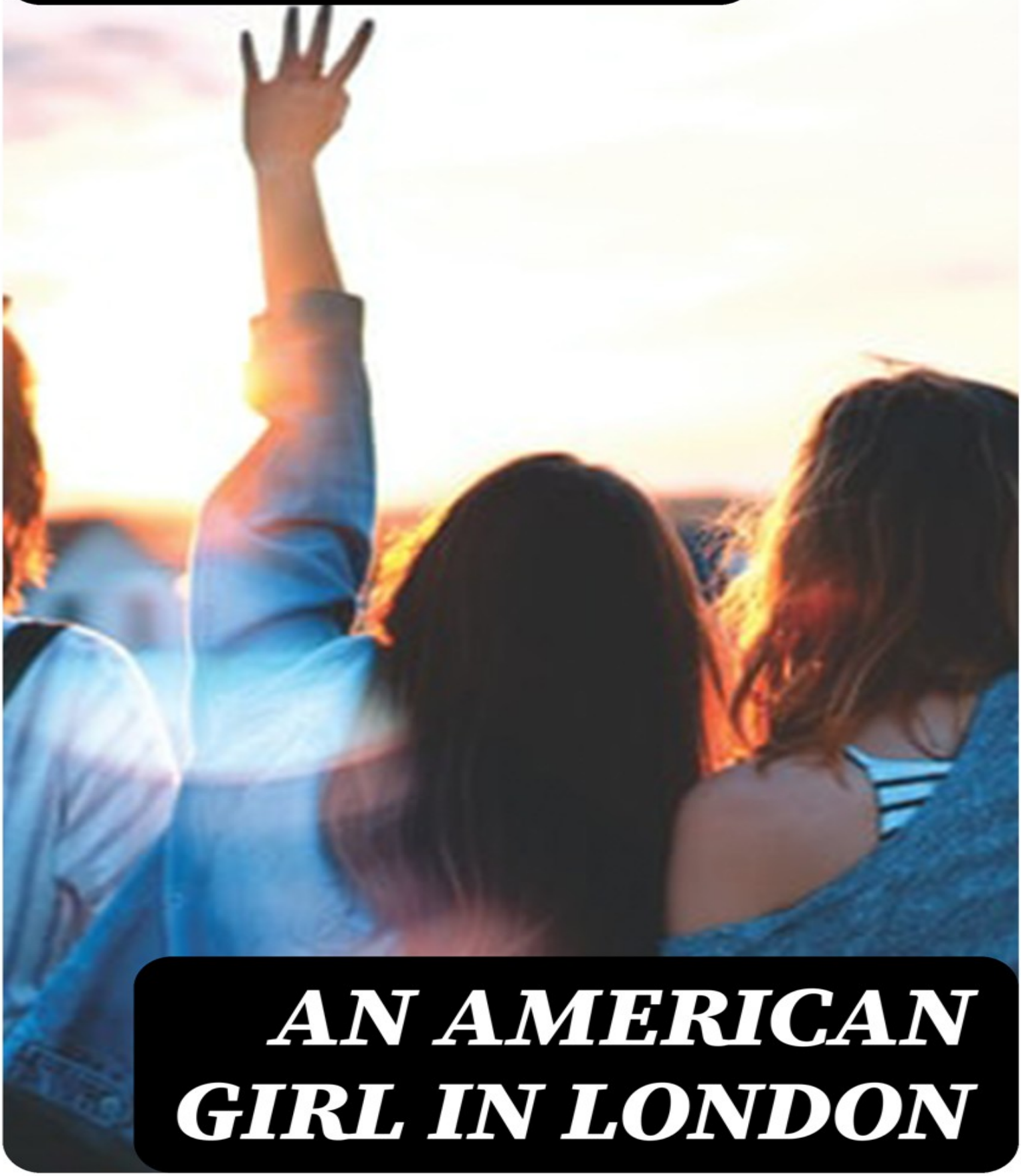
SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN



AN AMERICAN GIRL IN LONDON

Sara Jeannette Duncan

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AN AMERICAN GIRL IN LONDON

BY

SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN

AUTHOR OF "A SOCIAL DEPARTURE"

WITH EIGHTY ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

F. H. TOWNSEND

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Original

PREFACE

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FOR THE OTHER AMERICANS.

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I have written this account only secondarily and at the instigation of publishers, for Americans. Primarily, I wrote it for the English people. I composed it in their country; it was suggested by their institutions, and it is addressed to them. You will see, if you read it, that I had reasons for doing this. The reasons are in the first chapter, at the very beginning. As you have not far to look for them, therefore, and as it is quite unnecessary to print a thing twice in the same book, I will not go over them again. The object of this preface is chiefly to draw your attention to the fact that I am not talking to you, dear compatriot, so that you will understand that there is no personal ground for any annoyance you may feel at what I say.

Notwithstanding this, one of the Miss Wastgoggles, of Boston, has already taken the trouble to send me a rather

severely reproachful letter about my impressions and experiences, in which she says that she would have written hers, if it had ever occurred to her to do so, very differently. I have no doubt that this is true. She also begs me to remember that there are a great many different kinds of girls in America, numbers of whom are brought up "quite as they are in England." It is this remark of hers that makes me quote Miss Wastgoggles. I wish to say in connection with it that, while it is unreasonable to apologize for being only one kind of American girl, I do not pretend to represent the ideas of any more.

Mamie Wick.

No. 4000 Prairie Avenue, Chicago, Illinois,

November 20, 1890.

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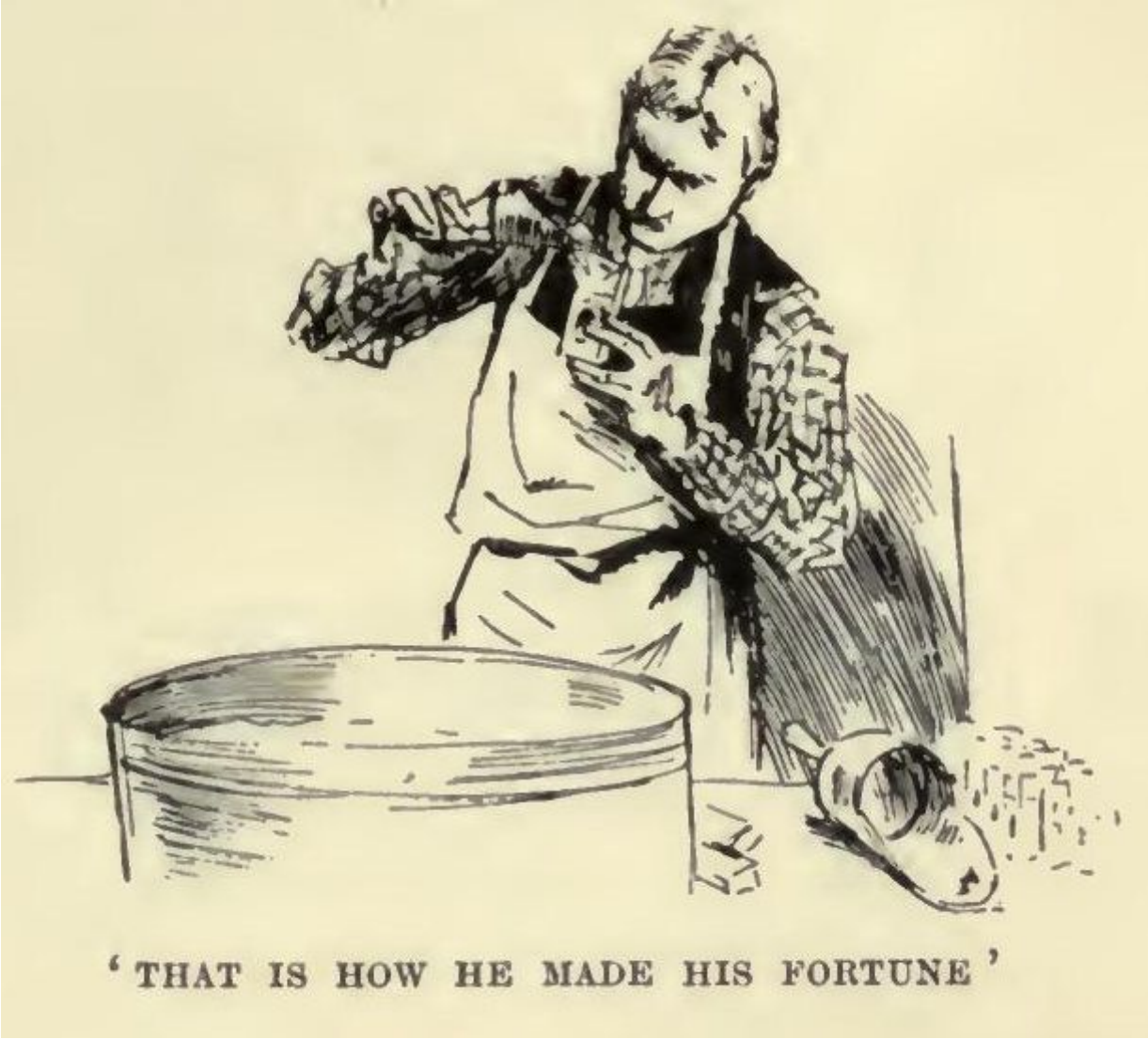
AM an American Girl. Therefore, perhaps, you will not be surprised at anything further I may have to say for myself. I have observed, since I came to England, that this

statement, made by a third person in connection with any question of my own conduct, is always broadly explanatory. And as my own conduct will naturally enter more or less into this volume, I may as well make it in the beginning, to save complications.

It may be necessary at this point to explain further. I know that in England an unmarried person, of my age, is not expected to talk much, especially about herself. This was a little difficult for me to understand at first, as I have always talked a great deal, and, one might say, been encouraged to do it; but I have at length been brought to understand it, and lately I have spoken with becoming infrequency, and chiefly about the Zoo. I find the Zoo to be a subject which is almost certain to be received with approval; and in animal nature there is, fortunately, a good deal of variety. I do not intend, however, in this book, to talk about the Zoo, or anything connected with it, but about the general impressions and experiences I have received in your country; and one of my reasons for departing from approved models of discussion for young ladies and striking out, as it were, into subject-matter on my own account, is that I think you may find it more or less interesting. I have noticed that you are pleased, over here, to bestow rather more attention upon the American Girl than upon any other kind of American that we produce. You have taken the trouble to form opinions about her—I have heard quantities of them. Her behaviour and her bringing-up, her idioms and her 'accent'—above all her 'accent'—have made themes for you, and you have been good enough to discuss them—Mr. James, in your midst, correcting and modifying your

impressions—with a good deal of animation, for you. I observe that she is almost the only frivolous subject that ever gets into your newspapers. I have become accustomed to meeting her there, usually at the breakfast-table, dressed in green satin and diamonds. The encounter had quite a shock of novelty for me at first, but that wore off in time; the green satin and diamonds were so invariable.

Being an American girl myself, I do not, naturally, quite see the reason of this, and it is a matter I feel a delicacy about inquiring into, on personal grounds. Privately, I should think that the number of us that come over here every summer to see the Tower of London and the National Gallery, and visit Stratford-upon-Avon, to say nothing of those who marry and stay in England, would have made you familiar with the kind of young women we are long ago; and to me it is very curious that you should go on talking about us. I can't say that we object very much, because, while you criticise us considerably as a class, you are very polite to us individually, and nobody minds being criticised as a noun of multitude. But it has occurred to me that, since so much is to be said about the American Girl, it might be permissible for her to say some of it herself.



'THAT IS HOW HE MADE HIS FORTUNE'

Original

I have learned that in England you like to know a great deal about people who are introduced to you—who their fathers and mothers are, their grandfathers and grandmothers, and even further back than that.

So I will gratify you at once on this point, so far as I am able. My father is Mr. Joshua P. Wick, of Chicago, Ill.—you may have seen his name in connection with the baking-powder interest in that city. That is how he made his fortune—in baking-powder; as he has often said, it is to baking-powder that we owe everything. He began by putting it up

in small quantities, but it is an article that is so much used in the United States, and ours was such a very good kind, that the demand for it increased like anything; and though we have not become so rich as a great many people in America, it is years since poppa gave his personal superintendence to the business. You will excuse my spelling it 'poppa'; I have called him that all my life, and 'papa' doesn't seem to mean anything to me.

Lately he has devoted himself to politics; he is in Congress now, and at the next election momma particularly wishes him to run for senator. There is a great deal of compliance about poppa, and I think he will run.

'I THINK HE WILL RUN'

Original

Momma was a Miss Wastgaggle, of Boston, and she was teaching school in Chicago when poppa met her. Her grandfather, who educated her, was a manufacturer of glass eyes. There are Wastgaggles in Boston now, but they spell the name with one 'g,' and lately they have been wanting momma to write hers 'Mrs. Wastgagle-Wick; but momma says that since she never liked the name well enough to give it to any of her children, she is certainly not going to take it again herself. These Wastgagles speak of our great-

grandfather as a well-known oculist, and I suppose, in a sense, he was one.

'SHE WAS TEACHING SCHOOL IN CHICAGO WHEN POPPA MET HER'

Original

My father's father lived in England, and was also a manufacturer, poppa says, always adding, 'in a plain way;' so I suppose whatever he made he made himself. It may have been boots, or umbrellas, or pastry—poppa never states; though I should be disposed to think, from his taking up the baking-powder idea, that it was pastry.

I am sorry that I am not able to give you fuller satisfaction about my antecedents. I know that I must have had more than I have mentioned, but my efforts to discover them—and I have made efforts since I decided to introduce myself to you—have been entirely futile. I am inclined to think that they were not people who achieved any great distinction in life; but I have never held anything against them on that account, for I have no reason to believe that they would not have been distinguished if they could. I cannot think that it has ever been in the nature of the Wicks, or the Wastgaggles either, to let the opportunity for distinction pass through any criminal negligence on their part. I am perfectly willing to excuse them on this ground, therefore; and if I, who am most intimately concerned in the matter, can afford to do this, perhaps it is not unreasonable to expect it of you.

In connections we do better. A grand-aunt of some early Wastgaggles was burned as a witch in Salem, Mass.—a thing very few families can point back to, even in England, I should think; and a second cousin of momma's was the first wife of one of our Presidents. He was a Democratic President, though, and as poppa always votes the Republican ticket, we don't think much of that. Besides, as

we are careful to point out whenever we mention the subject, she was in the cemetery years before he was in the White House. And there is Mrs. Portheris, of Half-Moon Street, Hyde Park, who is poppa's aunt by her first marriage.

We were all coming at first, poppa, and momma, and I—the others are still in school—and it had appeared among the 'City Personals' of the 'Chicago Tribune' that 'Colonel and Mrs. Joshua P. Wick, accompanied by Miss Mamie Wick'—I forgot to say that poppa was in the Civil War—'would have a look at monarchical institutions this summer.' Our newspapers do get hold of things so. But just a week before we were to sail something arose—I think it was a political complication—to prevent poppa's going, and momma is far too much of an invalid to undertake such a journey without him. I must say that both my parents are devoted to me, and when I said I thought I'd prefer going alone to giving up the trip, neither of them opposed it. Momma said she thought I ought to have the experience, because, though I'd been a good deal in society in Chicago, she didn't consider that that in itself was enough. Poppa said that the journey was really nothing nowadays, and he could easily get me a letter of introduction to the captain. Besides, in a shipful of two or three hundred there would be sure to be some pleasant people I could get acquainted with on the voyage. Mrs. Von Stuvdidyl, who lives next door to us, and has been to Europe several times, suggested that I should take a maid, and momma rather liked the idea, but I persuaded her out of it. I couldn't possibly have undertaken the care of a maid.

And then we all thought of Mrs. Portheris.

None of us had ever seen her, and there had been very little correspondence; in fact, we had not had a letter from her since several years ago, when she wrote a long one to poppa, something about some depressed California mining stock, I believe, which she thought poppa, as her nephew and an American, ought to take off her hands before it fell any lower. And I remember that poppa obliged her: whether as an American or as her nephew I don't know. After that she sent us every year a Christmas card, with an angel or a bunch of forget-me-nots on it, inscribed, 'To my nephew and niece, Joshua Peter and Mary Wick, and all their dear ones.' Her latest offering was lying in the card-basket on the table then, and I am afraid we looked at it with more interest than we had ever done before.

'I AM AFRAID WE LOOKED AT IT WITH MORE INTEREST THAN WE EVER HAD DONE BEFORE'

Original

The 'dear ones' read so sympathetically that momma said she knew we could depend upon Mrs. Portheris to take me round and make me enjoy myself, and she wanted to cable that I was coming. But poppa said No, his aunt must be getting up in years now, and an elderly English lady might easily be frightened into apoplexy by a cablegram. It was a pity there was no time to write, but I must just go and see her immediately, and say that I was the daughter of Joshua P. Wick, of Chicago, and she would be certain to

make me feel at home at once. But, as I said, none of us knew Mrs. Portheris.

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I AM not much acquainted in New York, so I had only poppa and Mr. Winterhazel to see me off. Mr. Winterhazel lives there, and does business in Wall Street, where he operates very successfully, I've been told, for such a young man. We had been the greatest friends and regular correspondents for three or four years—our tastes in literature and art were almost exactly the same, and it was a mutual pleasure to keep it up—but poppa had never met him before. They were very happy to make each other's acquaintance, though, and became quite intimate at once; they had heard so much about each other, they said. We had allowed two days before the steamer sailed, so that I could make some purchases—New York styles are so different from Chicago ones; and, as poppa said afterwards, it was very fortunate that Mr. Winterhazel was there. Otherwise, I should have been obliged to go round to the stores alone; for poppa himself was so busy seeing people about political matters that he hadn't the thirtieth part of a

second for me, except at meal-times, and then there was almost always somebody there. London is nothing to New York for confusion and hurry, and until you get accustomed to it the Elevated is apt to be very trying to your nerves. But Mr. Winterhazel was extremely kind, and gave up his whole time to me; and as he knew all the best stores, this put me under the greatest obligation to him. After dinner the first evening he took me to hear a gentleman who was lecturing on the London of Charles Dickens, with a stereopticon, thinking that, as I was going to London, it would probably be of interest to me—and it was. I anticipated your city more than ever afterwards. Poppa was as disappointed as could be that he wasn't able to go with us to the lecture; but he said that politics were politics, and I suppose they are.

Next day I sailed from North River Docks, Pier No. 2, a fresh wind blowing all the harbour into short blue waves, with the sun on them, and poppa and Mr. Winterhazel taking off their hats and waving their handkerchiefs as long as I could see them. I suppose I started for Great Britain with about as many comforts as most people have—poppa and Mr. Winterhazel had almost filled my state-room with flowers, and I found four pounds of caramels under the lower berth—but I confess, as we steamed out past Staten Island, and I saw the statue of Liberty getting smaller and smaller, and the waves of the Atlantic Ocean getting bigger and bigger, I felt very much by myself indeed, and began to depend a good deal upon Mrs. Portheris.

As to the caramels, in the next three hours I gave the whole of them to the first stewardess, who was kind enough to oblige me with a lemon.

Before leaving home I had promised everybody that I would keep a diary, and most of the time I did; but I find nothing at all of interest in it about the first three days of the voyage to London. The reason was that I had no opportunity whatever of making observations. But on the morning of the fourth day I was obliged to go on deck. The stewardess said she couldn't put up with it any longer, and I would never recover if I didn't; and I was very glad afterwards that I gave in. She was a real kind-hearted stewardess, I may say, though her manner was a little peremptory.

I didn't find as much sociability on deck as I expected. I should have thought everybody would have been more or less acquainted by that time, but, with the exception of a few gentlemen, people were standing or sitting round in the same little knots they came on board in. And yet it was very smooth. I was so perfectly delighted to be well again that I felt I must talk to somebody, so I spoke to one of a party of ladies from Boston who I thought might know the Wastgagles there. I was very polite, and she did not seem at all sea-sick, but I found it difficult to open up a conversation with her. I knew that the Bostonians thought a good deal of themselves—all the Wastgagles do—and her manner somehow made me think of a story I once heard of a Massachusetts milestone, marked '1 m. from Boston,' which somebody thought was a wayside tablet with the simple pathetic epitaph, 'I'm from Boston,' on it; and just to enliven her I told her the story. 'Indeed!' she said. 'Well, we *are* from Boston.'

I didn't quite know what to do after that, for the only other lady near me was English, I knew by her boots. Beside the boots she had grey hair and pink cheeks, and rather sharp grey eyes, and a large old-fashioned muff, and a red cloud. Only an Englishwoman would be wearing a muff and a cloud like that in public—nobody else would dare to do it. She was rather portly, and she sat very firmly and comfortably in her chair with her feet crossed, done up in a big Scotch rug, and being an English woman I knew that she would not expect anybody to speak to her who had not been introduced. She would probably, I thought, give me a haughty stare, as they do in novels, and say, with cold repression, 'You have the advantage of me, miss!'—and then what would my feelings be? So I made no more advances to anybody, but walked off my high spirits on the hurricane-deck, thinking about the exclusiveness of those Bostonians, and wondering whether, as a nation, we could be catching it from England.

You may imagine my feelings—or rather, as you are probably English, you can't—when the head steward gave me my place at the dinner-table immediately opposite the Bostonians, and between this lady and an unknown gentleman. 'I shall not make a single travelling acquaintance!' I said to myself as I sat down—and I must say I was disappointed. I began to realise how greatly we had all unconsciously depended upon my forming nice travelling acquaintances, as people always do in books, to make the trip pleasant, and I thought that in considering another voyage I should divorce myself from that idea

beforehand. However, I said nothing, of course, and found a certain amount of comfort in my soup.

I remember the courses of that dinner very well, and if they were calculated to make interesting literary matter I could write them out. The Bostonians ostentatiously occupied themselves with one another. One of them took up a position several miles behind her spectacles, looked at me through them, and then said something to her neighbour about 'Daisy Miller,' which the neighbour agreed to. I know what they meant now. The gentleman, when he was not attending to his dinner, stared at the salt-cellar most of the time, in a blank, abstracted way; and the English lady, who looked much nicer unshelled than she did on deck, kept her head carefully turned in the other direction, and made occasional remarks to an elderly person next her who was very deaf. If I had not been hungry, I don't know how I should have felt. But I maintained an absolute silence and ate my dinner.

Gradually—perhaps because the elderly person was so extremely deaf, and my own behaviour comparatively unaggressive—the lady of England began to assume a less uncomfortable position. A certain repellent air went out of her right shoulder. Presently she sat quite parallel with the table. By the advent of the pudding—it was cabinet pudding—I had become conscious that she had looked at me casually three times. When the Gorgonzola appeared I refused it. In America ladies eat very little Gorgonzola.

'Don't you *like* cheese?' she said, suddenly, a little as if I had offended her. I was so startled that I equivocated somewhat.

'No'm, not to day, I think—thank you!' I said. The fact is, I never touch it.

'Oh!' she responded. 'But then, this is your first appearance, I suppose? In that case, you wouldn't like it.' And I felt forgiven.

She said nothing more until dessert, and then she startled me again. 'Have you been bad?' she inquired.

I didn't know quite what to say, it seemed such an extraordinary question, but it flashed upon me that perhaps the lady was some kind of missionary, in which case it was my duty to be respectful. So I said that I hoped not—that at least I hadn't been told so since I was a very little girl. 'But then,' I said, 'The Episcopalian Prayer-book says we're all miserable sinners, doesn't it?' The lady looked at me in astonishment.

'What has the Prayer-book to do with your being ill?' she exclaimed. 'Oh, I see!' and she laughed very heartily. 'You thought I meant naughty! Cross-questions and crooked answers! Mr. Mafferton, you will appreciate this!' Mr. Mafferton was the gentleman whom I have mentioned in connection with the salt-cellars; and my other neighbour seemed to know him, which, as they both came from England, did not surprise me then, although now I should be inclined to consider that the most likely reason of all why they shouldn't be acquainted. I didn't see anything so very humorous in it, but the lady explained our misunderstanding to Mr. Mafferton as if it were the greatest joke imaginable, and she had made it herself. 'Really,' she said, 'it's good enough for "Punch!"' I was unfamiliar with that paper then, and couldn't say; but now I think it was myself.

Mr. Mafferton coloured dreadfully—I omitted to say that he was a youngish gentleman—and listened with a sort of strained smile, which debouched into a hesitating and uncomfortable remark about 'curious differences in idioms.' I thought he intended it to be polite, and he said it in the most agreeable man's voice I had ever heard; but I could not imagine what there was to flurry him so, and I felt quite sorry for him. And he had hardly time to get safely back to the salt-cellar before we all got up.

Next morning at breakfast I got on beautifully with the English lady, who hardly talked to the elderly deaf person at all, but was kind enough to be very much interested in what I expected to see in London. 'Your friends will have their hands full,' she remarked, with a sort of kind acerbity, 'if they undertake to show you all that!' I thought of poor old Mrs. Portheris, who was probably a martyr to rheumatism and neuralgia, with some compunction. 'Oh!' I said, 'I shouldn't think of asking them to; I'll read it all up, and then I can go round beautifully by myself!'

'By *yourself!*' she exclaimed. 'You! This is an independent American young lady—the very person I went especially to the United States to see, and spent a whole season in New York, going everywhere, without coming across a single specimen! You must excuse my staring at you. But you'll have to get over that idea. Your friends will never in the world allow it—I suppose you *have* friends?'

'No,' I said; 'only a relation.'

The lady laughed. 'Do you intend that for a joke?' she asked. 'Well, they do mean different things sometimes. But we'll see what the relation will have to say to it.'

Mr. Mafferton occasionally removed his eyes from the salt-cellar during this meal, and even ventured a remark or two. The remarks were not striking in any way—there was no food for thought in them whatever; yet they were very agreeable. Whether it was Mr. Mafferton's voice, or his manner, or his almost apologetic way of speaking, as if he knew that he was not properly acquainted, and ought not to do it, I don't know, but I liked hearing him make them. It was not, however, until later in the day, when I was sitting on deck talking with the lady from England about New York, where she didn't seem to like anything but the air and the melons, that I felt the least bit acquainted with Mr. Mafferton. I had found out her name, by the way. She asked me mine, and when I told her she said: 'But you're old enough now to have a Christian name—weren't you christened Mary?' She went on to say that she believed in the good old-fashioned names, like Nancy and Betsy, that couldn't be babified—and I am not sure whether she told me, or it was by intuition, that I learned that hers was Hephzibah. It seems to me now that it never could have been anything else. But I am quite certain she added that her husband was Hector Torquilin, and that he had been dead fifteen years. 'A distinguished man in his time, my dear, as you would know if you had been brought up in an English schoolroom.' And just then, while I was wondering what would be the most appropriate thing to say to a lady who told you that her husband had been dead fifteen years, and was a distinguished man in his time, and wishing that I had been brought up in an English schoolroom, so that I could be polite about him, Mr. Mafferton came up. He had

one of Mr. W. D. Howells' novels in his hand, and at once we glided into the subject of American literature. I remember I was surprised to find an Englishman so good-natured in his admiration of some of our authors, and so willing to concede an American standard which might be a high one, and yet have nothing to do with Dickens, and so appreciative generally of the conditions which have brought about our ways of thinking and writing. We had a most delightful conversation—I had no idea there was so much in Mr. Mafferton—and Mrs. Torquilin only interrupted once. That was to ask us if either of us had ever read the works of Fennimore Cooper, who was about the only author America had ever produced. Neither of us had, and I said I thought there were some others. 'Well,' she said, 'he is the only one we ever hear of in England.' But I don't think Mrs. Torquilin was quite correct in this statement, because since I have been in England I have met three or four people, beside Mr. Mafferton, who knew, or at least had heard of, several American writers. Then Mrs. Torquilin went to sleep, and when she woke up it was five o'clock, and her maid was just arriving with her tea. Mr. Mafferton asked me if he might get me some, but I said. No, thanks; I thought I would take a brisk walk instead, if Mrs. Torquilin would excuse me.

'Certainly,' she said; 'go and take some exercise, both of you. It's much better for young people than tea-drinking. And see here, my dear! I thought you were very sensible not to dress for dinner last night, like those silly young fools opposite. Silly young fools I call them. Now, take my advice, and don't let them persuade you to do it. An Atlantic steamer is no place for bare arms. Now run away, and have

your walk, and Mr. Mafferton will see that you're not blown overboard.'

Mr. Mafferton hesitated a moment. 'Are you quite sure, he said, 'that you wouldn't prefer the tea?'

'Oh yes, sir!' I said; 'we always have tea at half-past six at home, and I don't care about it so early as this. I'd much rather walk. But don't trouble to come with me if *you* would like some tea.'

'I'll come,' he said, 'if you won't call me "sir."' Here he frowned a little and coloured. 'It makes one feel seventy, you know. May I ask why you do it?'

I explained that in Chicago it was considered polite to say 'ma'am' or 'sir' to a lady or gentleman of any age with whom you did not happen to be very well acquainted, and I had heard it all my life; still, if he objected to it, I would not use it in his case.

He said he thought he did object to it—from a lady; it had other associations in his ears.

So I stopped calling Mr. Mafferton 'sir'; and since then, except to very old gentlemen, I have got out of the way of using the expression. I asked him if there was anything else that struck him as odd in my conversation kindly to tell me, as of course I did not wish to be an unnecessary shock to my relation in Half-Moon Street. He did not say he would, but we seemed to get on together even more agreeably after that.