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## **Picturesque America; or, the land we live in**

a delineation by pen and pencil of the mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, water-falls, shores, cañons, valleys, cities, and other picturesque features of our country ; with illustrations on steel and wood, by eminent American artists

**Bryant, William Cullen**

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Preface.

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## P R E F A C E .

IT is the design of the publication entitled "PICTURESQUE AMERICA" to present full descriptions and elaborate pictorial delineations of the scenery characteristic of all the different parts of our country. The wealth of material for this purpose is almost boundless.

It will be admitted that our country abounds with scenery new to the artist's pencil, of a varied character, whether beautiful or grand, or formed of those sharper but no less striking combinations of outline which belong to neither of these classes. In the Old World every spot remarkable in these respects has been visited by the artist; studied and sketched again and again; observed in sunshine and in the shade of clouds, and regarded from every point of view that may give variety to the delineation. Both those who see in a landscape only what it shows to common eyes, and those whose imagination, like that of Turner, transfigures and glorifies whatever they look at, have made of these places, for the most part, all that could be made of them, until a desire is felt for the elements of natural beauty in new combinations, and for regions not yet rifled of all that they can yield to the pencil. Art sighs to carry her conquests into new realms. On our continent, and within the limits of our Republic, she finds them—primitive forests, in which the huge trunks of a past generation of trees lie mouldering in the shade of their aged descendants; mountains and valleys, gorges and rivers, and tracts of sea-coast, which the foot of the artist has never trod; and glens murmuring with water-falls which his ear has never heard. Thousands of charming nooks are waiting to yield their beauty to the pencil of the first comer. On the two great oceans which border our league of States, and in the vast space between them, we find a variety of scenery which no other single country can boast of. In other parts of the globe are a few mountains which attain a greater altitude than any within our limits, but the mere difference in height adds nothing to the impression made on the spectator. Among our White Mountains, our Catskills, our Alleghanies, our Rocky Mountains, and our Sierra Nevada, we have some of the wildest and most beautiful scenery in the world. On our majestic rivers—among the largest on either continent—and on our lakes—the largest and noblest in the world—the country often wears an aspect in which beauty is blended with majesty; and on our prairies and savannas the spectator, surprised at the vastness of their features, finds himself, notwithstanding the soft and gentle sweep of their outlines, overpowered with a sense of sublimity.

By means of the overland communications lately opened between the Atlantic coast and that of the Pacific, we have now easy access to scenery of a most remarkable character. For those who would see Nature in her grandest forms of snow-clad mountain, deep valley, rocky pinnacle, precipice, and chasm, there is no longer any occasion to cross the ocean. A rapid journey by railway over the plains that stretch westward from the Mississippi, brings the tourist into a region of the Rocky Mountains rivalling Switzerland in its scenery of rock piled on rock, up to the region of the clouds. But Switzerland has no such groves on its mountain-sides, nor has even Libanus, with its ancient cedars, as those which raise the astonishment of the visitor to that Western region—trees of such prodigious height and enormous dimensions that, to attain their present bulk, we might imagine them to have sprouted from the seed at the time of the Trojan War. Another feature of that region is so remarkable as to have enriched our language with a new word; and *cañon*, as the Spaniards write it, or *canyon*, as it is often spelled by our people,

signifies one of those chasms between perpendicular walls of rock—chasms of fearful depth and of length like that of a river, reporting of some mighty convulsion of Nature in ages that have left no record save in these displacements of the crust of our globe. Nor should we overlook in this enumeration the scenery of the desert, as it is seen in all its dreariness, not without offering subjects for the pencil, in those tracts of our Western possessions where rains never fall nor springs gush to moisten the soil.

When we speak of the scenery in our country rivalling that of Switzerland, we do not mean to imply that it has not a distinct and peculiar aspect. In mountain-scenery Nature does not repeat herself any more than in the human countenance. The traveller among the Pyrenees sees at a glance that he is not among the Alps. There is something in the forms and tints by which he is surrounded, and even in the lights which fall upon them, that impresses him with the idea of an essential difference. So, when he journeys among the steeps, and gorges, and fountains of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, he well perceives that he is neither among the Alps nor the Pyrenees. The precipices wear outlines of their own, the soil has its peculiar vegetation, the clouds and the sky have their distinct physiognomy.

Here, then, is a field for the artist almost without limits. It is no wonder that, with such an abundance and diversity of subjects for the pencil of the landscape-painter, his art should flourish in our country, and that some of those by whom it is practised should have made themselves illustrious by their works. Amid this great variety, however, and in a territory of such great extent, parts of which are but newly explored and other parts yet unvisited by sketchers, it is certain that no country has within its borders so many beautiful spots altogether unfamiliar to its own people. It is quite safe to assert that a book of American scenery, like "PICTURESQUE AMERICA," will lay before American readers more scenes entirely new to them than a similar book on Europe. Paintings, engravings, and photographs, have made us all, even those who have never seen them, well acquainted with the banks of the Hudson, with Niagara, and with the wonderful valley of the Yosemite; but there are innumerable places which lie out of the usual path of our artists and tourists; and many strange, picturesque, and charming scenes, sought out in these secluded spots, will, for the first time, become familiar to the general public through these pages. It is the purpose of the work to illustrate with greater fulness, and with superior excellence, so far as art is concerned, the places which attract curiosity by their interesting associations, and, at the same time, to challenge the admiration of the public for many of the glorious scenes which lie in the by-ways of travel.

Nor is the plan of the work confined to the natural beauties of our country. It includes, moreover, the various aspects impressed on it by civilization. It will give views of our cities and towns, characteristic scenes of human activity on our rivers and lakes, and will often associate, with the places delineated, whatever of American life and habits may possess the picturesque element.

The descriptions which form the letter-press of this work are necessarily from different pens, since they were to be obtained from those who had personally some knowledge of the places described. As for the illustrations, they were made in almost every instance by artists sent by the publishers for the purpose. Photographs, however accurate, lack the spirit and personal quality which the accomplished painter or draughtsman infuses into his work. The engravings here presented may with reason claim for "PICTURESQUE AMERICA," in addition to the fidelity of the delineations, that they possess spirit, animation, and beauty, which give to the work of the artist a value higher than could be derived from mere topographical accuracy.

The letter-press has passed under my revision, but to the zeal and diligence of Mr. Oliver B. Bunce, who has made the getting up of this work a labor of love, the credit of obtaining the descriptions from different quarters is due. To his well-instructed taste also the public will owe what constitutes the principal value of the work, the selection of subjects, the employment of skilful artists, and the general arrangement of the contents.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.