

CHAPTER 15 - A False Start

"Worldly Ways and Byways" chapter 15 entitled, "A False Start" delves into the contrast between American men and women in cosmopolitan and sophisticated circles. The author praises American women for their grace and tact, whereas American men are seen as lacking in many social graces. The narrative contends that this discrepancy stems from a flawed approach to the education and ambitions directed towards young American men. The historical backdrop of rapid post-war economic growth led to an overemphasis on material success, overshadowing the importance of cultivating broader intellectual and cultural values. This singular focus on wealth creation has, according to the author, misguided many American men away from pursuing more fulfilling, well-rounded lives.

The text contrasts America's value system with that of England and France, where public service and cultural pursuits, respectively, are held in high esteem. American society, as depicted, undervalues the non-material aspects of life due to its obsession with monetary success and practicality. This preoccupation with wealth and, to a lesser extent, sports, is critiqued for limiting personal development, leaving American men ill-equipped in international or cultured settings. Sporting pursuits are noted but seen as insufficient to fill the gap left by a lack of engagement with the arts and humanities.

The chapter discusses how this narrow focus not only impacts individuals on a personal level but also influences American society's broader cultural and social interactions, even affecting how American men are perceived abroad. Despite financial success, there's an acknowledgment of a void that material wealth cannot fill, leading to a critique of American priorities and the suggestion that a recalibration towards intellectual and cultural pursuits might offer a more enriching path forward.

The narrative is a reflective critique on American societal values, urging a reconsideration of what constitutes success and suggesting a more balanced approach that includes the arts, culture, and public service alongside economic achievements. Through anecdotes and comparative analysis, it portrays a need for a shift away from materialism towards a more comprehensive appreciation of intellectual and cultural richness to foster a more globally aware and personally fulfilled American man.