

MY TOUR IN AMERICA

Experiences of the Funny Scotchman who found everything Lively in the United States and Canada

SECOND ARTICLE BY THE FAMOUS HARRY LAUDER

MY life in New York, apart from the theatre, was a constant whirl of gaiety and excitement. On my former visit I had made many good friends, and these, with the new acquaintances I was daily forming, all combined to extend to me the warmest and most effusive hospitality. In fact, I was kept so continually "on the move," and was so feasted and fêted, that I often wondered whether I was standing on "ma heid or ma heels." I had so many appointments and engagements that I had to get a special diary to enter them in, and every morning I would pore over the "entries" and give myself a headache trying to arrange how I would get them all to fit in.

New York is a great city and the New Yorkers are a marvellously smart and clever lot of men and women, but I do think that had I stayed there much longer I would have ruined my nerves, jacked up my digestion, and generally played the dickens for all time with any love of occasional seclusion and habits of peacefulness and regularity I may happen still to possess.

When you are in New York you have got to do as the New Yorkers do—hustle. If you don't hustle you lose half of what is going on. And the New York man doesn't like to lose anything. There are other people who may be classed in the same category, myself among the number; but I think the average New York man is not far short of being the keenest, cutest, most wide-awake gentleman in the whole wide world. Wide-awake? Yes, for he never seems to sleep at all.

Walking down a big thoroughfare one day soon after my arrival, I was intensely amused to see the announcement in a restaurant window, "Eternally Open." These words pretty well sum up the character of the average citizen of New York. He is eternally awake to the main chance; his eyes are always open—unless when it pays him to keep them shut!

It was not my intention at this stage to enter upon a jocular estimate of the American character as exemplified in the New York citizen, but, seeing I have been led into this side-track, I may as well stick to it for a little longer. I was particularly struck by the young, even boyish, appearance of most of the men I saw and met in New York. To tell you the truth, I cannot say that I remember seeing a really "auld yin" all the time I was there, and I mentioned this matter to a prominent city lawyer one evening in my dressing-room.

"Say, friend," I asked him—you always begin every remark in America by "Say"—"how does it come about that you New Yorkers are all so young-looking? Do you kill off your men here when they get up to about forty, or do you send them into the country?"

He smiled. "I guess the men in *this* city, sir," he replied, "are just as old as they feel. And we all feel like boys, sir. How old, now, would you take me to be?"

I looked him up and down, peered into his eyes, glanced at his glossy black hair, and hazarded thirty-five as being, perhaps, outside the mark. "I'm sixty-four, sir, and just beginning to enjoy life," was the prompt reply. Fortunately I had a "cocktail" handy, and it steadied me up a bit.

Another time I was slowly moving around Wall Street, the great financial hub of the American continent, and a friend who was conveying me was pointing out the prominent "gold-bugs," and explaining the methods and the magnitude of the New York Bourse. I was fascinated with the stir and the bustle of it all, and found myself trying to calculate how many millions of dollars were changing hands every tenth part of a second. The keen, eager almost strained look on the faces of many of the "operators" likewise interested me, and again I began to ruminate how many thousand dollars per day I would reckon sufficient return for a life of such appalling worry and nervous tension.

"Do you think all these chaps are making money?" I whispered to my friend.

"Wal," he replied, "I don't know about makin' it, but they're certainly tryin' to rake it in by hatfuls."

"Supposing," said I, "that a man with a very powerful voice stood up in the centre here and announced that there were a million dollars lying unclaimed four blocks away, what would you see?"

"See?" was my friend's answer, "I reckon you'd see the greatest Marathon race of modern times! But, of course, that's just a joke, my friend," he concluded. "In the first place there's not an unclaimed dollar in Noo York, and in the second there's nobody here would be guy enough to make such an announcement. He'd be round first pop havin' a squint for the million on his own."

The quick-lunch system in New York also took my fancy. Over in this effete old country we believe in taking reasonable time to enjoy the good things of the table, but the Yankee believes that every minute thus spent is absolutely wasted. Therefore, he feeds as he works—on the hurricane principle. I don't say that every New Yorker does so, but in several of the quick-lunch restaurants the visitors literally "shift" their viands with lightning-like voracity. I now know why there are so many patent medicines in America.

I watched the crowd in one of these wonderful restaurants for a full hour one afternoon. In that brief time hundreds—ay, thousands—must have been fed, if the word can be employed in this connection. The visitor rushes in as if a horde of creditors were after him, he orders whatever he wants, and, hey, presto! it is before him sooner than you can say "Jack." If you want to say "Jack Robinson" you will be too late, for by that time the lunch will have disappeared and the eater also. The entire operation can be summed up as follows: A plunge into the restaurant, a clatter of crockery, several convulsive jerks from plate to mouth on the part of the diner, a scurry for the door, and all's over!

I have a great deal to tell you yet about New York, the many personalities I met there, and my experiences in that wonderful city; but meantime I must get on to describe my "record" flying tour of the States and Canada on board ex-President Roosevelt's magnificent Pullman car Riva. That was a tour and no mistake!

When I signed my contract to "work America" for twenty weeks under the auspices of William Morris Incorporated, it was understood that part of that time would be spent in touring the larger cities of the States and Canada. I wasn't very keen on this touring business, I may tell you, because I knew it would mean a lot of hard work for me and even more excitement than was represented by an exclusive New York engagement, and that is quite enough in its own way.

However, Mr. Morris said: "Don't you worry, Lauder; you'll be well looked after, and we'll show you what luxurious travelling is across the water. You'll be flipped from place to place and never know you're moving."

My friend Mr. Morris was certainly correct so far as the luxury of the tour was concerned, but as for my never knowing I was travelling—well, that was coming it a bit strong. As a matter of fact, I became so infected with the idea of "hustle" that after the first few days I was positively unable even to sit still for five minutes on end. I felt that I had ever to be on the move or something serious would happen to me. That's how you feel in America.

The "Harry Lauder Special Train" set out from New York on the morning of December 14th, and as we steamed away from Hoboken Ferry Station a great crowd on the platform cheered vociferously and sang snatches of my songs. The train consisted of three coaches, a baggage car, a Pullman sleeping-car, and the private parlour car, "Riva."

The "Riva" was allocated to Mrs. Lauder and myself, while the Pullman was given over to the members of the vaudeville company that made up the "bill" along with myself and a specially-selected orchestra of sixteen performers under Mr. Donnally, an old Glasgow musician, but now an enthusiastic "Amurrican."

The "Riva" is really, I should say, the last word in railway comfort as far as civilisation and invention have yet proceeded. I was simply struck dumb with admiration of the car, its furnishings, its equipment, and all its arrangements. President Roosevelt frequently used the "Riva" during his term of the Presidential chair, and the only others who have travelled in it are Sarah Bernhardt and Adelina Patti. So, at all events, I was informed by one of the railway officials.

The "Harry Lauder Special," by the way, ran uncharged all over the different railway systems of the States and Canada, the original company making the arrangements for the full tour. They had

these so well in hand that there never was a hitch all the time with one exception. That was at Buffalo, where we were all very nearly sent to Kingdom Come by a collision.

Philadelphia was our first town en route. We arrived there about midday. The mayor of the city had arranged a civic reception for me, so we drove right up to the municipal buildings, a band of pipers leading the way. The mayor is an exceedingly nice man, and in the brief speech which he delivered welcoming me to Philadelphia he was all too flattering in his references to myself. There was a select little party of aldermen and prominent citizens present, and we spent a pleasant half-hour. The mayor and his friends were much taken with my accent—an accent which I never "accentuate," but certainly never endeavour to hide—and they kept smiling all the time I was speaking to them.

Subsequently they showed me over the chambers, and in a certain room I was shown the chair in which Hancock was seated when he signed the Declaration of Independence of the United States. I said I would like to be able to say that I had sat in Hancock's chair, and the mayor thereupon led me up to it and down I plumped. Li Hung Chang, the famous Chinese statesman, and ambassador, was, I was informed, intensely interested in the chair, and he also had the honour of sitting on such a unique and historic piece of furniture.

I was really sorry that I had practically no time to spend in Philadelphia; but, indeed, this regret was with me wherever I went. It was simply a case of rushing into nearly every town, giving two performances, afternoon and evening, and setting out again on board the "Lauder Special" somewhere about midnight. However, I generally contrived to have a drive or a motor run for a couple of hours in the forenoon, and in this way I was able to get an idea of the "hang" and characteristics of the different cities. In some places we remained for a couple of days, and the "two-day towns," such as Pittsburg, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, etc., were exceedingly welcome breaks in my wild career over the North American continent.

Apart altogether from any religious scruples—and I am quite well aware that the mere mention of the phrase may lay me open to the gibes of certain classes of people—I think that the comedian, equally with the clerk or the factory worker, is all the better, physically and morally, for a rest from work on the Sabbath. I would rather cease my stage-work completely than contemplate the horrible prospect, from a purely physical point of view, of toiling for a whole twelvemonth, Saturday and Sunday and all, with never a break in the deadly monotony.

All this has really nothing whatever to do with Detroit, but an incident which happened there causes me to refer to it. As I have told you, I was "billed" to appear there on two different Sundays. We had splendid audiences, the concerts were a great success, and the Arbroath Society of Detroit presented me with an address of welcome. As I passed many years of my life in Arbroath I was specially delighted to be thus honoured by the sons of St. Thomas in far-away Detroit. But I learnt that the St. Andrew's Society of Detroit had had a meeting, and that the members practically unanimously passed a resolution that none of them would attend "Harry Lauder's entertainments," seeing they were down for Sunday.

Now, I do think this was rather unkind of the Scots in Detroit. They must have known that I was not a free agent in the matter, and in any case they might have refrained from passing such a resolution in the circumstances. However, a few of the "St. Andrew's" men broke through the compact and not only attended the performance, but subsequently came "behind" and had a chat with me.

They were rather apologetic, and one of them said, with a melancholy look on his face, "Mon, Harry, it's an awfu' peety ye have to play on the Lord's Day!"

"Well, Donald," said I, "all I can say is this: the Scots in Detroit know what I have been doing to-day; but I would like fine to ken what *they* have been doing. They weren't a' at the Free Kirk, I'll bet!"

"No," was the reply; "I saw a heap o' them here on the quiet."

The third article in the series will appear on November 6th.