



## **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**

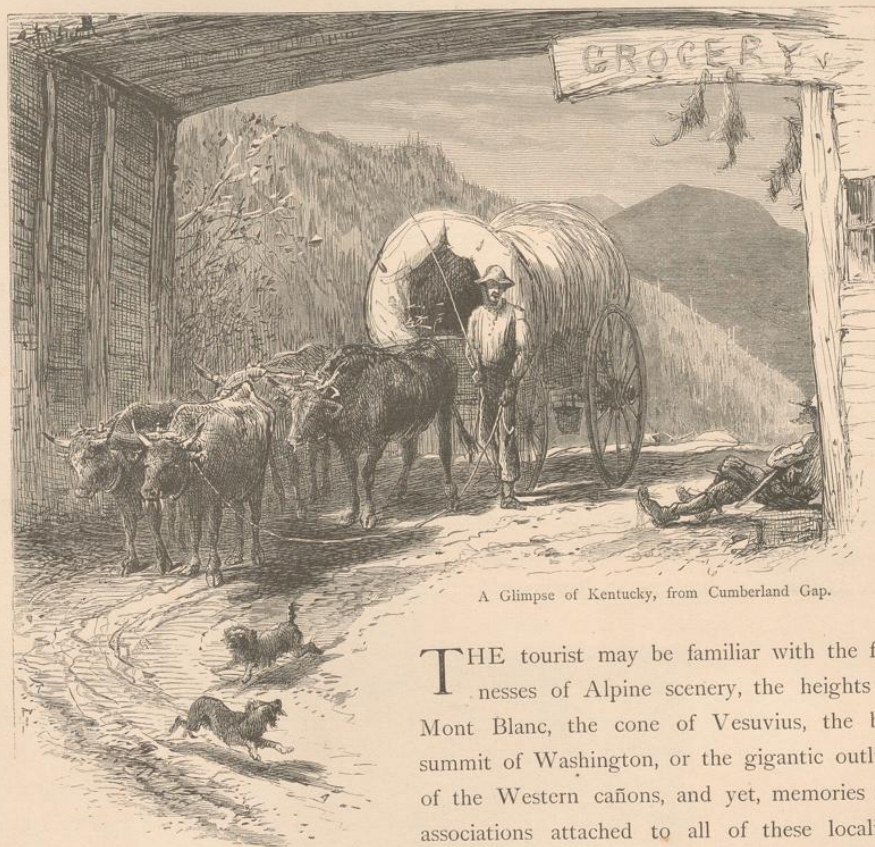
Cumberland Gap.

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## CUMBERLAND GAP.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY FENN.



A Glimpse of Kentucky, from Cumberland Gap.

THE tourist may be familiar with the fastnesses of Alpine scenery, the heights of Mont Blanc, the cone of Vesuvius, the bald summit of Washington, or the gigantic outlines of the Western cañons, and yet, memories and associations attached to all of these localities will be recalled by a visit to that region of

America in which the Cumberland Mountains trend obliquely across the States of Kentucky and Tennessee; because, somewhere in the four thousand four hundred miles of territory occupied by these "everlasting hills," they present to the eye almost every variety of picturesque expression that elsewhere has excited wonder or admiration.

Great ridges—now roofed over with thickets of evergreen, now padded with moss and ferns, or, again, crowned with huge boulders that seem to have been tumbled about in wild disorder by some convulsive spasm of the monster beneath—shoot suddenly upward, from two thousand to six thousand feet, and become, as it were, landmarks in



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*Cumberland Gap*

New York, D. Appleton & Co.



the view that are visible in such districts is to appear like a part of the clouds. Here  
we have a broad table-land, on which a city might be built, sometimes abruptly in  
steep precipitous and vertical faces of rock, rounded and rugged like the head of a  
mountain, which has been raised to great height to protect the view of the plain  
from the encroachments of the hillsides. There are other great hills of great  
importance, which rise to the west of the mountain, and which are some of the  
highest of the range, and which are some of the most beautiful in the country.

THE GREAT GAP

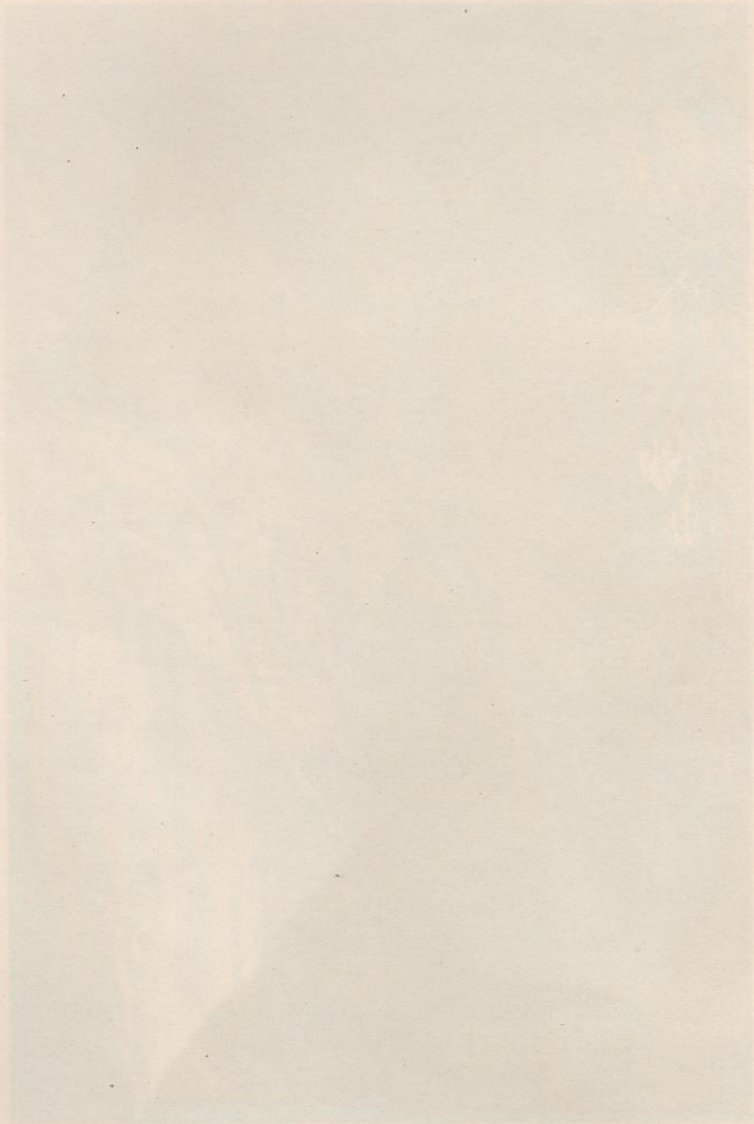
The view is every where the same, the only object in the sky is the sun, or moon,  
or stars, and the only sound is the low murmur of the wind. The view of the  
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the skies, that are visible at such distances as to appear like a part of the clouds. Here and there, a broad table-land, on which a city might be built, terminates abruptly in sharp escarpments and vertical sheets of rock, seamed and ragged, like the front of a stupendous fortress that has been raised by giant hands to protect the men of the mountains from the encroachments of the lowlanders. There are other rocks full of grand physiognomies; caves that might be the hiding-places of the winds; water-falls where the melody of the rills is never silent; glens and chasms; and forests so dense that a man might live and die in their recesses—

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot.”

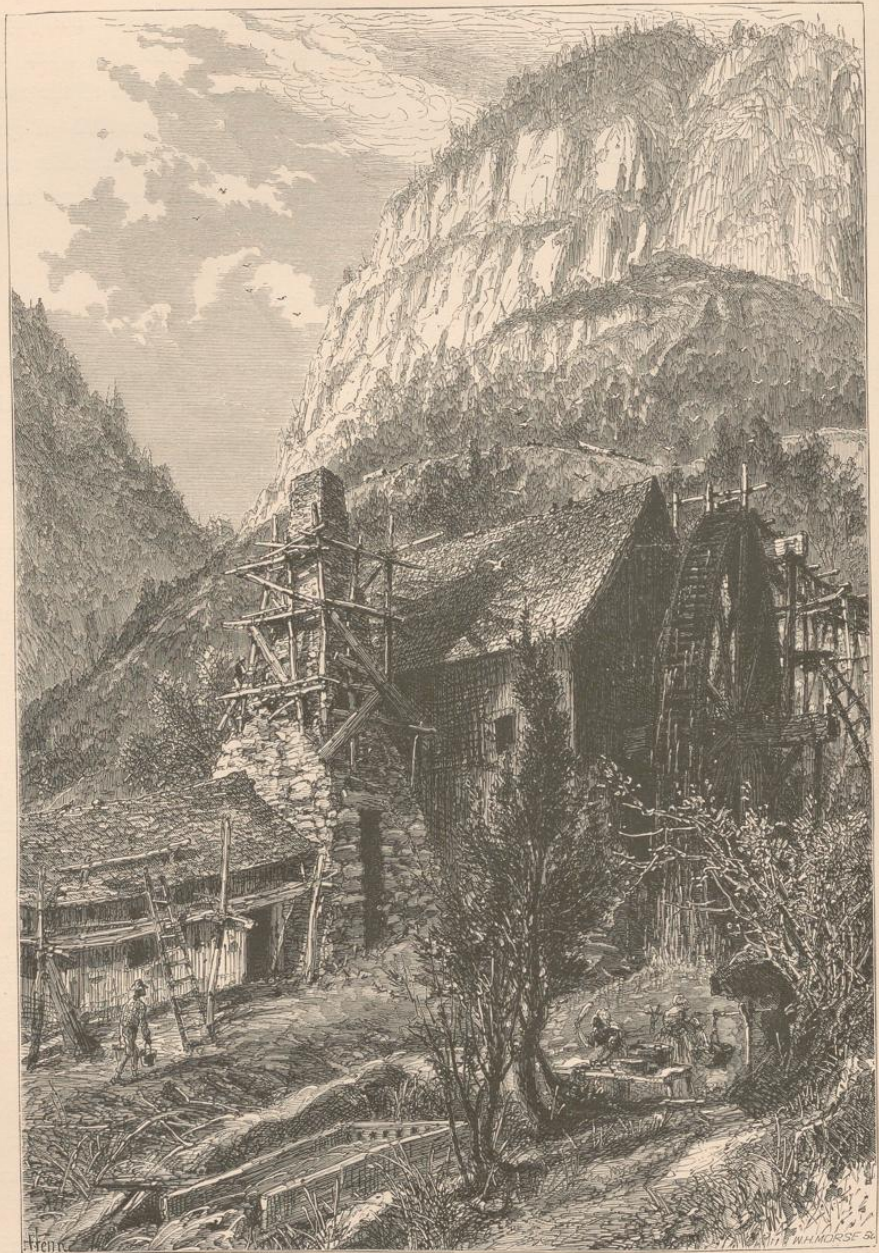
And so, in every conceivable shape that can appeal to the eye of poet, artist, or geologist, Nature has here piled up her changeless masonry of creation. The name *Cumberland*, let us here say, was given to these mountains by the first discoverers, a party of hunters from North Carolina, in honor of the Duke of Cumberland, at that time (1748) prime-minister of England.

The “ridges” referred to are among the curiosities of the Cumberland region. Aside from the fact that they observe a species of parallelism to each other, they contain numerous “breaks,” or depressions, which, in the peculiar configuration of the country, appear to the traveller who is at the foot of the mountain to be distant only a few hundred rods; yet he must frequently ride for miles through a labyrinth of hills, blind roads, and winding paths, before he can reach the entrance and pursue his journey.

The chief and most celebrated of these great fissures, or hall-ways, through the range, is known as “Cumberland Gap.” This gap is situated in East Tennessee, near the Kentucky border, about one hundred and fifty miles southeast from Lexington, and may be regarded as the only practical opening, for a distance of eighty miles, that deserves the name of a “gap.” There are other places which are so called, but it is only for the reason that they are more easy of access than because of any actual depression in the mountain. At a place called “Rogers’s Gap,” for example, which is eighteen miles distant from Cumberland Gap, there is no gap whatever; but the road, taking advantage of a series of ridges on the northern side, and running diagonally on the southern side, is rendered, with great exertion, passable by man and beast.

The gap depicted by our artist is about six miles in length, but so narrow in many places that there is scarcely room for the roadway. It is five hundred feet in depth. The mountains on either side rise to an altitude of twelve hundred feet; and, when their precipitous faces have been scaled by the tourist, and he stands upon the summit, the view, beneath a cloudless sky, is one of the most beautiful in America. Southward, there stretch away the lovely valleys of Tennessee, carpeted in summer with every shade of green, and in autumn with every rainbow tint—the rolling surface resem-





CUMBERLAND GAP, FROM THE EAST.



bling in the distance a vast plain, written all over with the handiwork of human enterprise; while, looking to the north, the vision is lost among a series of billowy-backed mountains, rising barrier-like to hide the luxuriant fields of Kentucky. "Across the country," is here a significant phrase; for the luckless traveller whose route lies in that direction must be prepared to encounter—

"Wave on wave succeeding."

The gap delineated in the accompanying sketches is a great highway between Southwestern Virginia and her sister States adjoining. Hence, during the late war, the position was early deemed important, and was occupied and strongly fortified by the Confederate Government. Cannon bristled from the neighboring heights, and a comparatively small force held the pass for many months, defending in that secluded mountain-recess the railroad connections between Richmond, North Alabama, Mississippi, Nashville, and Memphis, on the integrity of which so much depended.

The approach to the range from the northeast side, after leaving Abingdon, Virginia, is over a rough, broken country; and the only compensation to the traveller, as he saunters along on horseback, is in the enjoyment of bits of scenery wherein rocks and running streams, mountain-ferries, quaint old-fashioned mills, farm-houses and cabins perched like birds among the clefts of hills, lovely perspectives, wild-flowers and waving grain, and a homely but hospitable people, combine in charming confusion to keep the attention ever on the alert.

The road through the gap, winding like a huge ribbon, to take advantage of every foot of rugged soil, up, down, and around the mountains, is but the enlarged war-trail of the ancient Cherokees and other tribes, who made incursions from one State to the other. You are following the path pursued by Boone and the early settlers of the West. Passing through the scenes of bloody ambushes, legends, and traditions, it would seem almost a part of the romance of the place if now an Indian should suddenly break the reigning silence with a warwhoop, and its dying echoes be answered by the rifle-shot of a pioneer. In short, it is an old, old region, covered with the rime of centuries, and but slightly changed by the progress of events.

Of residents in the gap, there are but few. One of these has been enterprising enough to establish, near an old bridge, which is shown in the picture, a grocery-store, and obtains his livelihood by trading in a small way with the teamsters of the passing trains, and exchanging whiskey, clothing, etc., for the produce of his neighbors. Similar establishments will be found at intervals of five, ten, or fifteen miles; sometimes they are half hidden from view in the coves, or "pockets," of the mountains. But they absorb much of the small "truck" that finds its way to market from this section. The commodities thus purchased and shipped in the mountain-wagons through the gap, *en*





CUMBERLAND GAP, FROM EAGLE CLIFF.



*route* to Baltimore and elsewhere, consist of dried apples, peaches, chestnuts, butter, lard, flaxseed, bacon, etc. Horse and mule trading is likewise carried on to a considerable extent; and sharp-witted, indeed, must be that man who can buy or sell more shrewdly than these self-same mountaineers, whose lives have been hammered out on the anvil in Nature's own workshop.

As a class, they are a large-bodied, large-hearted, large-handed people, rude in speech, brave in act, and honest in their friendships. They may know nothing of the conventionalities of society, but they will exhibit the "small, sweet courtesies of life"—as they understand them—with a readiness of generosity that makes one "feel at home." They may have but a single room in their cabin, yet you will be invited to enjoy the night's hospitality like one of the family, and may go to bed with "he, she, and it," on the family floor, with the manifestation of no more curiosity or concern, on the part of the individual members thereof, than if they had been born without eyes. And in the morning, after a "pull" at the "peach-and-honey" and a breakfast of hog and hominy, a long stride by your horse's side for three or four miles will tell you that the mountaineer knows how to "speed the parting guest," in his simple fashion, with a grace and hospitality that come straight from the heart.

The road through a portion of the gap, and one of the caravans which are frequently passing, may be seen in one of the accompanying pictures; while in another sketch is a view of a primitive old mill, now almost in ruins, where grain is ground for the neighbors; but it is situated in a spot so picturesque that, if money could buy the beauty of Nature, long ago it would have been transplanted to become the site of a rural palace.

Whatever may be the peculiarities of the region, social or otherwise, the time cannot be far distant when the whole of this wild tract must yield to the march of improvement, and pour forth the treasures of mineralogical wealth now latent in its soil. Already, a railroad is in process of construction, that is destined to cut the backbone of Kentucky and Tennessee in twain, and open a new avenue of communication between the East and West; while geologists and engineers are "prospecting" among the mines.

Iron exists in abundance—a common variety being the red iron-ore, which soils the fingers, and is generally composed of small round and flat bodies, for which reason it is called "lenticular ore." Not unfrequently, fossils, shells, and a species of coral, are found in the mass, showing that at some period in the misty past the sea or its tributaries have swept through the heart of the continent. At some points in Cumberland Gap the iron is hard enough to be quarried out in blocks, and this vein of metal has been traced one hundred and fifty miles. It is from twenty-four to thirty inches thick, and is of excellent quality. Coal is likewise found in this region, and, as far back as 1854, many thousands of bushels were transported through the gap.