



Picturesque America; or, the land we live in

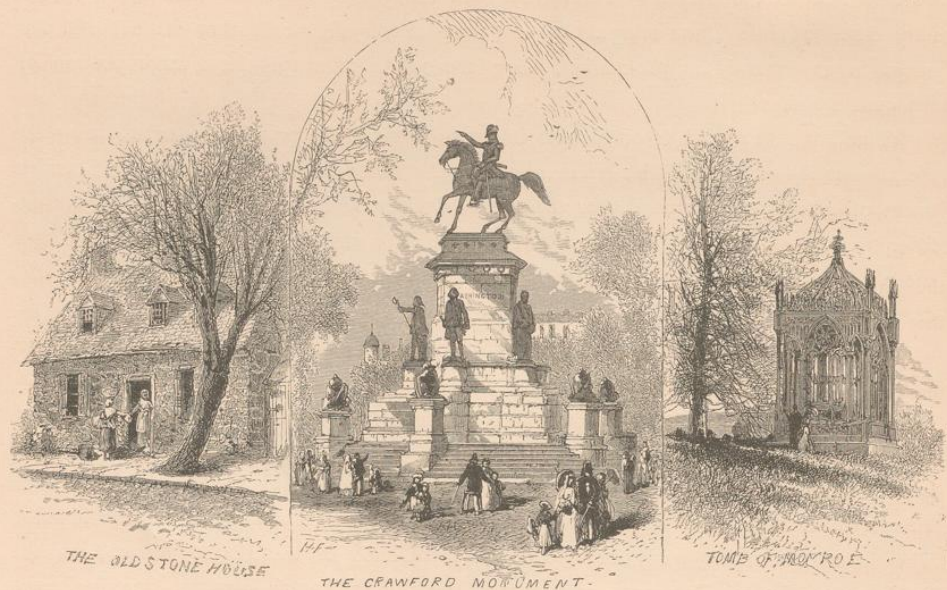
a delineation by pen and pencil of the mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, water-falls, shores, cañons, valleys, cities, and other picturesque features of our country ; with illustrations on steel and wood, by eminent American artists

Bryant, William Cullen

New York, 1872

Richmond, Scenic And Historic.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-65789](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-65789)



RICHMOND, SCENIC AND HISTORIC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY FENN.

IN one of the drawing-rooms of the Century Club, New York, there may be seen a painting of a quaint old mansion of red brick, architecturally of the reign of Queen Anne, one wing of which stands only in its charred timbers and blackened walls. This mansion is situated on the left bank of the James River, and, a century and a half ago, was the stately dwelling of the "Hon. William Byrd, of Westover, Esquire." It was occupied for some time during the late civil war by the Federal troops (when the painting in possession of the Century Club was executed), and the name, Westover, will be freshly recalled in connection with the operations in Virginia during that struggle.

There were three William Byrds, of Westover, grandfather, father, and son, each one of whom makes a figure in the colonial history of Virginia, but it was the second of the name and title to whom reference is made above—a man of many shining traits of character and of imposing personal appearance, as we know from contemporary records and from the full-length portrait of him, in flowing periwig and lace ruffles, after the manner of Vandyck, which is still preserved at Lower Brandon. He had an immense

estate, and lived profusely on its revenue for many years in England; he was the friend, as the inscription on his tomb at Westover tells us, of the learned and illustrious Charles Boyle, Earl of Orrery, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society; he contributed a paper to the Philosophical Transactions, and he left behind him a considerable mass of papers, known as the Westover Manuscripts, one of which is a delightful history of the dividing-line between Virginia and North Carolina. From this narrative we learn—a fact not mentioned in his epitaph—that he was the founder of Richmond.

On the 19th day of September, in the year 1733, he says, on their return from the boundary expedition, one Peter Jones and himself laid out two towns or cities, one on the Appomattox and the other on the James River, twenty-two miles apart. The one they called Petersburg, from the baptismal name of the Jones of the period, and not in compliment to Peter the Great; and the other they called Richmond, from a resemblance, real or fancied, in its site with soft hills, and far-stretching meadows, and curving sweep of river, lost to view at last behind glimmering woods, to the beautiful English town in Surrey. Whatever hopes they may have indulged of the future greatness of these Virginian towns, hopes as yet unfulfilled, it probably did not occur to Colonel the Hon. William Byrd or to Peter Jones, his companion, that around these sites military engagements were to be fought as memorable as Pultowa or Malplaquet, and that Petersburg and Richmond would become as famous in the history of sieges as Saragossa or Belgrade.

Colonel Byrd did not live to see Richmond attain unto any considerable size, for the town was not established by law until 1742, and he died only two years later. A few warehouses for the storage and shipment of tobacco were built first of all; then an irregular and scattering collection of houses for trade grew up around them; and on the hills overlooking the settlement arose the dwellings of a few rich planters and the thriving Scotch and English merchants who had established themselves at the place. But the fine town-house of Madame Rachel Esmond Warrington was fixed there by Mr. Thackeray several decades too soon. Richmond, indeed, had no importance until it supplanted Williamsburg as the seat of the State government in 1779, and so little prepared was it for defence in war that it was given up to the British troops, in Arnold's descent upon Virginia, without the firing of a gun, and Lieutenant-Colonel Simcoe, of the Queen's Rangers, rode into it with barely a show of opposition.

Immediately after the War of the Revolution, sanguine expectations were entertained that Richmond would soon become, not only the seat of a large trade, but a centre of learning and science. Commercial relations were established with London, and vessels of small tonnage made passages of sixty days from the wharves of Richmond to the pool of the Thames. Before many years an India-house was built, with the vague idea that the fabrics and spices of the East would be brought from Bombay and Calcutta direct to the capital of Virginia. But polite learning was to keep pace with material

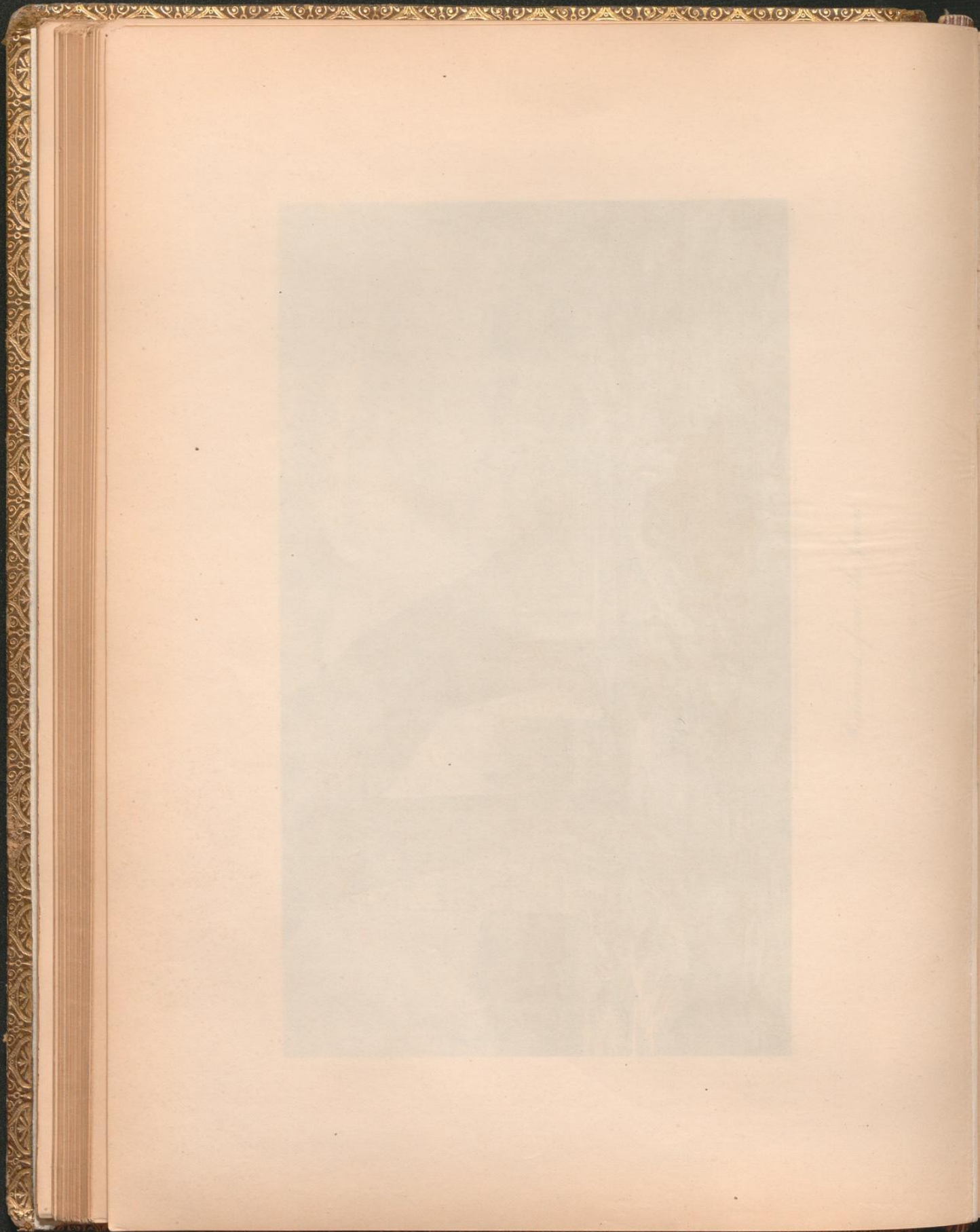


RICHMOND FROM HOLLY WOOD.



Richmond from the James

New-York: D. Appleton & Co.



growth, and accordingly we read in the annals of the town that the Chevalier Alexandre Marie Quesnay de Beaurepaire did, "in the year of our Lord 1786, the 10th of the Republic, viii calends of July, Patrick Henry being Governor of Virginia," lay the cornerstone of an Academy of Arts and Sciences, which was designed to be the American sister of the famous Royal (National, Imperial, and Republican) Academy of Sciences of Paris, an enterprise which failed, however, long before the dreams of commercial greatness had been relinquished.

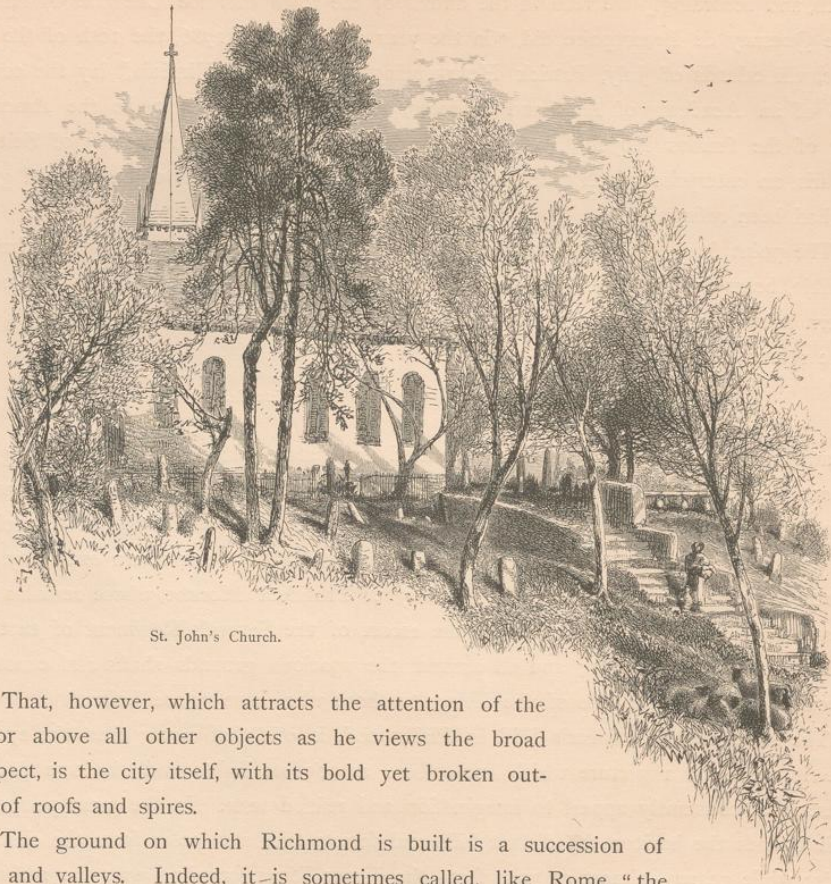
The point from which the most commanding and comprehensive view of Richmond is visible, bears the name of Hollywood Cemetery, a picturesque elevation in the north-western suburbs, where rest the remains of many illustrious men, and of thousands who in the recent struggle

"Went down to their graves in bloody shrouds."

Far away from the noises of city-life, curtained by Nature with the luxuriant foliage of tree and flower, and presenting at every turn of hill and dell patches of beauty which art cannot improve, there is perhaps no spot in America more suggestive of the solemn associations that attach to the sacred circle of the dead. At the southern extremity may be seen the monument erected to the memory of President Monroe, whose remains were removed hither from New York under the escort of the Seventh Regiment of that city several years before the war; and all around the spacious grounds shafts and cenotaphs are reared to pay the tribute of the living to those who have "gone before."

The scene from President's Hill, in Hollywood, is one that never tires the eye, because it embraces a picture which somewhere among its lights and shadows presents features that constantly appeal to imagination and refined taste. In the great perspective which bounds the horizon the distant hills and forests take new color from the changing clouds; while nearer—almost at your feet—the James River, brawling over the rocks, and chanting its perpetual requiem to the dead who lie around, catches from the sunshine playing on its ruffled breast kaleidoscopic hues. Hundreds of willowy islets impede its flow, diversifying the picture with patches of green, and the brown-backed rocks and ledges peeping out are marked by silvery trains of foam.

Intermediate in elevation between the river and the summit of President's Hill winds, in a graceful curve, the canal, seeking its basin at the town; and not far away are the forges of the Tredegar Iron-works, the fiery chimneys of which at night belch forth flames that send their sparkle into a thousand windows, and make pictures in the rippling waters. Still beyond these, in the sketch, are visible the gigantic flour-mills for which Richmond is justly famous, it being claimed that these buildings are the largest of the kind in the world. The curious fact may be stated in this connection that the flour manufactured here is said to be the only brand which is capable of resisting the heat of the tropics.



St. John's Church.

That, however, which attracts the attention of the visitor above all other objects as he views the broad prospect, is the city itself, with its bold yet broken outline of roofs and spires.

The ground on which Richmond is built is a succession of hills and valleys. Indeed, it is sometimes called, like Rome, "the seven-hilled city," and, in approaching from almost any direction, it produces upon the stranger the imposing effect of a large and populous capital. Nor will he be disappointed by his subsequent experience, for he will still find the city a place of interest as the social and political centre of Virginia.

From the period of the Revolution down to the present time the flower of the country-people have been in the habit of spending here a considerable portion of the year, while the sessions of the Legislature and the courts drew together many of the most brilliant intellects of the land. In 1861 still greater prominence was given to Richmond by its selection as the capital of the Southern Confederacy. It became the home of the Southern leaders and the resort of the officers of its armies, while the net-work of intrenchments that almost encircled the city and the battles fought in the neighborhood tell of the obstinacy with which it was defended as the key-stone of the cause. In April, 1865, when the Confederate forces evacuated their positions, nearly one thou-

sand houses, including property to the value of eight million dollars, were destroyed by fire. Since then, however, Richmond has nearly recovered from her misfortune, and there are now visible but few traces of the great conflagration.

Chief among the public buildings, and one that may be said to belong to the post-Revolutionary period, is the Capitol, a structure which lifts itself above all other buildings as from an Acropolis, and has, indeed, an imposing effect, which is not wholly lost when one gets near enough to see the meanness of its architectural details and the poverty of its materials. The *Maison Carrée* at Nismes, in France, was selected by Mr. Jefferson as the model for the structure, but so many alterations were made in this model that the Capitol resembles the *Maison Carrée* about as much as the Hall of Records in New-York City resembles the Temple of Wingless Victory. For all the purposes of the picturesque, however, the Capitol serves as well in the prospect from Hollywood as if it were the Parthenon restored. At the distance of two miles the stucco of its exterior glitters in the sunlight, like marble, and there is a symmetry in its proportions which Mr. Ruskin himself would acknowledge, harrowing as the building might be to his æsthetic soul when he came to examine it.

It stands on the brow of what is known as Shockoe Hill, in the centre of a public square of about eight acres, which, being beautifully laid out, is a favorite place of resort for both citizens and strangers, who find in its shady recesses and the music of its fountains a grateful contrast to the dust and bustle of the streets. The building is of the Græco-composite order, adorned with a portico of Ionic columns, and the view from it is extensive, varied, and beautiful. The entrances are on the two longer sides, and lead to a square hall in the centre of the building, surmounted by a dome. In the centre of this hall is the famous marble statue of Washington, bearing this inscription:

"Fait par Houdon, Citoyen Français, 1788."

On the pedestal is the honest and affectionate inscription which follows:

"The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia have caused this statue to be erected as a monument of affection and gratitude to

GEORGE WASHINGTON,

who, uniting to the endowments of the Hero the virtues of the Patriot, and exerting both in Establishing the Liberties of his Country, has rendered his name dear to his Fellow Citizens, and given the World an immortal example of true Glory. Done in the year of

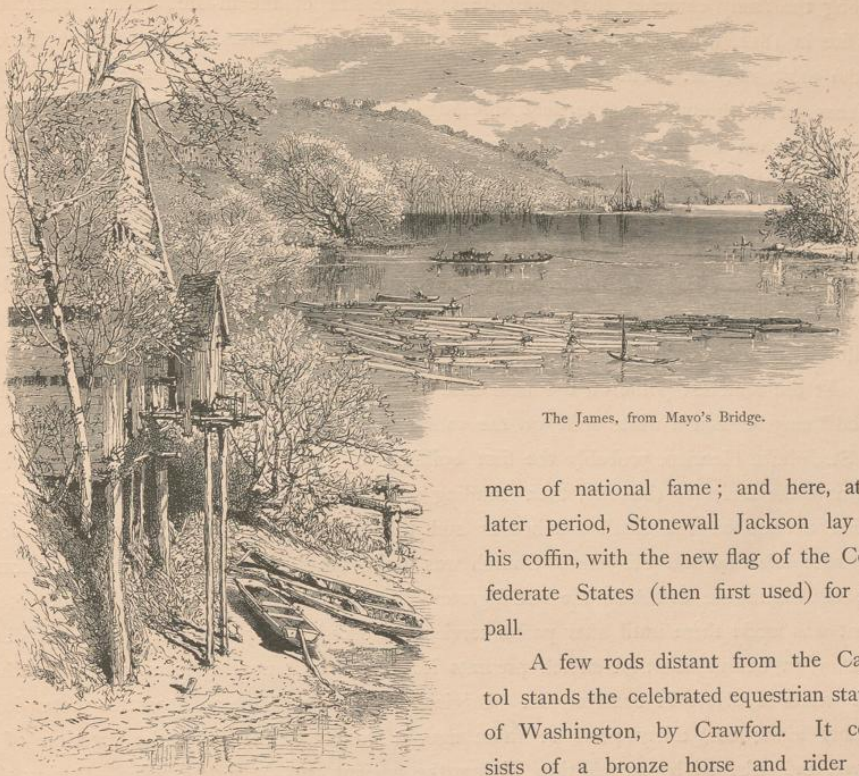
CHRIST

One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty Eight and in the year of the Commonwealth the Twelfth."

The statue is clothed in the uniform of an American general during the Revolution, and is of the size of life. In one of the niches of the wall is a marble bust of Lafayette. Among other objects of interest here, is an antique English stove covered with ornamental castings and inscriptions, and dating far back beyond the Revolution. It was used to warm the old Virginia House of Burgesses at Williamsburg, in colonial times, and still holds its place in the present hall as the centre of legislative discussion and gossip, as it no doubt was more than a hundred years ago. The library contains many historic relics and valuable old pictures, and indeed the entire building is rich in associations which make the place seem almost sacred. Here Aaron Burr was tried for treason before John Marshall; here Lafayette was received by his old companions in the cabinet and the field; here the memorable Convention of 1829-'30 held its sessions, among whose members were Madison, Monroe, Marshall, John Randolph, Leigh, and many other



The James, above Richmond.



The James, from Mayo's Bridge.

men of national fame; and here, at a later period, Stonewall Jackson lay in his coffin, with the new flag of the Confederate States (then first used) for his pall.

A few rods distant from the Capitol stands the celebrated equestrian statue of Washington, by Crawford. It consists of a bronze horse and rider of gigantic size, artistically poised upon a pedestal of granite, and surrounded by immense bronze figures of Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, George Mason, Thomas Nelson, and Andrew Lewis. Each of these statues is a study in itself, as a specimen of the sculptor's genius, and as an almost "speaking likeness" of the original. Henry is represented in the act of delivering an impassioned address; Jefferson, with pen in hand, and thoughtful brow, appears the statesman; Marshall wears the dignity and firmness of the great judge; while the noble form of General Andrew Lewis, arrayed in the hunting-costume of the pioneer, recalls the romance and daring of early days. On smaller pedestals are civic and military allegorical illustrations, also in bronze; and, altogether, the monument is perhaps the most imposing in America.

In another portion of the Capitol grounds is a marble statue of Henry Clay, of life-size, which well deserves the attention of the tourist as a faithful work of art.

The prominent public buildings of Richmond are substantial, and in most instances handsome specimens of architecture. The City Hall, Custom-House, Governor's Mansion, Penitentiary, Medical College, and State Armory, are severally worthy of a visit; while,

among the many churches, that which occupies the site of the ill-fated theatre destroyed by fire in 1811, when the Governor of the State and sixty others perished in the flames, is the most notable. The "Old Stone House" is cherished in the affections of the citizens of Richmond as the first dwelling erected within the city limits. "It was occupied, when I visited it," says Lossing, in his "Field-Book of the Revolution," "by Mrs. Elizabeth Welsh, whose great-grandfather, Jacob Ege, from Germany, built it before Byrd's warehouse was erected. It was owned by Mrs. Welsh's father, Samuel Ege, who was a commissary in the American army during the War of the Revolution. Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe, have all been beneath its roof. Mrs. Welsh informed me that she well remembers the fact that Monroe boarded with her mother while attending the Virginia Convention in 1788."

At the remotest point of the landscape in the drawing of "Richmond from Hollywood" may be seen a white spire on the summit of a hill. This is the old parish-church of St. John's, Henrico, probably the first building of note that was erected within what are now the limits of the city, then standing solitary in the midst of the native forest which overlooked the small warehouses and tobacco-sheds at the head of navigation. At what exact period St. John's Church was built, the local historians do not inform us; but there are tombs in the burial-ground bearing date 1751, and probably no interment was made there until after parish services were regularly performed in the building itself. Mr. Fenn's beautiful sketch presents it exactly as it now appears, and gives that side which is oldest in construction. Originally, it was without architectural pretensions of any kind; but, thirty years or more ago, it was modernized by the erection of a tower, and enlarged by an addition joining the ancient part at right angles. During the late civil war the tower fell in a high wind, and has been replaced by the spire which is seen, in the drawing. The old church was far less imposing, without and within, than Trinity at Newport, which it resembled in the general arrangement of its pews, and in an old sounding-board that once stood above the pulpit, but yielded at last to the progress of decay. The associations of the building are of the most stirring and interesting character. Here assembled, on the 20th of March, 1775, the Second Convention of Virginia, which was called to determine the question of peace or war between the colony and the crown, and which gave to the Old Dominion the honor of organizing the first plan of resistance to British tyranny. The deliberations of this convention form a striking chapter in the history of the American Revolution, and are familiar to all educated persons in the United States. The body contained a large number of men who were destined to become illustrious in the annals of the Commonwealth and the country. Among them were Peyton Randolph and Richard Bland, George Wythe and Richard Henry Lee. The delegate from Albemarle was Thomas Jefferson, and the delegate from Fairfax was George Washington. But the leading spirit of the convention was Patrick Henry, and the walls of this old church gave back the animating strains of his eloquence,



Rapids in the James.

as, rising to the full height of his argument, he uttered the war-cry of the Revolution: "Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but, as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

The populous graveyard around the church has long since been disused for interments, and the tombs themselves are crumbling into ruin, which the deep grasses and running ivy of the spot half conceal. On some the inscriptions are almost illegible, and it is plain, from the neglect of all, that few descendants of the dead that repose beneath them now remain among the inhabitants of Richmond. None of the great historic names of the Commonwealth are to be found among these tombs, and the thoughts they suggest are such as were excited in the mind of Gray at Stoke Pogis, which the "Elegy" so beautifully and effectively embodies in verse. The sleepers were the undistinguished forefathers of the hamlet mostly, of various races and nationalities, and, though three generations are represented in this city of silence and forgetfulness, quite as many lie here who prayed for King George in the church near by as for the President of the United States in later times.

From the hill on which the church stands, and indeed from most of the

hills about Richmond, the James River is in view for several miles of its course, and lends much to the attractiveness of the prospect. Above the city, in the rapids which for six miles tumble over a rocky bed, we see whence is derived the water-power that animates the mills, and how art has overcome the obstructions of Nature by means of a canal which opens the navigation of the river above the falls. Below the bridge, the scene is more



Scene on the Canal.

peaceful, and the tranquil surface of the water reflects the steadily-increasing commerce of the capital. Barks and steamers ply regularly between its sister-ports, and the white gleam of their sails and the dark smoke of their furnaces, though far from fulfilling the visions of the builders of the India-house of which we have spoken, give a charm to picturesque surroundings that will always be worthy of the pencil of the artist. The

accompanying illustrations correctly present various aspects of the river; but it is among the rapids, or just below them, that Mr. Fenn has happily embraced the upward and the downward view. The covered bridge, which a train of cars is about entering, seen in the drawing of the rapids, is that of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, and the frames which appear above the water are the fish-traps which are rebuilt every spring to catch the shad as they come over the falls. The unwary fish swims with the swift current right into the trap, and is carried by its force out of his native element, high and dry upon the strips of planking, there to remain until the owner of the trap removes it, unless stolen at night by the prowling human shad-thief, or the predatory raccoon which inhabits the islands in the stream. Once in the trap, the shad cannot possibly go back, and, in seasons when a good run of this fish ascends the river, large numbers are thus caught for the Richmond market. It may be supposed that the navigation of a river so rapid and so rocky as the James at this point, is difficult, but the negro boatmen have great dexterity in poling and paddling their little skiffs across from island to island; and the small steam-yacht, which lies under the island's bank in the picture, does no more than shoot the torrent into the deeper and smoother water lower down.

The canal, which is seen in the last of Mr. Fenn's collection of drawings, is connected with tide-water by a series of locks, with an aggregate lift of ninety-six feet. Two of these locks on the highest level constitute the central part of a sketch which, at first glance, looks as if it were designed to set before us a quaint, old, tumble-down nook or corner of some European city. Upon examination, however, one sees the African element of the population in such force, tending the lock, feeding the poultry, and driving the team across the bridge, as to determine the locality in a Southern town of the United States. One cannot help recognizing in this sketch how much more effective in the hands of the artist is dilapidation than tidiness, and a ruin than a perfect structure. The ramshackle porches of the negro tenements here have a higher effect than would a neat row of white-painted houses with green blinds, in a well-kept New-England village, and the broken walls of the warehouse (destroyed by the fire of April, 1865, and never rebuilt) are more picturesque than would be the smooth front of a factory that might give occupation to five hundred operatives.

Richmond retains yet, in the marks of her great conflagration, much of that undesirable picturesqueness that belongs to ruins. But such is the beauty of its site, and the charm of its landscape, that, when not one ragged wall or cruel chasm shall be left to suggest the ravage it has undergone—when the whole river-margin along the rapids shall have been made vulgar and noisy (and profitable) by lines of factories, and Richmond shall become the great manufacturing city of the South—even then it will tempt the wandering artist to take out his portfolio and sketch the outlines of its hills, and the tumult of its leaping waters.