



# The American Commonwealth, The (NONE)

*James Bryce*

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In *Democracy in America* (1835) the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville interpreted American society through the lens of democratic political theory. A half-century later the Scotsman James Bryce examined "the institutions and the people of America as they are." Bryce presented his findings in *The American Commonwealth*, first published in London in three volumes in 1888. This new Liberty Fund two-volume edition is based on the updated third edition of 1941, which encompassed all the changes, corrections, and additions that Bryce entered into the previous editions. Its expanded appendix includes Bryce's 1887 essay, "The Predictions of Hamilton and De Tocqueville," and contemporaneous (1889) reviews of *The American Commonwealth* by Woodrow Wilson and Lord Acton.

The great merit of Bryce's work is that it is based on close observation of the actual operation of American political institutions, including political parties and municipal and state governments. Consequently, Bryce provides what Professor Gary McDowell describes as "a grand atlas of American politics and society." Indeed, Bryce was able to discern enduring characteristics of American society and politics. Therefore, as Robert Nisbet has written, "we still go to Bryce for piquant and cogent answers to the questions of why great men are not chosen presidents and why the best men do not go into politics in America."

**James Bryce** (1838–1922) was a British jurist, historian, and statesman. From 1907 to 1913 he was England's ambassador to the United States.

**Gary L. McDowell** is the Tyler Haynes Interdisciplinary Professor of Leadership Studies, Political Science, and Law at the University of Richmond in Virginia. From 1992 to 2003 he was the Director of the Institute of United States Studies in the University of London.

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