Kipling's America
edited by D. H. Stewart

Published by ELT Press

Stewart, edited by D. H.
Kipling's America: Travel Letters, 1889-1895.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/11052.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/11052

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=290921
An Interview
At Buffalo

AS OTHERS SEE US

12 August 1889 Buffalo Courier

RUDYARD KIPLING, journalist and author, and a member of the editorial staff of the Pioneer of Allahabad, India, who is under contract with an English syndicate to write a book on America, as well as to do correspondence, and who is the author of five books on life in India, has been staying for a couple of days at the Iroquois Hotel. Last night he went to Niagara Falls to view the great natural wonder by moonlight, as he is expected to say something about the place in his letters. Mr. Kipling is journeying to England after a stay of seven years in India, and has taken in China and Japan, whence he went to San Francisco, and then to Oregon, Washington Territory, Alaska, and so on through the far Western country over the Rockies to the East.

Chatting with a reporter of the COURIER last night Mr. Kipling said: “As I came East I found that I was entering a new country, as it were, and I feel farther from the West here than I do from India. The difference begins at Chicago. The East is as much different from the West as America from India. Why, you even talk differently, and I am trying to understand the dialects of the different States, but it’s awfully difficult. And I am told that there is still another country in the South, where the individuality of the people, and their manners and customs, is as marked as in either the West or the East.

“You Americans are a wonderfully hospitable people and genuinely courteous. Indeed, your reputation in that regard, I believe, is proverbial. In the West I found that their hospitality was of a wildly
reckless character. If you want to ask a friend to take a drink, you invite everybody in the place to join you, as a matter of course. They all do it. Such is the custom, and to do otherwise would be considered rude. Your people think nothing of going out of their way to help a stranger, and when one is in search of information, your most obliging informant is the one not engaged in an official capacity; the rudest are those who are—especially the railroad conductor.

“I never knew what it was to be in a despotic country, however, until I came to America. You are a long suffering race here from a complexity of evils. The way you permit yourselves to be ordered around and the patience with which you endure the infringements upon public rights passes my comprehension. For instance, when I was in San Francisco, within a fortnight five people were killed or injured by the cable cars, right in daylight. The newspapers set up a howl about the need of guards and the corporation owning the road had the audacity to say that they had not decided which patent was the most desirable to adopt. If you had an effete monarchy, traffic would have been stopped and the cars turned on their sides until the guards were provided.

“The American girl is one of your divinest products and worth considerably more than all your improvements. We have the improvements, but not the American girl. She is clever as well as original, and as amusing as she is pretty. The country appears to be run chiefly for the benefit of herself and her mamma. You have grasped the mechanics of life and bossed their use to the uttermost.

“It is sad to reflect that with all your freedom you are not able to be free from the tyranny of servants. The way they boss a house is wonderful, and the way an American woman allows herself to be made a slave for the person employed to do her work is astounding. In short, you have the servant’s heel on your neck. It knocks the health and strength out of women who are fitted for better things. It is an awful waste of precious power. This applies more especially to what I would call your middle class. The women are made hewers of wood and drawers of water, and why is it? It is something that I cannot understand.

“One of these days you will be compelled to have an accounting with the yellow man, and I fear you will have no end of trouble with
the Chinese. They have a navy that could blow yours out of water and
could even make it hot for that of England. Two of their gunboats
could easily shell San Francisco, and I don’t believe you have a ship on
the Pacific coast that could cope with them. Why right here in Buffalo,
as with New York, you are terribly lacking in the way of a coast de-
fense, and if ever a foreign gunboat got down Niagara River, it would
be pay up or blow up.

“While I was in Yokohama an American ship had been condemned
and advertised for sale. Then came the disaster at Samoa and that
very boat was put back in commission by your Government. You have
treated the yellow man sufficiently roughly already for him to declare
war against you, and if you were a continental power he would have
been put up to declare war on you long ago.

“You have the tyranny of the newspaper invading domestic privacy
and private rights, the tyranny of the servant, and that awful tyranny
of the majority over the minority which you call votes. Why, coming
East I came through one place where they actually told me I couldn’t
take a drink. Then you have the separate empire, the State of Utah,
where, as far as my poor eyes could see, they are in passive rebellion
and preach sedition from the pulpits.”

Asked to describe how they do newspaper work in India, Mr. Ki-
pling said:

“Well, you’ll hardly believe it, but our presses are all run by hand,
and the reason of this is that it is cheaper. You can get a native for
eight cents a day, or $2 a month. They are stripped to a breechclout,
and when the thermometer is from 110 to 115 in the shade, I tell you
they sweat while running a press. We have no press association, and
every paper has to fight for itself. There are no reporters. The Ameri-
can reporter is positively an unknown quantity. Sensational head-
lines are never used. There is no public to cater to as you have here.
Every man for whom you write has received an education equally as
good as, if not better than, your own. He is either an administrator, an
engineer, a soldier, or a specialist of some kind. There are no masses,
except for the natives for whom you do not write, and God help you if
you cannot be moderately accurate. You must sway public opinion by
persuading your equals instead of exciting your inferiors, and this it
is that makes an editor in India bald before his time. In India you have 250,000,000 natives bossed by 200,000 whites.

“The bulk of our work is in dealing with subjects—military subjects, and questions of administration. The Pioneer is a little larger than half the size of one of your time-table folders, has 36 pages, and is published daily. The compositors are natives of half-caste. They don’t understand a word of the matter that they set up, and the ‘dirty’ proofs are something awful, but the matter comes out all right in the paper. They are nearly stripped when at their cases. A printing office in India has its own grove of mango trees, with its own tennis courts and flower beds, and is one story in height. As many as 300 compositors are sometimes employed in a single office. We have four editorial writers on the Pioneer, each one of whom has his individual branch or specialty, and then there is a heavy staff of correspondents, but they are not distinguished as a part of the newspaper force proper. Every pressman has to be imported, and there are no substitutes. If he gets sick he has got to work.”

“How do you collect your news?”

“Could you work in a fiery furnace? For six months in the year a man never goes out of doors from 7 in the morning to 7 in the evening. Society at a station is very small and it is the one place where the social scandal never blossoms out until it does so officially before a judge. The editorial force deals with subjects, and from each town in which there is a European colony a letter is written weekly, the same as you get letters from summer resorts. For six months in the year the majority of the women are up in the mountains, 7,116 feet. It is not deemed wise to keep them in the lower country during that period, and the men who can go there will do so, but the newspaper men have to stay. Their work is more solid than that of the average American newspaper man. No frivolity is tolerated. Whether the work is any better than that on American newspapers I cannot say. Frivolity on an India newspaper must be of a highly educated character—pointed with classical allusions.”

“Then you have no use for Mark Twains and Bill Nyes.”

“O, we have our humorists, but our humor is as much Greek to an Englishman as it would be to you. We have our own slang and our own expressions for our own kith and kin. For two years after he begins
newspaper life in India a man is not recognized as of the same fraternity. He is called a ‘griffin,’ the same as a man from the East is called a ‘tenderfoot’ out West.

“There is no literary or journalistic life in India. Every newspaper man is of society, and a newspaper man afterward. It takes a long time for a journalist to know the country, and he had got to chuck all his previous notions overboard.

“An India editor in summer costume in the month of July would shock America.”

It was now nearly train time and Mr. Kipling was obliged to cut off much more of interesting character that he could have told about newspaper life in India.