνω.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH; AND

T. CADELL, STRAND, LONDON.

M. D. C C C . X X X I I I .

TO

WILLIAM WOLRYCHE WHITMORE,
ESQUIRE, M.P.

DEAR WHITMORE,

I INSCRIBE these volumes to you. As a politician, your course has ever been straightforward and consistent, and I know no one who brings to the discharge of his public duties, a mind less biassed by prejudice, or more philosophically solicitous for the attainment of truth. Neither mingling in the asperities of party conflict, nor descending to those arts by which temporary popularity is often purchased at the expense of

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permanent contempt, you have been wisely content to rest your claims to the gratitude of your country, on a zealous, enlightened, and unobtrusive devotion to her best interests.

Had I been conscious, in what I have written of the United States, of being influenced by any motive incompatible with perfect fairness of purpose, you are perhaps the last person to whose judgment I should venture an appeal. By no one will the arguments I have advanced be more rigidly examined, and the grist of truth more carefully winnowed from the chaff of sophistry and declamation. For this reason, and in testimony of sincere esteem, I now publicly connect your name with the present work. You will at least find in it the conclusions of an independent observer ; formed after much

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deliberation, and offered to the world with that confidence in their justice, which becomes a writer, who, through the medium of the press, pretends to influence the opinions of others.

It was not till more than a year after my return, that I finally determined on publishing the result of my observations in the United States. Of books of travels in America, there seemed no deficiency; and I was naturally unwilling to incur, by the public expression of my opinions, the certainty of giving offence to a people, of whose hospitality I shall always entertain a grateful recollection. I should therefore gladly have remained silent, and devoted those hours which occasionally hang heavy on the hands of an idle gentleman, to the productions of lighter literature, which, if not more

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attractive to the reader, would certainly have been more agreeable to the taste and habits of the writer.

But when I found the institutions and experience of the United States deliberately quoted in the reformed Parliament, as affording safe precedent for British legislation, and learned that the drivellers who uttered such nonsense, instead of encountering merited derision, were listened to with patience and approbation, by men as ignorant as themselves, I certainly did feel that another work on America was yet wanted, and at once determined to undertake a task which inferior considerations would probably have induced me to decline.

How far, in writing of the institutions of a foreign country, I may have been influenced

by the prejudices natural to an Englishman, I presume not to determine. To the impartiality of a cosmopolite I make no pretension. No man can wholly cast off the trammels of habit and education, nor escape from the bias of that multitude of minute and latent predilections, which insensibly affects the judgment of the wisest.

But apart from such necessary and acknowledged influences, I am aware of no prejudice which could lead me to form a perverted estimate of the condition, moral or social, of the Americans. I visited their country with no antipathies to be overcome ; and I doubt not you can bear testimony that my political sentiments were not such, as to make it probable that I would regard with an unfavourable eye the

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popular character of their government. In the United States I was received with kindness, and enjoyed an intercourse at once gratifying and instructive, with many individuals for whom I can never cease to cherish the warmest sentiments of esteem. I neither left England a visionary and discontented enthusiast, nor did I return to it a man of blighted prospects and disappointed hopes. In the business or ambitions of the world I had long ceased to have any share. I was bound to no party, and pledged to no opinions. I had visited many countries, and may therefore be permitted to claim the possession of such advantages as foreign travel can bestow.

Under these circumstances, I leave it to the ingenuity of others to discover by what probable

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—what possible temptation, I could be induced to write in a spirit of unjust depreciation of the manners, morals, or institutions of a people so intimately connected with England, by the ties of interest, and the affinities of common ancestry.

It has been said by some one, that the narrative of a traveller is necessarily a book of inaccuracies. I admit the truth of the apophthegm, and only claim the most favourable construction for his mistakes. The range of a traveller's observations must generally be limited to those peculiarities which float, as it were, on the surface of society. Of the "sunken treasures" beneath, he cannot speak. His sources of information are always fallible, and at best he can appeal only to the results of an

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imperfect experience. A great deal which necessarily enters into his narrative, must be derived from the testimony of others. In the common intercourse of society, men do not select their words with that scrupulous precision which they use in a witness-box. Details are loosely given and inaccurately remembered. Events are coloured or distorted by the partialities of the narrator ; minute circumstances are omitted or brought into undue prominence, and the vast and varied machinery by which truth is manufactured into fallacy is continually at work.

From the errors which I fear must still constitute the badge of all our tribe, I pretend to no exemption. But whatever be the amount of its imperfections, the present work is offered to

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the world without excuse of any sort, for I confess my observations have led to the conclusion, that a book requiring apology is rarely worth it.

Ever, DEAR WHITMORE,

Very truly yours,

T. H.

RYDAL, *8th July*, 1833.

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