

CHAPTER 32 - A Nation in a Hurry

Chapter 32 of "The Ways of Men" titled "A Nation in a Hurry" reveals the author's observations on the frenetic pace of American life, contrasting it with the more leisurely rhythms observed in Europe and historical America. The anecdote of steamboat captains seating someone on the safety valve to increase speed epitomizes the relentless American rush. This urgency is immediately noticed upon returning to the U.S. from abroad, where the tendency to speed through life manifests in every aspect, from customs at the dock to dining habits and business transactions.

The author criticizes the societal pressure for quickness which prevails over quality and tranquility, seen in business practices that favor speed over accuracy, and in personal habits like the rapid consumption of meals. This obsession with saving time has infiltrated all layers of society, including the leisure class which, paradoxically, suffers from a perpetual lack of time. The American drive for efficiency and rapidity also extends to social engagements and entertainment, with dinner parties and theater outings rushed through as if endurance tests.

Ironically, despite this compulsive rush, the text suggests that Americans do not necessarily accomplish more but are trapped in a cycle of haste that negatively impacts societal aesthetics, health, and calmness. This societal hurry is seen as a curse or an "influence" that Americans both bemoan and perpetuate. The closing analogy recalls the steam navigation story, musing that Americans are determined to "run under full head of steam," risking explosion rather than slowing down.

In conclusion, this chapter critiques the American penchant for haste at the expense of depth and enjoyment, highlighting a cultural shift that values speed over quality, resulting in a frenetic lifestyle that contrasts sharply with the more measured pace of life advocated in historical and some contemporary foreign contexts.