



The Amateur Emigrant

Robert Louis Stevenson , Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne Stevenson (Preface)

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This is the sparkling record of the haphazard six-thousand-mile odyssey that twenty-five-year-old Stevenson made in pursuit of his future wife, Fanny. The two had met and fallen in love during a trip to France, but when Fanny's first husband called her home to California, Stevenson soon followed from Scotland. The sickly Stevenson first made a turbulent Atlantic crossing, like so many nineteenth-century immigrants, as a steerage passenger in a steamer of dubious seaworthiness. After a frenetic stopover in New York City, he embarked on a two-week, three-thousand-mile trip across the continent—the fastest and cheapest way then possible—by emigrant train. Finally arriving in the frontier town of San Francisco to win Fanny over, he was quickly captivated by California. Stevenson's often hilarious impressions of the young country, its rambunctious and colorful inhabitants, and the still-untamed continent are among his most vivid writings. "This lighthearted book is the result of a very difficult journey, one that almost killed him."—Paul Theroux

The Amateur Emigrant Details

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From Reader Review The Amateur Emigrant for online ebook

AlegnaB † says

3.5

Gabi Coatsworth says

I loved this book and have read it twice. It's a wonderful (and true) depiction of life in mid 19th century America, as Stevenson travels across the country by train to join his new bride in San Francisco. Please try it - it's not very long, and very good value for the time spent

Denise says

The writing is good, but this story of RLS's emigration to America didn't capture my interest as I thought it would. I confess, the most enjoyable parts were those where he talked about his new country and its inhabitants from his English point of view. Because, as an American, it's all about me, right?

Kathie says

Stevenson's account of his emigration to the United States. He had plenty to say about the people he encountered on the ship and in the last chapter, the people in New York. All in all, rather boring.

Alison says

Listened. In 1879 29-year-old RLS traveled from Scotland to San Francisco and wrote about the experience. He wasn't famous yet, and he was very poor, so he wrote from the perspective and experiences of most poor immigrants, which makes his account valuable. He wrote an impassioned defense of Native Americans and couldn't abide unkindness.

natura says

Muy bueno, una grata sorpresa. No solo es un retrato de los más diversos tipos que encontró en la travesía, revela también la personalidad del autor: su empatía, su sensibilidad, la capacidad de observación... Sus certeras reflexiones sobre los más diversos temas nos dan una idea clara de lo buena persona que era y de su buen criterio.

Tony says

I picked this up because I've always enjoyed Stevenson's fiction, and I'd heard this account of his trip across the United States in 1879 was an outstanding example of travel writing. It is indeed that, but not quite in the way that I expected. His trip was originally documented in three separate publications: The Amateur Emigrant, Across the Plains, and The Silvarado Squatters, which were originally published out of sequence. The Amateur Emigrant wasn't published until after his death due to its potential to bring Stevenson into disrepute. Even then, was controversial due to what was then perceived to be too frank and graphic an account of the lower classes.

The version I read is the DaCapo Press 2002 paperback, which includes The Amateur Emigrant, Across the Plains, but not The Silvarado Squatters. The first section takes up about 60% of the book, and covers his ten days of sea passage from Scotland to New York. The second section covers his train trip from New York to San Francisco. There, the story abruptly ends, without the section of his time in California. So, what one gets is a highly detailed picture of what a typical emigrant to America of the time might go through to get there. It's an interesting portrait of shipboard society and train etiquette but not quite what I was expecting. He has much to say on his fellow travelers, and displays a sharp eye for the mannerism or words that betray a person's true character. But on the whole, I'd say it's probably of limited interest to the modern reader, save those with greater than average interest in immigration to early Gilded Age America.

Sneh Pradhan says

Writing , you can slip beautifully into and cuddle with !!!!

Janelle says

I listened to the Librivox audiobook which only includes the leg from Scotland to New York. I enjoyed this account of Stevenson's travels and hope I can find the books with the remaining legs of his journey.

Ellen Fetu says

For what it was, a travel journal, excellent read. Wished I would have had an English colleague with me, as there were quite a few very English and old expressions and terms which I did not recognize. If one ever wondered what travel by ocean steamer and then cross-country train in 1880 was like, reader is given a detailed account. That was very interesting.

Kimbolimbo says

I listened to this book on Librivox.org. The reader was very hard to understand and she made the book BORING. I bet it would be a much more interesting book to actually read. Unfortunately I have no desire to try and read this book again.

Todd Weber says

Not exactly a toe-tapper, this book was at least interesting from a historical perspective. This journey took place in 1867; my great-great grandfather emigrated in 1868. Had to be similar circumstances for him.

Sonia says

This is a travel memoir written by RLS describing his voyage from Scotland to San Francisco, most of it concerning the sea voyage across the Atlantic. I found it interesting and amusing in a kind of Mark Twain style.

C.S. Houghton says

Not a whole lot happens during Stevenson's trip from Scotland to San Francisco, but he does find quite a bit to say about the six thousand mile journey. Mostly, he complains, but I like the way he complains. The Amateur Emigrant is a witty 19th century travelogue full of first-hand descriptions and candid observations.

Angela Light says