



## **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**

The French Broad.

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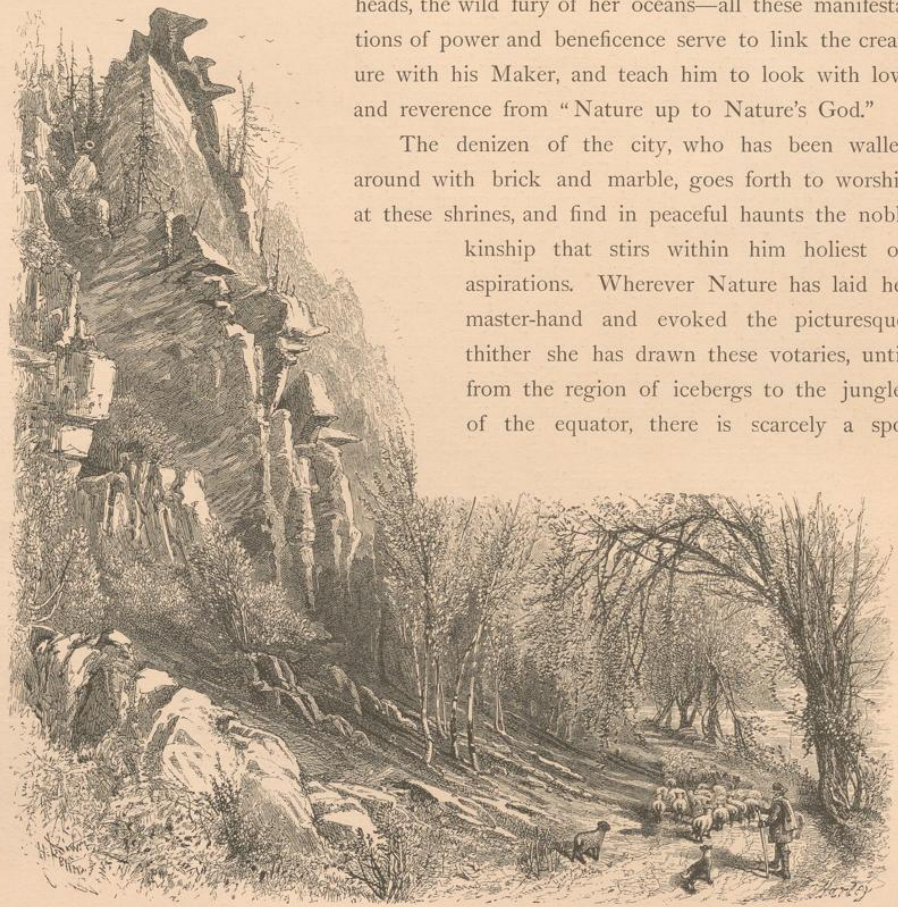
## THE FRENCH BROAD.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY FENN.

NATURE seldom repeats herself. In all of her wild vagaries, on river, plain, and mountain, there is observable the same diversity of outline and expression that is to be seen in the highest type of creation—man. The scenery which springs forth with such marvellous variety at her magic touch—now rugged, now grand, now full of grace and beauty, now calm as the ethereal blue, never palling upon the eye—the music of her water-falls, the solemnity of her forests, the reverberations of her mountain-

heads, the wild fury of her oceans—all these manifestations of power and beneficence serve to link the creature with his Maker, and teach him to look with love and reverence from "Nature up to Nature's God."

The denizen of the city, who has been walled around with brick and marble, goes forth to worship at these shrines, and find in peaceful haunts the noble kinship that stirs within him holiest of aspirations. Wherever Nature has laid her master-hand and evoked the picturesque, thither she has drawn these votaries, until, from the region of icebergs to the jungles of the equator, there is scarcely a spot



Paint Rock, on the French Broad.



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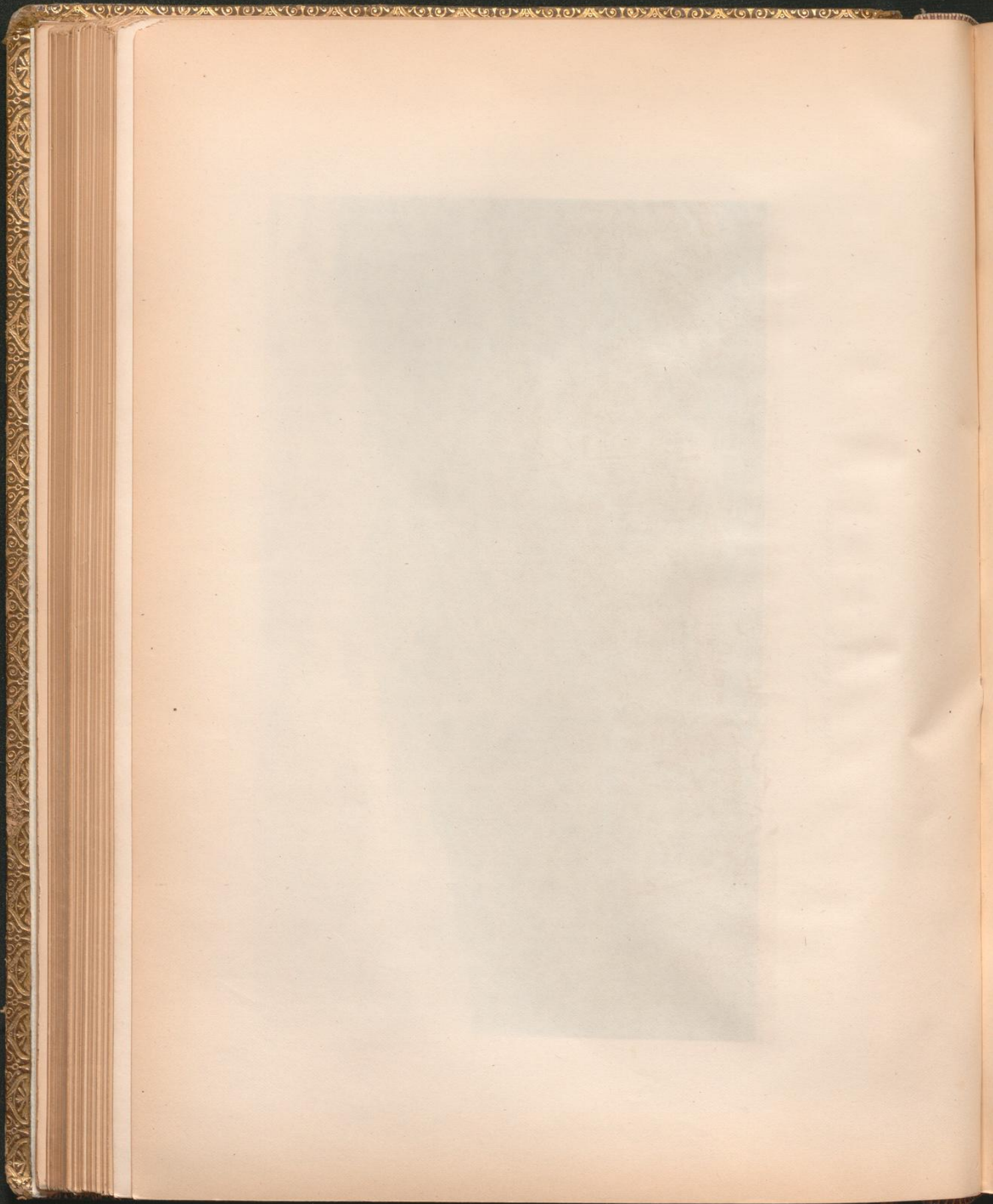
*The Smoky Mountains.*

[NORTH CAROLINA]

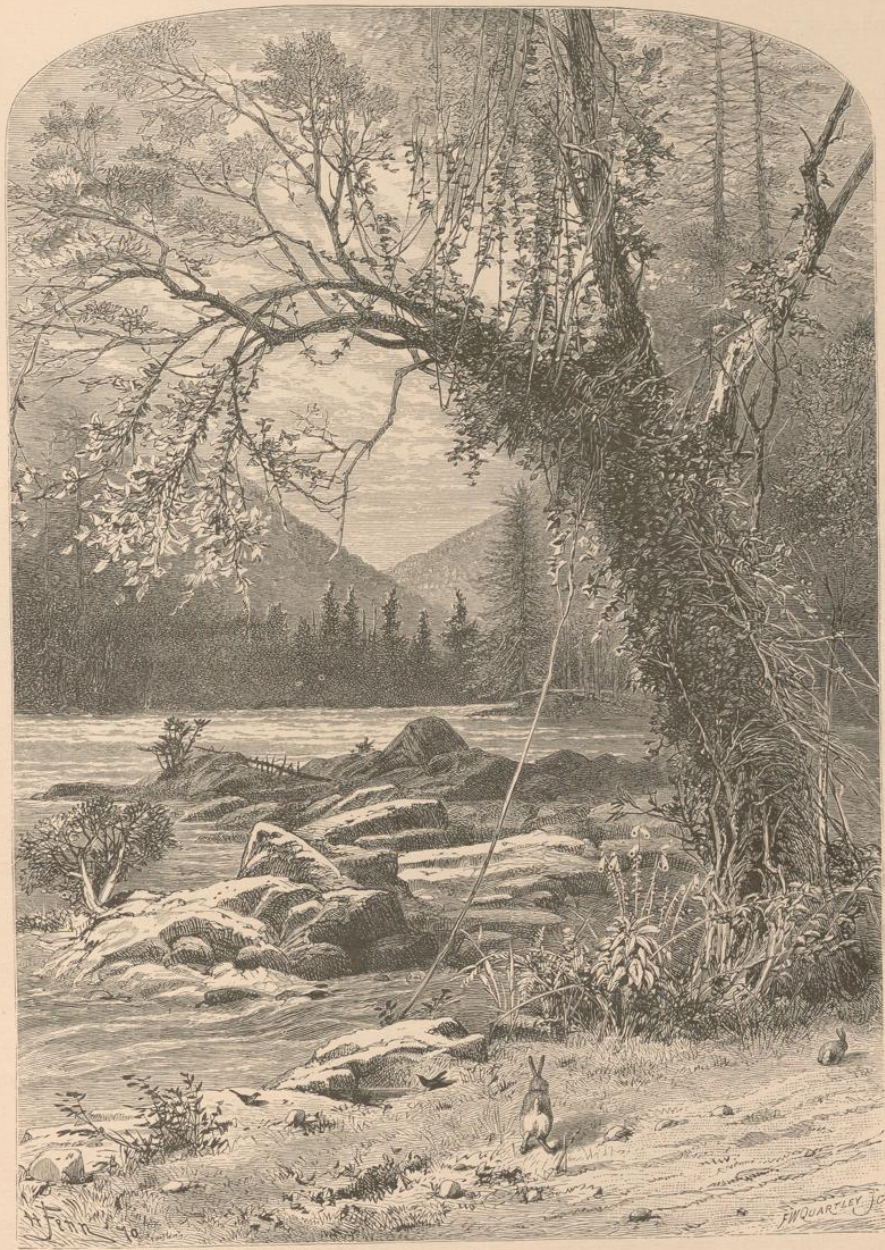
New York, D. Appleton & Co.











THE FRENCH BROAD



replete with attraction that has not at some time been the abiding-place of the tourist and stranger.

Such is eminently true of our own America; and yet, in the vastness of the continent, new beauties are being continually discovered, and points of interest are becoming places of resort, which, but a few years ago, were known only to the explorer or the local inhabitant. The Adirondacks, the Yosemite Valley, the cañons of the Western mountains, the wilds of Maine—these, and other localities, are becoming as familiar to the summer traveller as are the fashionable neighborhoods of Niagara, Memphremagog, or the White Mountains.

Still another section of the country which seems destined at no distant day to become a place of recreation, and to attract the artist and lover of Nature, is that portion of Western North Carolina through which course the beautiful waters of the French Broad River and other mountain-streams, and which may be described in general terms as the table-land of the Blue Ridge.

The fame of the beauty and the sublimity of the scenery is extensive, and the realization does not belie the report. Tall, grim, old rocks lift their bald heads far, far toward the heavens, in all the sublimity of solemn grandeur; while in the vision of the distant lowlands, that may be enjoyed from this summit or that, is a soft, sweet delicacy which breathes almost of the celestial, and makes one feel unconscious of aught save the panorama of loveliness before him.

Indeed, it would seem as if Nature had selected this region for the display of her fantastic power in uplifting the earth, and giving to it strange shapes and startling contrasts—in imparting curious physiognomies to the mountains and evoking melody from the water-falls.

The locality comprises about eight thousand square miles of territory, and, though settled more than a hundred years ago, and a great pass-way from the West to the East and South, has not yet seen a single railway penetrate the solid walls that form its border. The old-fashioned stage-coach still lumbers along the mountain-turnpikes, and holds undisputed sway on the flower-lined road that follows the course of the river; and the locomotive lingers at each portal, as if it were sacrilege to break the silence of the spot. Perhaps it is best that it is so, for there is certainly a shadow of romance in travelling through these solitudes in the good old style of our forefathers, and there is often a keen relish in experiencing the primitive customs and semi-aboriginal comforts of this wild region.

In journeying to this "land of the sky," the traveller from either North or West will find it convenient to approach from East Tennessee, and leave the cars at Greenville, the home of ex-President Andrew Johnson. Here a stage may be taken, which carries him along under the brows of hills and mountains, crowned with the Canada balsam, the Norway spruce, the hemlock, and white-pine. On the one hand he will catch





MOUNTAIN ISLAND.



glimpses of distant valleys, rich to repletion, in which clusters of farm-houses dot the prospect; and on the other tower tall peaks, that have no rivals this side of the Rocky Mountains. A drive of a few miles brings him to a range known as the Iron or Great Smoky Mountains, and here he passes under the shadow of that curious formation known to the tourist as Paint Rock. The French Broad, likewise, bursts upon his view in all its wild beauty; and from this point to Asheville, in North Carolina, and beyond, the scene is one of mingled loveliness and grandeur.

We linger briefly, however, before pursuing the journey, to describe the river, of which it may be said that, in all this gallery of Nature's strange fantasies, none possess



A Scene on the French Broad.

so many characteristics at once peculiar in themselves and attractive to the tourist and scientist as the French Broad.

In the Indian vernacular, it was originally known as Tselica; but the Cherokees now call it Tockyeste, signifying, and not untruthfully, "The Little Roarer," or, as translated by some, "The Racer." Its present name is said to be derived as follows: "In the early settlement of the country, a party of hunters left what was then Mecklenburg, North Carolina, for the mountains. Crossing Broad River in Rutherford County they so named it; the next they called the Second Broad, and the third Main Broad. Then, crossing the Blue Ridge at Hickory-Nut Gap, they came to a stream which





"THE LOVERS' LEAP"—APPROACH BY NIGHT.



they called Cane Creek, from the abundance of cane growing on its banks—a singular thing in the mountains. Following this branch, the hunters came to a larger and broader river, into which it emptied, and named it the French Broad, because all of the country west of the Blue Ridge was then held by that nation.”

It rises in the Blue Ridge, on the South-Carolina line, but a few feet from the headwaters of the Congaree, on the south side of the divide. Thence it flows northward to Tennessee, the first forty miles of its journey being through a broad, fertile valley, famed for its beauty of scenery and fertility of soil. The route from this direction is perhaps the most comfortable by which one can approach Asheville.

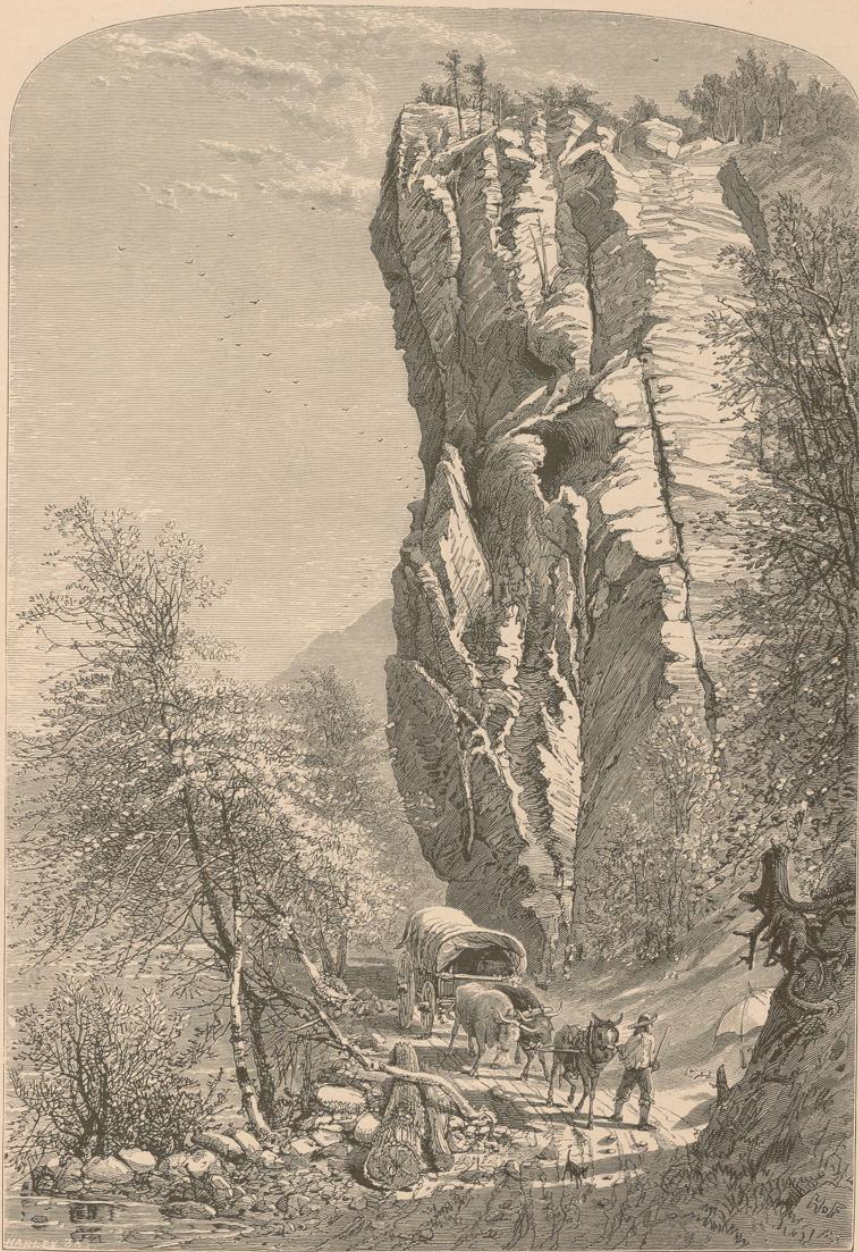
These upper waters of the French Broad are now a favorite place of resort, and the traveller will find at Flat Rock numerous summer residences of wealthy Carolinians, where art and Nature have combined to make one of the loveliest localities in that section of the country. Cæsar's Head, near by, is a lofty mountain, one side of which is a perpendicular precipice of great height, from which may be had an extensive view of the upper portion of South Carolina. An hotel is erected within a few rods of the precipice, and, as may be imagined, it is a cool and delightful spot in which to spend a summer vacation.

In approaching Asheville, the scene changes; the hills press close in upon the river, and the rapids grow more and more furious, until they make their final plunge at Mountain Island. This singular formation is caused by the river forcing its way through the ridge on each side of a knob, from fifty to seventy-five feet in height. The fall, at this point, is about forty-five feet, and the road, which above runs almost into the river, below skirts a dark and solemn abyss. The view by our artist is taken just above the falls; yet, beautiful as is the picture, neither pen nor pencil can do justice to the real grandeur of this mountain-scene.

The geographical centre of this French-Broad region is Asheville, a delightful town, located on a hill above the river, two thousand two hundred and twelve feet above the level of the sea. The view here embraces, on the one side, seemingly interminable ranges of mountains, from which at least a hundred peaks rise to hold communion with the clouds; and, on the other, a beautiful valley, where courses the river, not, as yet, pent up within its rocky walls and foaming on in its mad career.

“The soil of this region is singularly fertile. This is due in the valleys to the wash from the mountains, but many of the mountains of this interior basin present the strange anomaly of being fertile to their very tops. It is a singular fact respecting this country that the sharp-peaked mountains are all poor land, while those which are rounded, and come up rather rolling and gently, are almost invariably rich. There are no lakes in this region; yet, from the peculiar formation of certain sections, it would seem that there once had been. The soil is generally a decomposition of granite, gneiss, and limestone. It is rich in potash, and contains undissolved particles of mica; its color





"THE LOVERS' LEAP"—AT EARLY SUNRISE.



is dark, and to the touch has a soapy feel. The tree-growth is chestnut, oaks, hickory, black and white walnuts, cucumber-tree, ash, linden, and sugar-maple. Dr. Curtis, a distinguished geologist, once said that he found every shrub and flower near Niagara Falls duplicated in Buncombe County, North Carolina."

The journey from Asheville down the French Broad to the Warm Springs, and onward for several miles, is one of the most picturesque that can be conceived; for at every turn new beauties are presented to the eye, that linger in memory long after the scene has faded from view. Our artist, in his several sketches of the route, has as faithfully represented its general character as a mere copy will permit. The road is a kind of terrace, resembling a shelf, dark woods and steep rocks overhanging it on one side, and, on the other, the river rushing, tumbling, and roaring over ledges of rock in its frantic haste. Occasionally, at a sudden bend, you will see the sweetest little dells in the world, canopied by the spruce and hemlock, by laurel and running vines, where the sunshine never intrudes, and the shade is a perpetual invitation to rest. Here and there a stream of water gushes from the mountain, and, trickling down the brown face of the rocks like crystal tears, hurries across the road in a little streamlet to join the grander flow that is coursing to the sea.

By moonlight the scene is singularly impressive. The old-fashioned stage-coach, creaking and swaying at every jolt; the driver, with his quaint speech; the notes of his horn, cheerily ringing out in the midnight air, and losing themselves in the distant echoes bounding from hill to hill; the opposite shores of the river, looking in the dim light like great black clouds that reach from earth heavenward; the curling billows at your feet, wallowing one after another upon the shore, and catching rainbow hues from the lamps upon your coach; the long, feathery lines of foam that have broken loose from the dark ledges in the river; the great rocks, like Lovers' Leap, that rise overhead, spectre-like, and sublime in their massiveness—all these are incidents of a midnight journey along the French Broad that the tourist will recognize as among the most charming of a lifetime.

The view by day is thus described in the *Southern Quarterly Review*: "Our road, an excellent one for the mountains, is cut out along the very margin of the river. Occasionally there is no ledge to protect you from the steep. The track does not often admit of two carriages abreast, and huge immovable boulders sometimes contract to the narrowest measures the pathway for the single one. You wind along the precipice with a perpetual sense of danger, which increases the sublimity of the scene. The river, meanwhile, boils, bounds, and rages at your feet, tossing in strange writhings over the fractured masses of the rock, and plunging headlong with a groan into great cavities between, now leaping with a surging hiss down sudden steeps, which it approaches unprepared. Beyond you note the perpendicular heights, stern, dark, jagged, suspending a thousand feet in air





A FARM ON THE FRENCH BROAD.



"You find yourself suddenly in a cavernous avenue. Look up and behold an enormous boulder thrust out from the mountain-side, hanging completely over you like an Atlantean roof, but such a roof as threatens momentarily to topple down in storm and thunder on your head. And thus, with a sense keenly alive to the startling aspects in the forms around you—the superior grandeur of the heights, the proof which they everywhere present that the volcano and the torrent have but recently done their work of convulsion and revolution—you hurry on for miles, relieved occasionally by scenes of strangely-sweet beauty in the valleys, where the waters are calm, where they no longer hiss and boil and rage and roar in conflict with the masses whose bonds they have broken, and where, leaping away into an even and unruffled flow, they seem to sleep in lakes whose edges bear fringes of flowery vines and the loveliest floral tangles, from which you may pluck at seasons the purplest berries drooping to the very lips of the waters.

"Sometimes these seeming lakes gather about the prettiest islets, that prompt you to fancy abodes such as the fairies delighted to explore, and where, indeed, the Cherokee has placed a class of spirits with strange, mysterious powers, who are acknowledged to maintain a singular influence over the red-man's destinies. A landscape-painter of real talent would find, along the two great stems of the French Broad, a thousand pictures far superior to any thing ever yet gathered on the banks of the Hudson or the groups of the Catskill."

Near the Tennessee boundary, and close by the Warm Springs, the road lies in the shadow of the bold mountain-precipices known as the Paint Rocks. These have a perpendicular elevation of between two and three hundred feet. Their name is derived from the Indian pictures yet to be seen upon them. In a poem entitled "Tselica," the late William Gilmore Simms has woven into beautiful verse a charming legend of the spot. "The tradition of the Cherokees," he says, "asserts the existence of a siren in the French Broad, who allures the hunter to the stream and strangles him in her embrace, or so infects him with some mortal disease that he invariably perishes." The locality at this point is strangely beautiful, and it is not a matter of wonder that the Warm Springs in the immediate neighborhood should be the summer resort of hundreds who seek health and the keen enjoyment which Nature here contributes to every sense.

These springs are among the natural curiosities of the Atlantic States; and in their curative properties, especially when employed in rheumatic and cutaneous affections, they are said to rival the famous Hot Springs of Arkansas. The temperature of the water varies from eighty to one hundred and ten degrees, the location of the various outlets apparently determining its grade. Analysis has demonstrated that it gives off free sulphuretted hydrogen and carbonic acid, and holds in solution carbonate and sulphate of lime, with a trace of magnesia. Baths of various kinds are arranged for the convenience of the visitors; and the fare, the trout-fishing, and hunting, are all that can be desired at a country watering-place.





OLD MILL—REEMS'S CREEK.



The artist has graphically portrayed, in an accompanying picture, one of the many striking scenes upon the French Broad—a farm on a hill-side. The mountain lifts its lofty peak to mingle with the clouds; and its rough escarpment, taking new expression from every point of view, overhangs the famous Buncombe Turnpike, which winds along the base, skirting the river's edge. This road was built by the State, about forty years ago, and is the great route for hogs and cattle driven from East Tennessee to the cotton-growing section of South Carolina. Originally, it was the old Indian trail. Previous to 1860, as many as sixty thousand head would pass over this route during the winter; and these animals, with their human tenders, made a market for the surplus produce of the hill-sides. Still, as may be imagined from the sketch, farming under such circumstances is rather a precarious business; for, notwithstanding the fact that the soil is astonishingly rich in potash and vegetable matter—a black, fatty-looking loam—the



A Team on the French Broad.

difficulties that attend its cultivation require from the hardy agriculturist unusual patience and toil.

A low-country man, on his way to the Springs, once asked one of these farmers, who was something of a wag:

“Say, squire, you don’t grow corn up yonder, do you?”

“Well, I reckon I do.”

“How much do you get to the acre?”

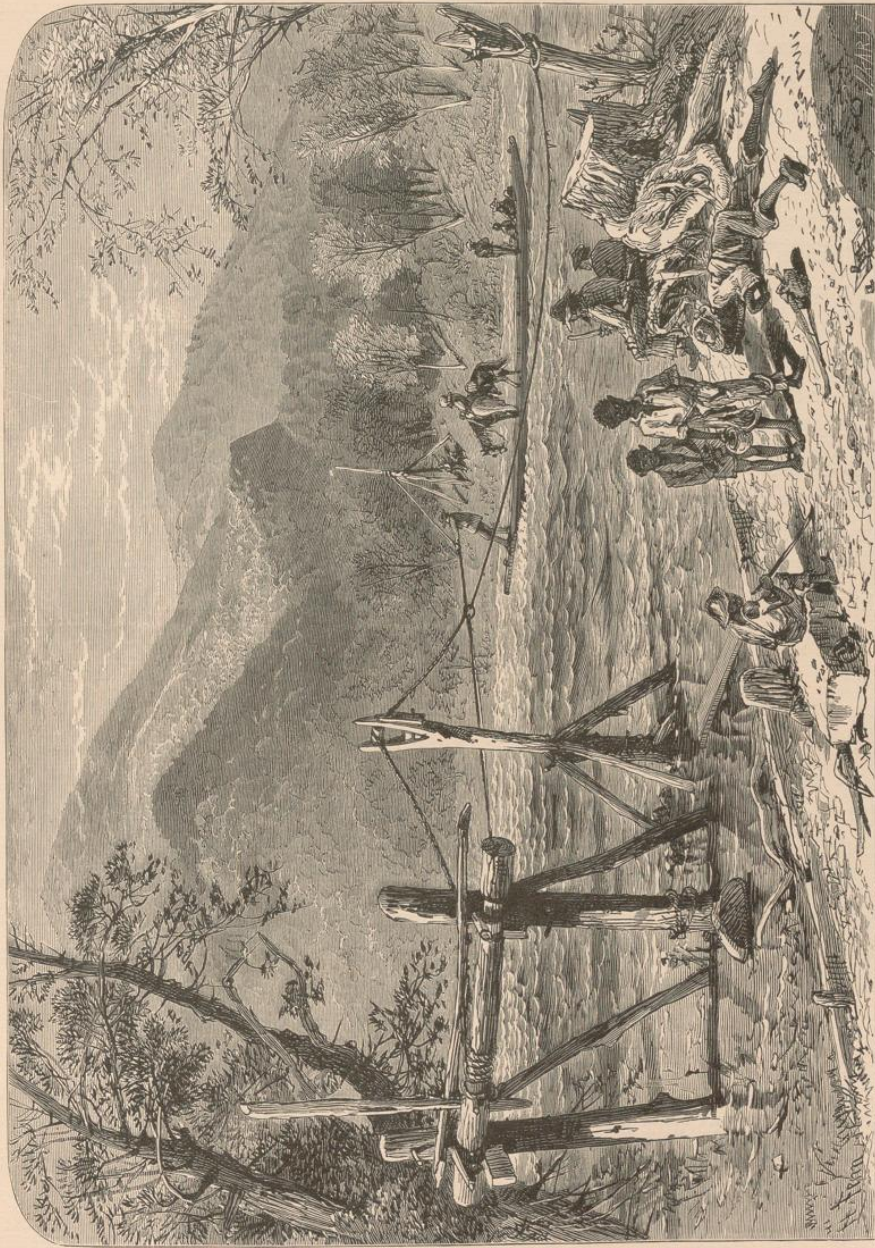
“Nigh on to twenty-five bushel—shelled—thar or tharabouts.”

“But how do you manage to plough on those hills?”

“Why, that’s easy enough. Yer see, our animuls is born kinder irreg’lar-like—two short legs and two long legs—and the long legs allers travel on the down-hill side.”

“Just one question more, squire—how in thunder do you plant it when you get among the rocks?”





A FERRY ON THE FRENCH BROAD.



"Wall, that's easy too. We jes' load our shot-guns with the kernels, and stan' down here and shoot 'em right inter the ground, and thar it grows spontanous-like."

Not an unentertaining study of human and animal nature is likewise presented in the old-fashioned country "schooners," with their teams and drivers, which traverse the turnpike, carrying the produce of East Tennessee to the upper country of South Carolina. Ethiopia in her rags, and mule-power with all of its obstinacy, here find their fitting representatives. There is no spectacle more unique, in all the range of Southern reminiscences, than the mutual sympathy which seems to exist between man and beast on the road, in the camp, and at the corn-crib. A rope constitutes the sole electric current between hand and bit, and half a dozen strange sounds in the vernacular of the driver, now persuasive and now emphatic, serve to surmount every difficulty likely to present itself on the mountain-paths.

Another point of interest, but a short distance off the route, which has been depicted by the artist, is the old mill on Reem's Creek—one of the landmarks of the days when it was a struggle between the Indian and the pale-face as to which should hold the land. The creek rises in the Black Mountains, and empties into the French Broad; and the mill is historic as being the oldest building this side of the mountains. It was built there by the settler from whom its name is derived, as "a sort of fort, something of a store, and a little of a mill." The old ford of the French Broad is just at the mouth of the creek, and it is a part of the tradition of the neighborhood that Daniel Boone here first learned to shoot Indians and bears.

A few miles up the stream are some of the most beautiful valleys in the world, and on one of the mountain-spurs near by are cornfields, three thousand five hundred feet higher than the sea, which are said to have yielded fifty bushels shelled to the acre. Timothy, and other northern grasses, grow luxuriantly in this region; and within the last three or four years several cheese-factories have been erected, and are in successful operation, furnishing products which are pronounced to be equal to those of the North. Enterprising Germans and Americans are likewise engaged in utilizing the vast water-power of the French Broad, with the view of converting some of the magnificent chestnuts, oaks, maples, and walnuts, which abound, into implements of industry and household ornaments; and, doubtless, the time is not far distant when the whistle of the locomotive, the hum of the woollen spindle and loom, the noisy life of the forge and trip-hammer, and the whir of the factory, will be heard blending with the melody of the rushing waters, and adding new strains to those which Nature has sung alone in these wild scenes since the creation.

Among the Southern institutions which are fast yielding to the march of progress are the ferries on the public roads. In the olden time the cabin or ferry-house was the gathering-spot of the neighborhood, where corn-whiskey and river-news divided the honors of the hour, and frowsy loungers played "seven-up" on the moss-lined rocks.



The idle Cuffee was always sure to fill a place in the picture, and that place was invariably the soft side of a plank, where he slept with his upturned face to the sunshine.

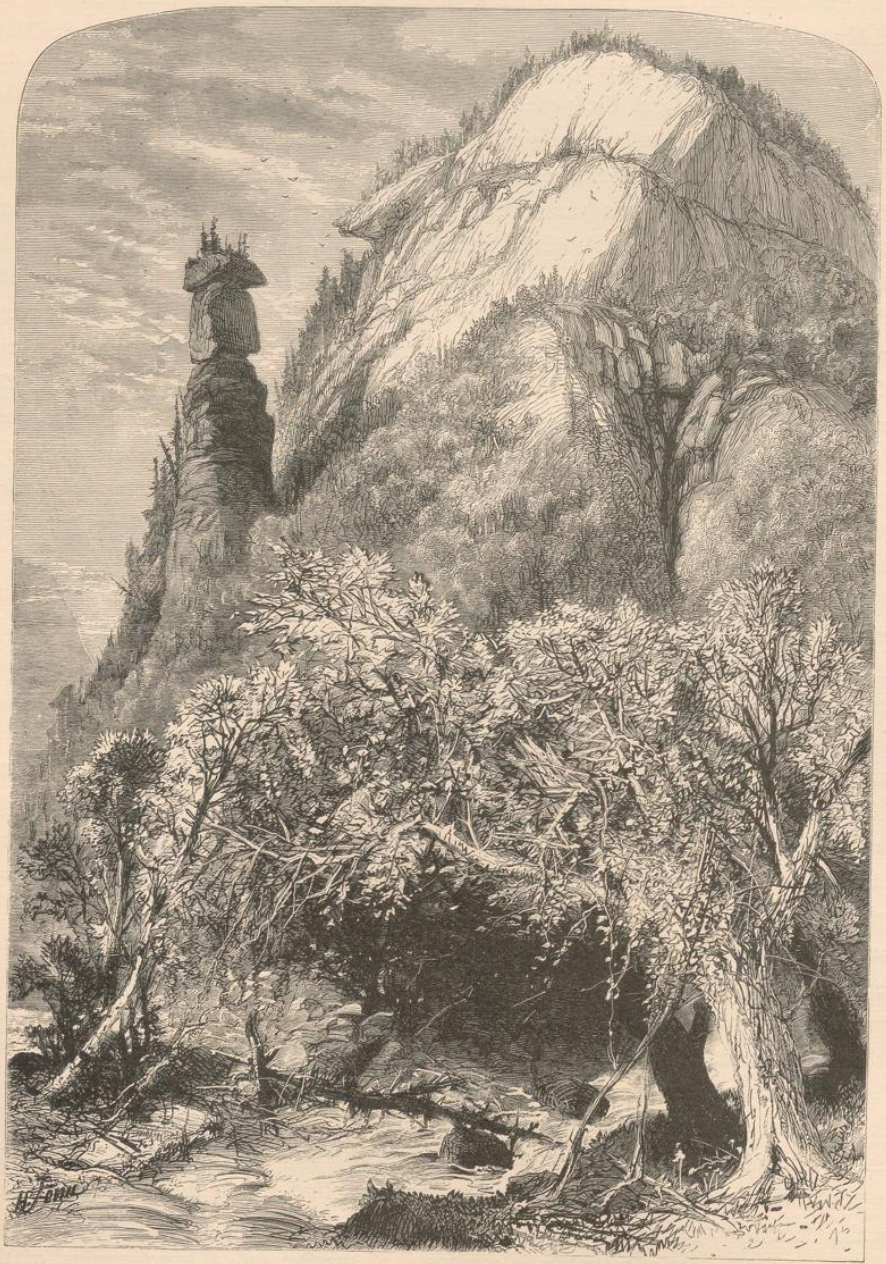
The ferry itself was antique, and innocent of any but the rudest invention. It was cheap in construction, and the perfection of a simplicity that, so far as any improvement is concerned, might have originated among the antediluvians.

A rope extending to some convenient tree on either bank; a flat-bottomed boat and a stout negro—that was the machinery. You drove down, whooped, received an answering yell, possessed your soul in patience until the return of the crazy craft, and entered cautiously. The cable passed through a guide-post attached to the gunwale, and the ferryman, seizing it with a peculiar wooden key, gave it a twist, and commenced the process of pulling his freight to the other side. If any thing gave way, as was not unfrequently the case during a freshet, you drifted helplessly down the current, with the chances of being poled ashore in some out-of-the-way spot, or of a cold-bath in the river.

Happily, bridges are taking the places of these antique relics; the railway is carrying forward its civilizing influences, and in a little while the tourist may be whirled down the valleys of the French Broad in palace-cars that will make travelling luxurious, albeit it may rob him of half the pleasures that attach to the good old way.

It would require a volume to describe the many lovely scenes of interest in and around this picturesque locality—the caves, mountains, water-falls, and natural curiosities, within a day's travel, always attractive to the artist, poet, and lover of Nature, but there is one spot, that has been illustrated by Mr. Fenn, which deserves at least a brief notice. Hickory-Nut Gap is one of the great gate-ways to the French-Broad Basin. The approach from Charlotte, North Carolina, is by way of the pretty little town of Rutherfordton, from which point the visitor soon reaches the view of and is lost amid the wild, grand scenery that prevails on every side. His road and the track of the head-waters of Broad River are cut through massive walls of granite over a thousand feet high. Far off, in the distance, he looks in admiration at the beautiful falls of Hickory-Nut Creek. The sun glistens on the spray-like stream, splintered into showers of diamond-drops by a fall of three hundred and fifty feet, and throwing out a thousand rainbow hues. Passing on, he sees a remarkable, weather-worn peak, which is known as the Chimney Rock, reaching like a huge needle toward the heavens. The entire length of the Gap is about nine miles, the last five of which are watered by the Rocky-Broad River. That portion of the gorge, which might be called the gate-way, is at the eastern extremity, and is not more than half a mile in width. The highest bluff is on the south side, and it is here, midway up its front, that stands the isolated rock, of circular form, looming against the sky, and resembling the high turret of some grand castle. The entire mountain is composed of granite; and a large portion of the bluff in question hangs over the abyss beneath, and is as smooth as it possibly could be made by the rains of uncounted centuries. Over one portion of this superb cliff, falling





CHIMNEY ROCK, HICKORY-NUT GAP.



far down into some undiscovered and apparently unattainable pool, is a stream of water which seems to be the offspring of the clouds; and, in a neighboring rock, near the base of the precipice, are three shooting water-falls, at the foot of which, formed out of solid stone, are three holes, ten feet in diameter, and from forty to fifty feet in depth. The water in them has a rotary motion, and, when a stick or branch is thrown into it, it will disappear for some time, and then rise on the upper side of the pool, to disappear again in the same manner.

The mineral resources of this French-Broad region, and indeed of Western North Carolina, are almost boundless. For more than a hundred and twenty miles, the great Western Turnpike from Asheville crosses mountains of iron-ore, great masses of copper and lead, veins of silver and gold, and runs for miles upon strata of the finest-grained marble of every shade, from the purest white, through variegated, delicate, and rich rose and pink tints, to the sombrest and glossiest black. It traverses a region through which there are springs of every medicinal character; water-falls of immense height; chasms into whose seemingly bottomless depths one shudders to look; dark chaparrals of laurel known only to the wild beast; and forests in which the foot of the white man has never trodden. At the same time there are fertile valleys and sloping mountain-sides that yield the *largesse* of Nature's bounty. Such is the strange, rich, and picturesque country of the French Broad.

