



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

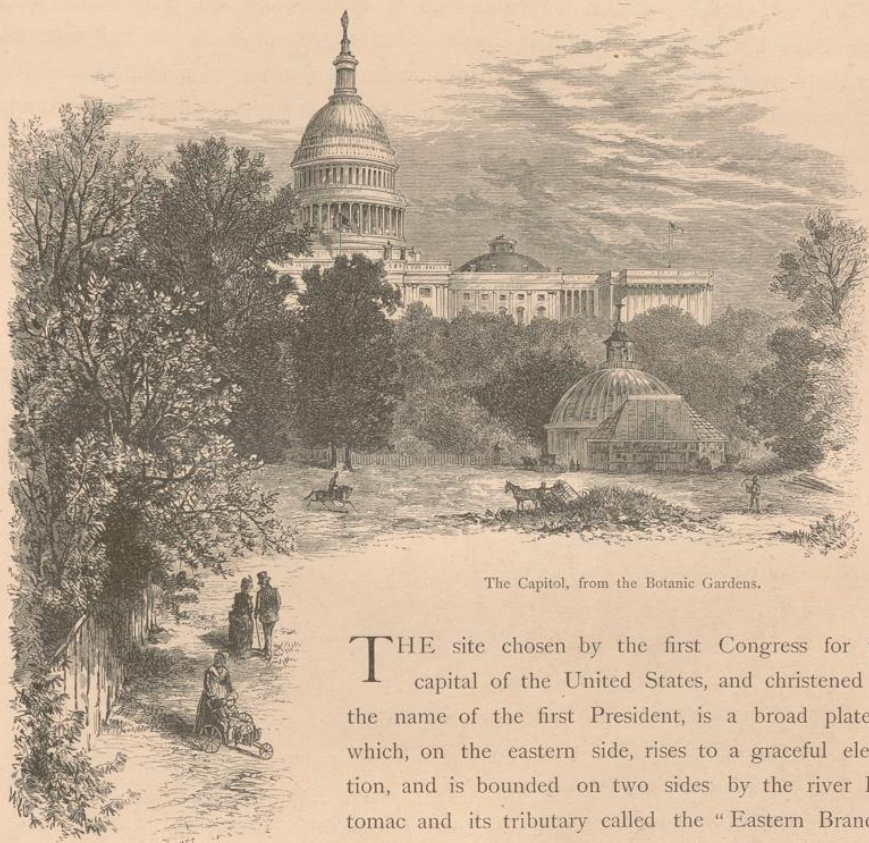
New York, 1874

Washington.

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WASHINGTON AND ITS VICINITY.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. L. SHEPPARD.



The Capitol, from the Botanic Gardens.

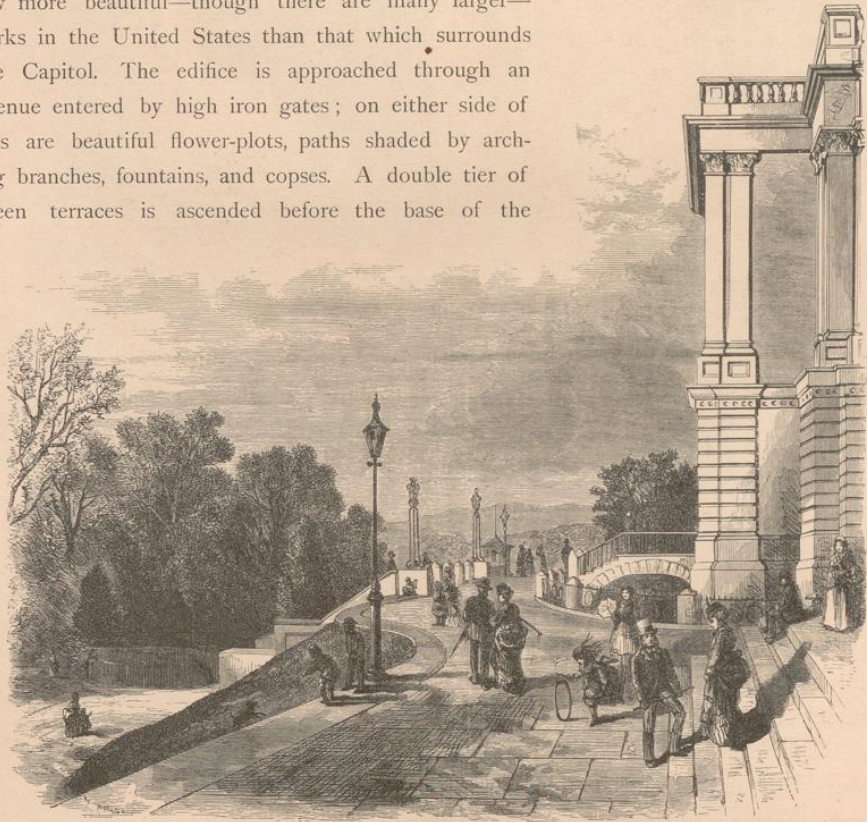
THE site chosen by the first Congress for the capital of the United States, and christened by the name of the first President, is a broad plateau, which, on the eastern side, rises to a graceful elevation, and is bounded on two sides by the river Potomac and its tributary called the "Eastern Branch."

The main portion of the city, including its business quarter, its public buildings, its main thoroughfares, and its aristocratic residences, stands upon a rather level plain, terminated at the rear by a series of wooded and irregular hills; while the Capitol rears itself upon a sloping elevation, and overlooks a wide extent of country.

Washington has not, until within comparatively recent years, been celebrated for its beauty. Formerly it was an unattractive place, composed in large part of low and mostly wooden buildings, with streets ill-paved and little cared for. Now the national metropolis, thanks to liberal expenditures and a newly-born pride in the govern-

ment that its seat should be worthy of its distinction, presents an aspect not only of prosperity, but of sights agreeable to the eye and mostly in good taste. Its adornment has betrayed that its natural advantages were greater than had been supposed; and the seeker after the picturesque may find ample opportunity to gratify his quest while observing, at "magnificent distances," the official palaces which have been erected at the service of the republic.

The most striking object at Washington is undoubtedly the magnificent white-marble Capitol, a glimpse of which is caught as the city is approached by rail from Baltimore. It rises majestically far above all surrounding objects, amid a nest of thick and darkly verdant foliage, on the brow of the hill to which it gives its name; its very lofty dome, with its tiers of columns, its rich ornamentation, and its summit surmounted by the colossal statue of Liberty, presents a noble appearance, and may be seen for many miles around; while its broad, white wings, low in proportion to the dome, give an idea of spaciousness which no palace of European potentate surpasses. There are few more beautiful—though there are many larger—parks in the United States than that which surrounds the Capitol. The edifice is approached through an avenue entered by high iron gates; on either side of this are beautiful flower-plots, paths shaded by arching branches, fountains, and copses. A double tier of green terraces is ascended before the base of the



Capitol, Western Terrace.

Capitol is reached ; then you find yourself on a broad marble terrace, semicircular in form, with a large fountain beside you, whence you may see the silvery windings of the Potomac miles away, disappearing at last amid the abundant foliage where the Maryland and Virginia coasts seem to blend in the far distance. From this look-out you may discern every part of the metropolis ; in the midst of the mass of houses rise the white-marble Post-Office Department and the yet handsomer Patent-Office just beside it. Some distance farther on is to be descried the long colonnade of the Treasury, and the top of the White House, just beyond, peeps from among the crests of flourishing groups of trees ; more to the left are seen the picturesque, castle-like, red-sandstone towers and turrets of the Smithsonian Institution, standing solitary on a broad plain al-



In the White-House Grounds.

ready sprouting with young foliage. Between the Smithsonian and the creek the unfinished shaft of the Washington Monument, a square marble torso of desolate appearance, meets the view ; while the eye, spanning the Potomac, may catch sight, in the distance, of that lordly old manor-house of Arlington, identified, in very different ways, with the earlier and later history of the country. Georgetown Heights form the far background in the west ; more to the north, the picturesque hills, with their wild, straggling growths, which, from the main suburbs and sites of suburban residences of the city, form a striking framework to the scene. A small park also stretches out at the rear of the Capitol, on the east. This presents, however, nothing notable in scenery, its chief adorn-

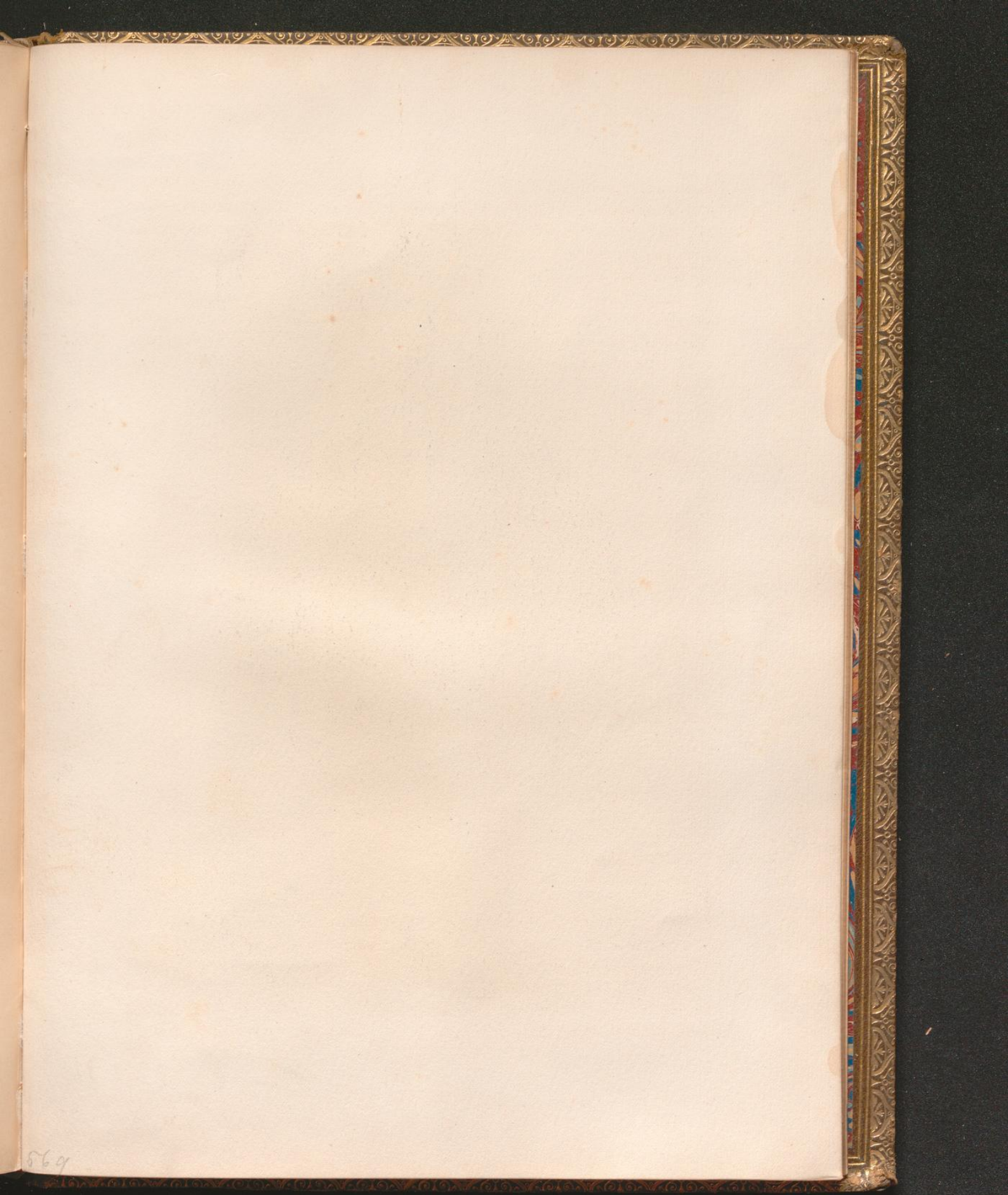
ment being the sitting statue of Washington, in Roman costume, which has been so sharply criticised and so warmly defended. Just outside the limits of this park stands the "Old Capitol," a quaint brick building used by Congress when the Capitol was burned by the British in 1814, in which Calhoun died, and which was used as a prison during the late war.

At the opposite end of the city from the Capitol is the group of departments surrounding the presidential mansion, and enclosing with it pleasant, umbrageous parks and grounds. On one side are the Treasury and new State Departments; on the other, the rather plain, old-fashioned, cosey-looking War and Navy Departments—oddly enough



Smithsonian Institution, near White-House Grounds.

the most placid and modest of the Washington purlieus. The White House is situated midway between these two groups of edifices, and is completely surrounded by open and ornamental spaces. In front of its high, glaringly white portico, with its *porte cochère*, is a lawn, in the centre of which is a corroded copper statue of President Jefferson. This lawn reaches to the thoroughfare, beyond which is Lafayette Square, thickly planted with trees, among which stands Clark Mills's equestrian statue of Washington, and surrounded by elegant residences occupied by senators, diplomats, cabinet ministers, and wealthy bankers. The most picturesque view of the White House, however, is from its rear. The front is not imposing. At the back, a small but beautiful park, profusely

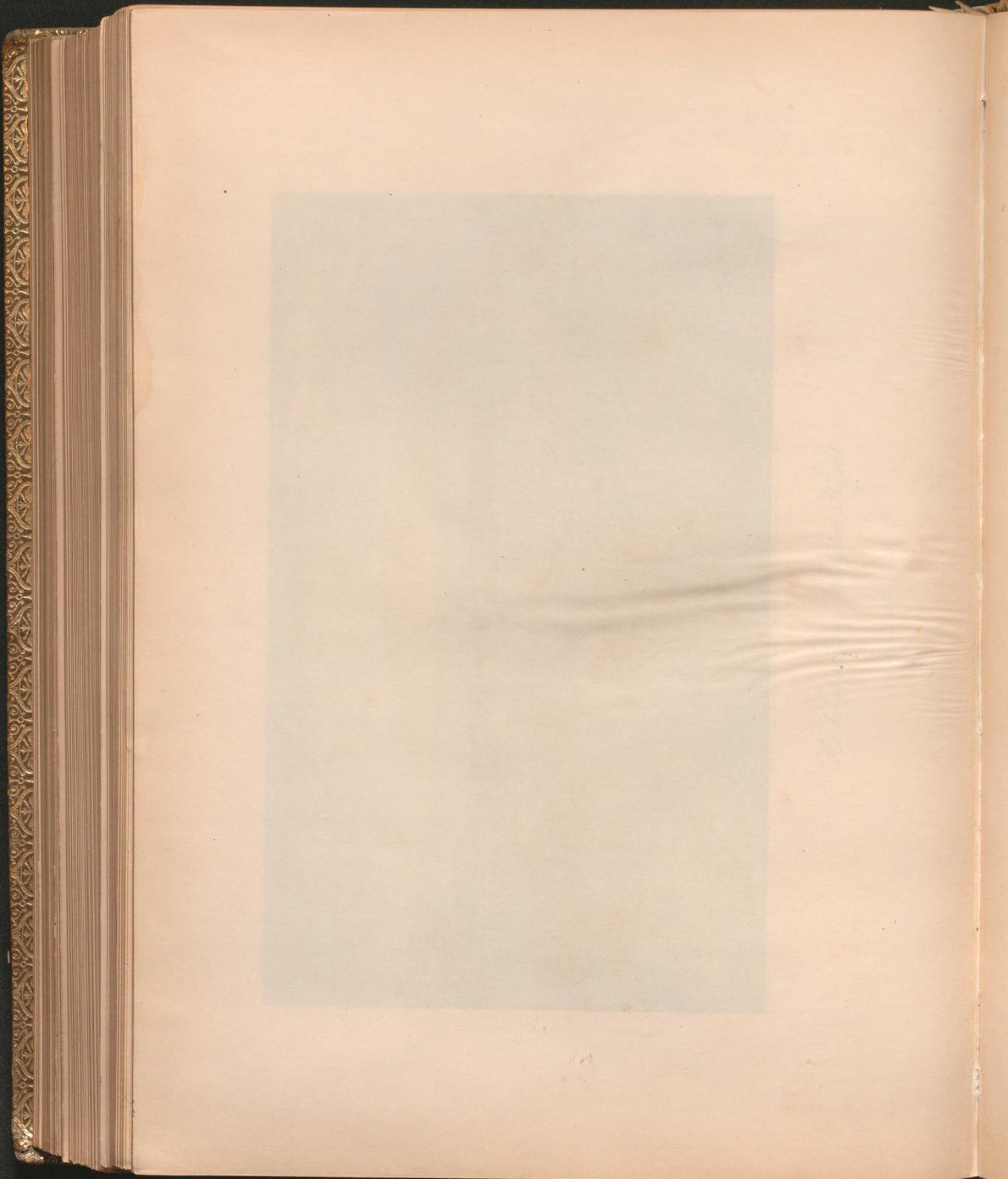


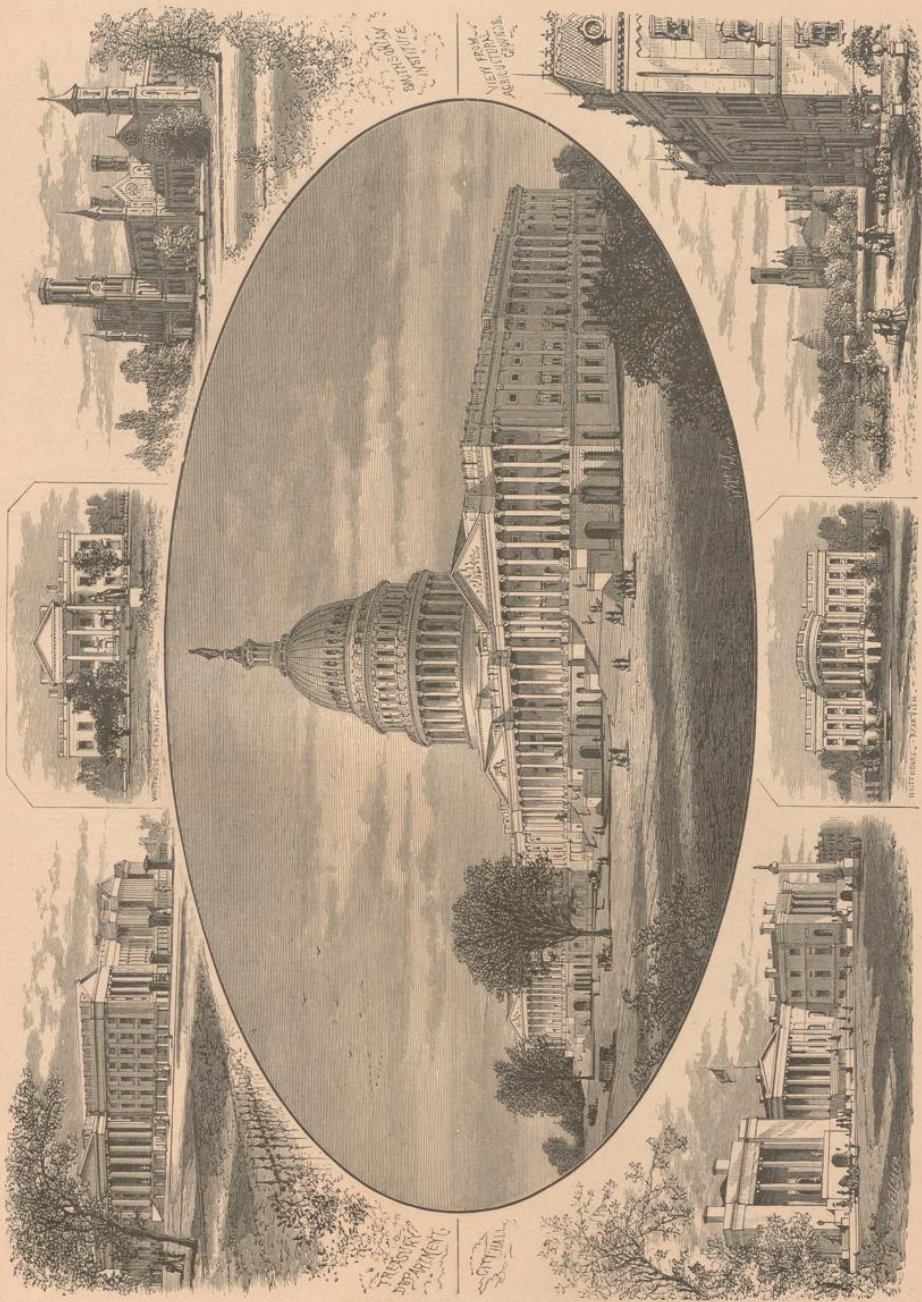
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Washington from Solington Heights.

New-York: D. Appleton & Co.





PUBLIC BUILDINGS IN WASHINGTON.



View from Red Hill, back of Georgetown.

adorned with plants and flowers, varied by artificial hillocks, and spread with closely-trimmed lawns, stretches off to a high-road separated from it by a high wall. This park is open to the public; and the chief magistrate and his family may enjoy its cheerful prospect from a handsome, circular portico, supported by high, round pillars, with solid arches below, and a broad stone staircase winding up on either side, fairly overgrown with ivy and other clinging parasites. The most prominent object seen from these "President's grounds" is the red Smithsonian Institution, which from here seems a very feudal castle set down amid scenes created by modern art. Beyond the presidential mansion and the cluster of department buildings, Pennsylvania Avenue stretches over a flat and comparatively sparsely-settled district, until, by a sudden turn, it leads to the ancient, irregular, and now rather uninteresting town of Georgetown. Its former commercial bustle has departed from it; for Georgetown is older than its larger and more celebrated neighbor, and was once the third or fourth river-port in

the United States. It is still, however, a more picturesque place than Washington; built mostly on hills, which rise above the Potomac, affording really beautiful views of the river and its umbrageous shores. The town has many of those substantial old red-brick mansions where long ago dwelt the political and social aristocracy, and which are to be found in all Virginia and Maryland towns of a century's age, surrounded often with high brick walls, approached by winding and shaded avenues, sometimes with high-pillared porticos, and having, over the doors and windows, some attempt at modest sculptured ornamentation. From Red Hill, which rises by pretty slopes at the rear of Georgetown, a fine view is had of the wide, winding river. The Potomac, just below, takes a broad sweep from west to east; and, at the place where it is spanned by the famous Long



Glimpse of Georgetown, from Analostan Island.

Bridge, over which the troops passed from Washington to their defeat at Bull Run, it seems to form almost a lake. Washington itself is descried between the trees from the east of Red Hill; in the dim distance, the shore of Maryland, lofty in places, and retreating southeastward; and, on the immediate right, the more attractive Virginian shore, with a glimpse of the historic estate of Arlington. A large aqueduct connects Georgetown with this Virginian shore; and the views from every point of it are full of attractive interest.

Now the Potomac is just below you; its stream not so turbidly yellow as it becomes farther down. The Capitol, white and majestic, looms high above the metropolis, the rest of which seems a confused mass of houses and spires; verdant meadows, pastures, and natural lawns, sweeping down by gentle inclinations beneath elms and oaks,



GREAT FALLS OF THE POTOMAC.



LOOKING DOWN THE POTOMAC, FROM THE CHAIN BRIDGE.

are seen on the shore you are approaching; while quite near at hand the portico of Arlington rises on the summit of a higher slope, embedded in the richest Virginian foliage. Just below, not far from the shore, lies a picturesque little island, Analostan, which would almost seem to have floated from some Old-World waters, and been moved quite out of its sphere, in the midst of a young country. For it betrays, half hidden amid creepers and shrubbery, which have for many years been permitted to grow there unforbidden, what seem remains of ancient habitations. One might fancy that it had some time been the site of a baronial stronghold, now fallen in ruins and deserted. Here, in reality, in the early days of the republic, lived a sturdy old Virginian gentleman of aristocratic descent and rank, who played no insignificant part in the formation



Arlington Heights, from Grounds in National Observatory.

of the government, and for some time represented his native State in the old Congress. This was George Mason. He carried the aristocratic idea of lordly seclusion to the extent of seating himself on this lonely, well-shaded island, where he built an old-fashioned Virginia manor-house, and resided in it in solitary state. But, after his death, it seems to have been deserted, and now only serves to adorn the landscape with a somewhat curious and peculiar feature. The walk from the aqueduct to Arlington is by a road whence continual glimpses of the river are to be had through the wild-wood, where the shrubbery grows tangled and rude, and wild-grapes, in particular, abound. Arlington is now

no longer what it was before the days of war and consequent change of occupancy came. Those who remember it when Mr. Custis, its venerable owner, was still alive, preserve the impression of an ideal old Virginia manor and estate—one, indeed, which an English noble would not have been ashamed to own. Its site is a most imposing one; the lawn sweeps broadly down from its striking, ample porch for several hundred feet toward the river; its interior, in Mr. Custis's time, was a perfect reproduction of an aristocratic Virginia interior of a century ago. The road was pointed out by which Washington used to ride from Mount Vernon, a distance of ten or twelve miles; and every nook and corner preserved some relic or reminder of the Father of his Country,



Fort Washington.

many of them bequeathed by him to Mr. Custis, who was his adopted son. All about the place had the aspect of wealth, antiquity, and aristocratic ease; and, from the porch, it was, and still is, possible to have a very picturesque view of the capital city, from the Capitol to where the city merges into Georgetown.

The Potomac, for several miles north as well as south of Washington, is bordered by attractive landscapes. One of the pleasantest walks in that vicinity is from Georgetown northward along the banks of the canal, with the artificial water-course on one side, and the broad, winding, and here rather rapid river appearing every moment on the other. A mile from Georgetown by this road, you never would imagine that you were

in so close a proximity to one of the "centres of civilization." The scenery is wild, almost rugged. A profusion of brush and shrubbery mingles with the forest-trees along the banks, which rise in continual and irregular elevations; there are few habitations, and such as there are recall the former social status of the border States. After proceeding thus about three miles, you reach Little Falls, which have no other pretensions to distinction than that they are surrounded by very attractive scenery, and form a modest cataract winding in and out among the rocks which here encounter the stream. Over Little Falls is a high bridge, by which one passes in a minute or two from Maryland into Virginia. Piled-up rocks line the shore, and anglers from the metropolis may often be found perched upon them, enjoying the very good fishing which the spot provides. Great Falls, as falls, are more pretentious than Little Falls; they are situated a short distance above. Here the water foams and rushes among jagged rocks, forming numerous cascades and pools as it hastens on. In this region the Potomac has become a comparatively narrow stream, with limpid and rapid waters; and all along its course, as far as Harper's Ferry, its valley presents a varied, unkempt scenery, which makes the jaunt along its shores a thoroughly pleasant one.

But, on the Potomac below Washington, where it is now broader and slower in motion, the aspects are perhaps more worthy of inspection, both because Nature here is more genial and more cultivated, and because at every step there is a reminder of some historical scene, old or modern. Passing down by the steamboat, less than an hour brings you, between verdant, sloping banks dotted by well-to-do-looking and for the most part venerable country-houses, to the landing-place, whence you reach Mount Vernon. It is unnecessary to describe this home of Washington, so familiar to every citizen by description if not by sight.

On either side of the river are Forts Washington, Foote, and other strongholds, familiar to the history of the war of the rebellion. The view northward from Fort Foote is especially fine, comprehending the view at its widest, bay-like expanse, and bringing into clear relief the city of Washington, with the bright dome still dominating all surrounding objects; while the shores in the immediate foreground are composed of gentle cliffs crowned with the rich growths of that Southern clime.

THE END.

