AMERICAN LITERATURE
In Nineteenth-Century
ENGLAND

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To Celestine

PREFACE

THE PRESENT VOLUME is the first ever written with the purpose of proving the wide interest in American literature displayed by the English people. It is meant primarily for specialists in American literary history, for students of the Victorian Age, and for political historians who are particularly interested in Anglo-American relations.

While the study is confined to the nineteenth century, it will be apparent that most of the illustrations come from the period following the Reform Bill of 1832. There are two reasons for the limitation. First, the consumption of American books in England before 1833 was insignificant compared with that which followed later; and, secondly, the late William B. Cairns has already provided a number of able studies concerned especially with British criticisms of American writings prior to 1833. There are many aspects of the reception of American literature among the British which are either neglected altogether or merely mentioned incidentally in this volume, for example, the record of the enormous quantity of American plays which were produced in London. The failure to cover more terrain in my studies is a natural consequence of the hugeness of my topic. *Ubi ingenium par materiae?* It will be found, also, that a large share of my attention has been claimed by the history of the English book-trade. This is due to my belief that literary history, especially that of the nineteenth century, which merely records critical opinions and forgets that publishing was a business conducted for profit is as flimsy as the study of psychology without reference to the nervous system.

The method of this book probably needs initial elucidation, for it may seem to be merely a collection of essays. In the Introduction I have retraced the general view of the United States held by the British during the century and have offered the suggestion that the literature of the United States has a "great tradition" of its own, a tradition which, it is hoped, will enhance interest in the record of its impact upon the English. In the following chapter, by presenting certain

particulars in the history of the booktrade I have undertaken to show how and why so many books by our authors came to the attention of British readers. I have next illustrated the importance of American magazines to our transmarine cousins and of American writers for their periodicals. After these very broad surveys I have narrowed the field to one type of literary production, namely, humor, a type which was very cordially received in the British Isles despite the "vulgar error" that an Englishman cannot understand a joke. Then, in the next chapter, I have restricted the point of view still further by concentrating upon just one author, Longfellow. I should have preferred to use instead Emerson or Whitman, but my choice was determined not only by the very great popularity of Longfellow but by my desire to break virgin soil in my researches. The final chapter attempts a cursory review of the critical reaction to American literature during the entire century and ends with a brief indication that it was not altogether without influence. It should be remembered that an entire monograph could easily be written on each of my chapter-topics. I have intended to present in simple exposition the broadest features of the topics along with a variety of particulars which serve as concrete illustrations. By using the index a reader especially interested in the British reputation of only one of our major authors may find it possible to reconstruct from the scattered illustrations a "partial portrait," to use the apt phrase of Henry James.

During the years which have been devoted to the preparation of this work I have often profited by the kindness of others. Librarians have been especially helpful, and I wish to express my gratitude to the staffs of the following institutions: the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, the Huntington Library, the Harvard College Library, the Columbia University Library, and, last but not least, the Library of Duke University. To Mr. F. L. Kent, Assistant-Keeper of Books in the British Museum, I am obligated for bibliographical information assembled by himself or by Mrs. Kent. To Mr. Frederick B. Tolles, Mr. Ellis Raesly, Miss Ellen Frey, Miss Amy Cruse, and Professor Richard H. Heindel, I am grateful for various types of information. Professor Emery E. Neff, Professor Paull F. Baum, Professor Howard F. Lowry, Professor Lewis Leary, and Mr.

J. Lee Harlan have read the entire first draft of this book; and Professor Walter Blair, Professor Walter Graham, Mr. Henry W. L. Dana, Mr. David K. Jackson, Mr. Alfred Knopf, and Mr. Frederic G. Melcher have gone over various of the individual chapters. To each of these gentlemen my thanks for valuable suggestions and criticisms. The Research Council of Duke University has in its kindness seen fit to supply funds for the employment of research assistants and typists.

Miss Mildred Howells has generously allowed me to quote from various books by her father, William Dean Howells; and permissions have been obtained from the following publishers for quotations from the works specified: Houghton Mifflin Company (Charles E. Stowe, *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*); Harper & Brothers (*The Correspondence of John Lothrop Motley*, ed. G. W. Curtis, and *Mark Twain's Letters*, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine); The Macmillan Company (Frederic Harrison, *Autobiographic Memories*, and Alfred Austin, "A Voice from the West"); Longmans, Green and Co. (Charles H. E. Brookfield, *Random Reminiscences*, and *Letters to William Allingham*, ed. H. Allingham and E. B. Williams); Ernest Benn, Ltd. (*Mary Russell Mitford: Correspondence with Charles Boner & John Ruskin*, ed. Elizabeth Lee).

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INTRODUCTION: THE BRITISH ATTITUDE

"Cultured persons complain that the society there is vulgar, less agreeable to the delicate tastes of delicately trained minds. But it is infinitely preferable to the ordinary worker"—JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN.

THE ATTITUDE of one nation toward another represents a congeries of contradictions based largely on ignorance and prejudice, with a constant succession of storm centers of high emotional intensity provoked by political events. As a result, one who wishes to map the course of international feeling must speak as Sir Oracle—and pray that no dogs bark.

There was much in the nineteenth century to draw the United States and its mother country together. Despite the confusion of races seething in our melting pot the English element was at all times dominant. As late as 1920, even after the tremendous influx of the "new" immigration, it was decided that 51 percent of the population of our country was of Colonial extraction. As important as the quantitative dominance of British blood was the cultural dominance of British literature, law, and speech, the community of language being the most significant of all. Then, too, there was trade, next to language the most universal solvent, as well as creator, of international ill feeling. Countless millions of English pounds sought, and found, an increase in the Magna Graecia of the West. Even Carlyle, who objected to democracy on the ground that it gave Jesus Christ and Judas Iscariot the same vote, had investments in America, which, unlike those of Sydney Smith, were profitable to a high degree. All through the century Englishmen with money to sow reaped a harvest in the nation acting its epic of finance in the rounding out of a continent. At the opposite end of the economic scale were the hosts of the poor whose relatives and friends had followed the course of empire in such amazing numbers—three millions of them before Victoria had ruled for thirty years. Such people must have provided the largest mass of British friends of America.

On the other hand, there was much to keep the apple of discord rolling in the center. The animosities engendered by the Revolution and the War of 1812, the Anglophobia of the Jacksonian democrats and the Irish-Americans, the conflicts of opinion over the boundaries of Maine, Oregon, and Alaska, the Trent Affair, the Alabama Claims, quarrels over fish, fur, and tariff, word battles involving Cuba and Venezuela—all these are reminders that during the century the United States squabbled more with England than with any nation of Europe. More consequential than the gusts of emotion in provoking international bad feeling was the sensitivity of the average American to European opinion of himself and the concomitant supercilious, disdainful, and condescending, if not always directly hostile, air of the British ruling classes, whose opinions as expressed in speeches, in sermons, in books of travel, or in the London *Times* were received as the gruff voice of John Bull himself. For most of the nineteenth century an established church viewed the United States as a strange confusion of dissenting sects; West End society pronounced Americans to be vulgar; the leisured class which was comfortably settled in the "gilded bondage of the country house" looked in vain for a kindred set across the ocean; a political hierarchy, whether Whig or Tory, feared democracy as it feared the plague. British officials marvelled at the lack of diplomacy displayed by the American government and its drably dressed ministers; army officers had scant respect for Indian fighters and admired the tactics of the rebel Lee; their naval brethren found little to learn of us until the heyday of Captain Mahan. Oxford and Cambridge men were almost totally ignorant of the nature of American colleges and scarcely felt a need for the study of American history—the United States was so recent a foundation it hardly had a past worth considering. Sportsmen were indeed interested in American hunting, but it was the wild turkey or the buffalo rather than the hunter about whom they sought to learn. Until late in the century these "classes" were the voice of England: the friends or relatives of émigrés, the tradesmen, or the minor journalists had little part in expressing the official attitude toward the younger nation.[1] Washington Irving's essay "English Writers on America"

[1] An Englishman has described Parliament as "relatively aristocratic" up to 1906 (R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870–1914*, Oxford, 1936, p. 496).

(1820) dwelt on the "eagerness and unhesitating faith" with which the aristocracy received the gross misrepresentations of even the coarsest writers who dealt with the United States; and James Russell Lowell provided the classic denunciation of their attitude in 1869 with his article "On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners." Even after 1870 when the onslaughts against the United States were fewer and more discreetly guised, the cat was sometimes loosed from the bag. In 1874, for example, a reviewer observed in passing: "We are apt to look on Yankees in the mass as vulgar, sectarian, swaggering, democratic, money-worshipping folk, who have degraded the English language to a colonial level"; and Ruskin added to the picture a missing element:

> England taught the Americans all they have of speech or thought, hitherto. What thoughts they have not learned from England are foolish thoughts; what words they have not learned from England, unseemly words; the vile among them not being able even to be humorous parrots, but only obscene mocking-birds.[2]

No event exhibited the fundamental cleavage between the English upper classes and the American people better than the Civil War, when even a mind like Charles Darwin's was converted to the official British view. John Bright, in a letter to the historian Motley, provided an acute analysis:

> Coming down from the War of Independence and from the war of 1815, there has also been in this country a certain jealousy of yours. It has been felt by the ruling class that your escape from George III and our Aristocratic Government had been followed by a success and a progress of which England could offer no example. The argument could not be avoided, if Englishmen west of the Atlantic can prosper without Crown, without Lords, without Church, without a great territorial class with feudal privileges, and without all this or these can become great and happy, how long will Englishmen in England continue to think these things necessary for them? Any argument in favour of freedom here, drawn from your example, was hateful to the ruling class; and therefore it is not to be wondered at that a great disaster happening to your country and to its constitution should not be regarded as a great calamity by certain influential classes here.[3]

[2] *Dublin Review*, XXIII (July, 1874), 68; *Fors Clavigera* for June 1, 1874.

[3] March 9, 1863, *The Correspondence of John Lothrop Motley*, ed. G. W. Curtis, New York, 1889, II, 120. Cf. George Ticknor's similar diagnosis in a letter to B. R.

At Cambridge, the more "liberal" of the universities, Leslie Stephen, who was an exception to the rule, found that his friends would hardly speak to him after a Northern victory; but he had the dubious pleasure of inciting elderly Tories to declare that they would "rather have heard of the British Guards being annihilated by the French" than learn of a defeat of the Southern army.[4] Even when the English in general were profoundly shocked at the assassination of Abraham Lincoln there were those staunch churchmen who felt that he perhaps deserved his fate because he had attended the theatre on Good Friday.[5] In 1866 a Liverpool gentleman offered to endow a Cambridge lectureship on American "history, literature, and institutions," with the stipulation that the President and Fellows of Harvard nominate the lecturer. Knowing the grave fears of democracy regnant in academic minds, the sponsors of the measure merely offered a motion to the Senate that "by way of experiment" one of the rooms of the university be put at the disposal of the contemplated instructor "for a single course of lectures." Charles Kingsley, who in 1862 as Regius Professor of Modern History had worked up a course on American history without any knowledge of the subject, issued a broadside in favor of the motion in which he argued, incidentally, that a study of the United States would be an effective method of combating any attempts to "Americanize" England. When the Senate met they began by "bemoaning themselves about democracy" until one of them "luckily discovered for the first time" that Harvard had a connection with the Unitarian church. The charge of Socinianism did the business, and the motion was lost by one hundred and ten votes to eighty-two.[6]

Curtis, May 12, 1857 (*Life, Letters and Journals of George Ticknor*, Boston, 1877, II, 402). J. S. Mill's views were akin to those of Bright. See also Leslie Stephen, *Some Early Impressions*, London, 1924, pp. 87–88.

[4] F. W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen*, New York and London, 1906, pp. 148, 158. For a history of the British reaction during our Civil War, see Donaldson Jordan and Edwin J. Pratt, *Europe and the American Civil War*, Boston and New York, 1931, Part I.

[5] *The Hardman Papers: a Further Selection (1865–1868) from the Letters and Memoirs of Sir William Hardman*, ed. S. M. Ellis, London, 1930, pp. 12 ff., 18–19.

[6] Maitland, *op. cit.*, pp. 175–177; and *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life*, ed. his wife, London, 1877, II, 134, 228–229. In 1879–1880 the lectures on the United States delivered by John Fiske at London University and the Royal Institution were notably successful (*The Letters of John Fiske*, ed. Ethel F. Fisk, New York, 1940, pp. 391 ff., 441 ff.).

But the Civil War and the perfervid discussions of the "American question," which alone had prompted Kingsley to attempt lectures on the United States at Cambridge, undoubtedly served to dispel a bit of British ignorance concerning the new country across the sea; and the eventual victory of the Northern forces set at nought the proclamations of the upper classes that such a government could not endure. Traditional political conservatism was rocked to its foundations; the *Times* "sacked" its chief American correspondent who had been so wrong in telling its readers what they wanted to believe; and the radicals, for years merely a kind of tail on the Whig party, were to have their inning. Young Henry Adams, rejoicing in the turn of events, in 1865 boldly claimed that America now wielded "a prodigious influence on European politics," and with the election to Parliament of such friends of America as J. S. Mill and Tom Hughes, prophesied: "Our influence on England will be strong enough to carry a new reform through within ten years. . . . Piece by piece the only feudal and middle-age harness will drop off, that remains." [7] The harness did drop off, with astonishing speed, and the experience and example of the United States may not have been without influence. Disraeli's Act of 1867 opened the first notable breach in the narrow franchise of 1832, a breach widened with the Ballot Act of 1872 and the extension of the voting privilege in 1884. The British government, which in the forties had spent less on public education than the city of Boston, laid the groundwork for national elementary schools in the summer of 1870; and the next year a University Tests Act robbed the Church of England of another medieval trapping by throwing open for the first time all lay posts in the colleges to men of all creeds on equal terms.

In the *Pickwick Papers* the elder Weller concocted a plan for the escape of the hero by concealing him in a piano, and then suggested: "Have a passage ready taken for 'Merriker. . . . Let the gov'ner stop there, till Mrs. Bardell's dead . . . and then let him come back and write a book about the 'Merrikins as'll pay all his expenses and more,

[7] *Letters of Henry Adams (1858–1891)*, ed. W. C. Ford, Boston and New York [1930], pp. 120–122. Matthew Arnold in 1865 admitted that "American example is perhaps likely to make most impression on England . . ." but he doubted its immediate effect (*Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848–1888*, ed. George W. E. Russell, London, 1895, I, 245).

if he blows 'em up enough." Dickens, himself, like many another, found that there was truth in the suggestion. But by the time the new reforms had reshaped British political life the English travellers to America who wrote books needed to be on the lookout lest they blow up something which they might find also at home.[8] Even Matthew Arnold in commenting on the shortcomings of American civilization reminded himself that he could find in his own country "an upper class materialized, a middle class vulgarized, and a lower class brutalized."[9] Late in the century there was an increase in the tribe of travel-book writers who, like William Archer, were inclined to praise almost everything American, from a Columbia seminar to George Ade, and to acknowledge the prevalence of "journalese" in English vocabularies as well as American.[10]

A new era in Anglo-American relations begins about 1870, when the ruling classes of England were convinced that the "republican experiment" was not doomed to failure and when the British government really began to shape itself into a democracy. One may attribute something of the more favorable attitude of the upper classes toward the United States to a variety of factors, such as the frequent Anglo-American marriages, the rise in immigration to America from the United Kingdom, the furtherance of trade back and forth between the two countries, the amazing increase in the population and wealth of the United States,[11] the growth of an imperialism which forced Britain to look for a friend, and, more specifically, the threatening ascendancy of Germany in Continental Europe. But perhaps the most potent force of all was the fact that life in England came to be more and more like life in the United States, with the spread of middle-class capitalism and the rise to power of the common man, a rise which was accompanied by an ever-increasing diffusion of intellectual

[8] Cf. Allan Nevins, *American Social History as Recorded by British Travellers*, New York [1931], pp. 425 ff.

[9] *Civilization in the United States*, 1888, Part IV. In 1885 he had written his American daughter that England would come "more and more" to the social conditions of the United States (*Letters*, II, 289).

[10] *America To-Day*, London, 1900, p. 179.

[11] United Kingdom in millions: (1821) 20.8, (1871) 31.8, (1881) 35.2, (1891) 38.1, (1901) 41.9; United States: (1820) 9.6, (1870) 38.5, (1880) 50.1, (1890) 62.6, (1900) 75.9.

mediocrity. But the "classes" were still not without influence; *flecti—non frangi* was their motto, and the cause of their strength.

At the same time that the condescension or hostility toward the United States on the part of the British classes became less overt and in many cases disappeared, in America the "society" of the Atlantic Seaboard, the colleges in the same region, and the intellectuals in general became increasingly Anglophile, in part perhaps as a means of escape from the swarms of new immigrants babbling in unknown tongues. The similar folk of the West followed suit; there was many a Charles Eliot Norton *in parvo* in the new universities on the prairie. Long before the Civil War Lowell had warned his literary countrymen in *A Fable for Critics:*

> Though you brag of your New World, you don't half believe in it;
> And as much of the Old as is possible weave in it;
> Your goddess of freedom, a tight, buxom girl,
> With lips like a cherry and teeth like a pearl,
> With eyes bold as Herë's, and hair floating free,
> And full of the sun as the spray of the sea,
> Who can sing at a husking or romp at a shearing,
> Who can trip through the forests alone without fearing,
> Who can drive home the cows with a song through the grass,
> Keeps glancing aside into Europe's cracked glass,
> Hides her red hands in gloves, pinches up her lithe waist,
> And makes herself wretched with transmarine taste.

Emerson had also observed: "The object of education in the United States seems to be to fit persons to travel in Europe," and after 1870 there was yet more than a half-truth in the utterance, as any reader of Henry James or even Mark Twain can see.

One of the evidences of a decline in the antagonism of the upper classes of England toward the United States after the Civil War was the appearance of attempts to better Anglo-American relations through the establishment of English-speaking Unions and similar organizations. Early in 1871 an Anglo-American Association was formed, with Thomas Hughes as chairman. A chief difficulty in the way of its progress, he thought, was "the lamentable ignorance of contemporary American history," an ignorance which James Bryce was soon to try to dispel with his *American Commonwealth* (1888).

Conan Doyle in 1891 dedicated his *White Company* "to the Hope of the Future, the Reunion of English-speaking Races," and, in the exciting days of our war with Spain, Anglo-American Leagues and Alliances sprang up like magic. Even a Bishop of London wrote in 1898: "The question of the future of the world is the existence of the Anglo-Saxon civilization on a religious basis"; and a prominent dissenting clergyman, Hugh Price Hughes, conceived an Imperial Anglo-Saxon Federation in which Methodism would lead the way to harmony. As the century ended, Walter Besant sponsored an Atlantic Union to unite the professional classes of the Colonies and the States with the corresponding elements in the United Kingdom. The year 1898 was an Annus Mirabilis in the history of Anglo-American relations, with the Laureate Alfred Austin voicing the sentiment of accord:

> Yes, this is the Voice on the bluff March gale,
> We severed have been too long.
> But now we have done with a worn-out tale,
> The tale of an ancient wrong,
> And our friendship shall last as long as Love doth last,
> And be stronger than death is strong.[12]

Henry Adams, who visited London in 1898, found the shift of attitude rather melodramatic to the last survivor of the American Legation of 1861, and concluded that "Germany as the grizzly terror" had effected in twenty years what his ancestors had tried in vain for two hundred to accomplish.[13]

A little later another Adams, impressed by the British reaction to the death of McKinley, wrote an essay on "A National Change of Heart," in which he commented on "an extremely noticeable recent something" which appeared to him to mark a "change in demeanor" on the part of England.[14] Curious to know whether a sympathetic

[12] "A Voice from the West." Information concerning the Anglo-American Unions, etc., comes from Richard H. Heindel, *The American Impact on Great Britain 1898–1914*, Philadelphia, 1940, chaps. iii, iv, and vi, and especially pp. 38 ff. and 127 ff.

[13] *The Education of Henry Adams*, chap. xxiv.

[14] Charles Francis Adams, *Lee at Appomattox and Other Papers*, Boston and New York, 1902, pp. 256–273. The list of town councils, etc., in England which passed resolutions on the death of Garfield in 1881 is indicative of a "change of heart" also. For the list see Lowell's communication No. 261 to the Secretary of State, dated October 6, 1881 (MS, Department of State).

Englishman had any opinion on the subject, in 1901 Adams wrote to Leslie Stephen, who had begun his literary career with a blast against the London *Times* and its hostility to America during the Civil War. In reply he received these modest words:

> I have probably seen more of your countrymen than the great majority of Englishmen in my own class—far more than ninety-nine out of one hundred in the less educated classes, and I may claim average intelligence. Yet I feel utterly disqualified by sheer ignorance from pronouncing any general judgment on your seventy millions. I have not the materials. . . . We feel a little better able to understand people who talk English than the barbarians who gabble French or German, and we have a vague idea that we are cousins. If we come into opposition, that makes our jealousy rather keener, and if we happen to be on the same side, makes us more friendly. The antipathy to the U.S. in 1861, &c., meant the hatred of the upper class to Bright and Cobden, who were taken to be unpatriotic as well as democratic. At present that sentiment is pretty well dead—we have "Shot Niagara"—and the "imperialist" sentiment opposes us to Germany and France and Russia, and makes us look for friends.[15]

So far as even the intellectuals of England were concerned, Leslie Stephen was probably right in his reference to "sheer ignorance" about the United States. Nothing is more revelatory than the fact that the Unions and Leagues flickered on feebly or sputtered out and that from 1888 to 1914 only about nine thousand copies of Bryce's study of the United States were sold in the land which produced it.[16]

The foregoing remarks lead to the general conclusion that the ruling classes of England passed from an open hostility to a tranquil indifference to the United States, and that after the time of our Civil War the rapid democratization of the tight little island led to an era of comparative good feeling reaching a climax in cousinly affection in the nineties. It is natural, nevertheless, to assume that one would find elements in the British population at odds with the ruling classes and more or less favorably disposed toward the nation rising with raw but tremendous energy in the West. Thus, political and religious radicals, thwarted elements in the middle or lower classes, and a variety of dissenters might be expected to be exceptions to the rule. The best evidence of the favorable disposition of the more plebeian strata of the British population is afforded by the large number of

[15] Maitland, *op. cit.*, pp. 467–468. [16] Heindel, *op. cit.*, p. 312.