



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

The Catskills.

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THE CATSKILLS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY FENN.



The Mountain House.

ABOUT one hundred and forty miles from the sea, on the western bank of the Hudson, the chain of mountains which, under various names, stretches from the banks of the St. Lawrence to Georgia and Tennessee, throws out a broken link toward the east. Clustering closely together, these isolated mountains, to which the early Dutch settlers gave the name of "Catskills," approach within eight miles of the river, and, like an advanced bastion of the great rocky wall, command the valley for a considerable distance, and form one of the most striking features in the landscape. On the western side, they

slope gradually toward the central part of the State of New York, running off into spurs and ridges in every direction. On the eastern, however, they rise abruptly from the valley to a height of more than four thousand feet, resembling, when looked at from the river, a gigantic fist with the palm downward, the peaks representing the knuckles, and the glens and cloves the spaces between them. Thus separated from their kindred, and pushed forward many miles in advance of them, they overlook a great extent of country, affording a wider and more varied view than many a point of far greater elevation. Indeed, from few places, even among the Alps of Switzerland, does the traveller see beneath him a greater range of hill and valley; and yet many an American stands on the summit of the Righi, rapt in admiration of the wonderful prospect, ignorant that a view nearly as extensive, and in many respects as remarkable, may be found in one of the earliest-settled parts of his own country! Nor are the Catskill Mountains famous only for this celebrated bird's-eye view. They contain some of the

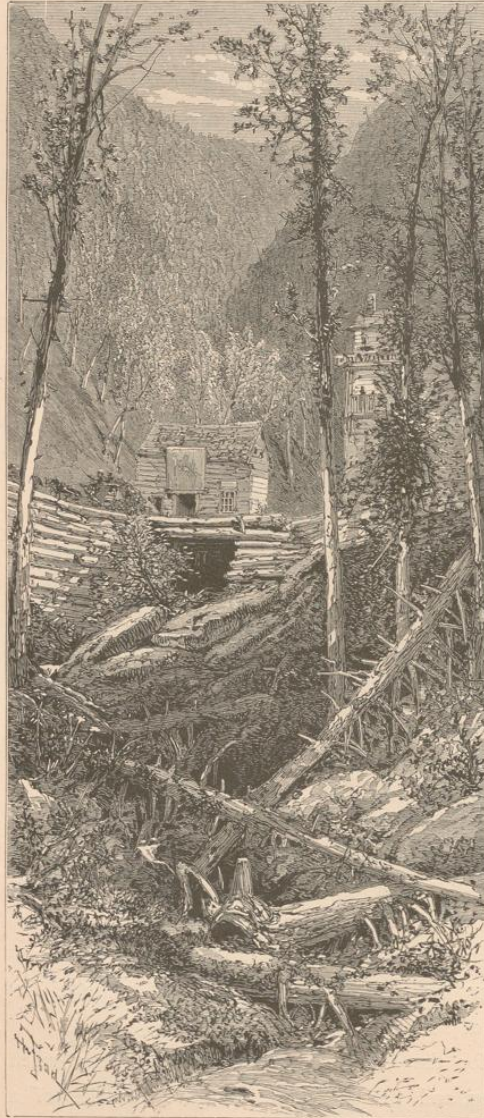


View of Mountains from Creek, Catskill-Mountain Road.

most picturesque bits of mountain-scenery in the world. The beauties of the Clove and the Falls of the Kauterskill have been immortalized by Irving and Cooper and Bryant, passing into the classics of American literature, and awakening in the genius of Cole its loftiest inspiration. After such illustrators, the task of describing the charms of this beautiful group of mountains would seem to be as difficult as the attempt were presumptuous; but a few notes may, perhaps, be useful in explanation of some of the sketches made by Mr. Fenn in this shrine of summer pilgrimage.

It was mid-August when we started for the Catskills. Though it was early when we left New-York City, no air was stirring, and the hot morning gave promise of a hotter day. The train steamed out of the huge depot into the glare of the early sunlight, and the dust began to whirl up beneath the wheels in a white, dry cloud. We have rushed with lightning-speed along the eastern bank of the Hudson—now plunging into a dark, damp tunnel cut through the overhanging rock; now whirling around some

promontory, jutting out into the placid river; and, again, seeming to skim over its silvery bosom, as we glided across an elbow of the stream. We have passed beneath Yonkers



Rip Van Winkle's House, Catskill Road.

a sharp notch, or depression, terminating in a deep shadow. There lies the Clove, through which the Kauterskill comes tumbling to the plain. High on the face of the South Moun-

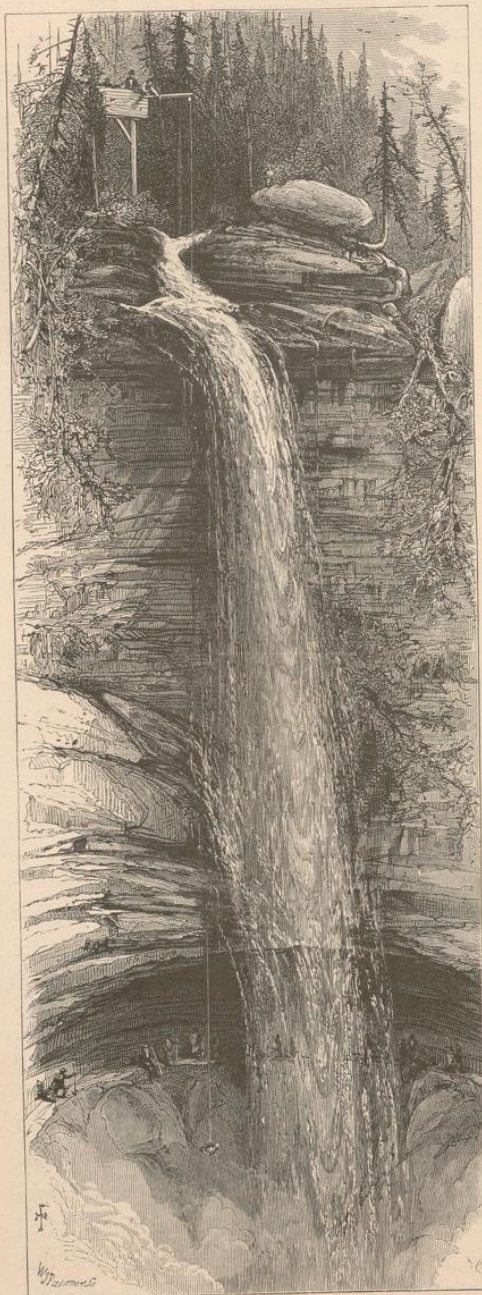
and Tarrytown, and watched the shadows play on the high wall of the Palisades; skirted the shores of Haverstraw Bay and Tappan Zee; and, entering the giant gates of the Highlands at Stony Point, caught a glimpse of West Point, as we swung around the mountain opposite Cro' - Nest. Newburg and Poughkeepsie have flashed by in the rapidly-changing panorama. The Hudson, bearing many a white-sailed craft upon its bosom, flows tranquilly along between high banks covered with trees, with here and there a pretty cottage nestling among them. Now and then, as we strain our eyes forward, we can catch for a moment a faint outline, toward the north, of high mountains, dark blue in the lessening distance. Suddenly we rush through a dark cleft in the rock, and then out again on the other side. On the western bank of the river you can see a series of ridges covered with trees, rolling away, one after another, eight or ten miles; and beyond the farthest, lifting their wooded sides up into the clouds that have begun to settle on their peaks, are the famous mountains. Yonder round one to the right is Black Head; then, in succession, North Mountain, South Mountain, and Round Top, with High Peak towering over all. Between this last and the South Mountain you see

tain, or rather between it and its northern neighbor, your eye detects a small speck, hanging like a swallow's-nest upon a wall, white and glistening in the sun. It is the Mountain House, from the broad piazza of which three or four hundred human beings are perhaps, at this moment, looking out over the landscape which lies beneath them like a map, and noting the faint line of white smoke that marks the passage of our train. A scream escapes from the locomotive, and the speed is slackened. Presently we come to a dead stop. Bundles are quickly made; a crowd of travellers hurries from the cars; baggage is thrown about in wild confusion; the locomotive gives a warning whistle; and, amid a cloud of dust, the train whirls up the river, and out of sight on its way to Albany. A ferry-boat lies waiting at the little wharf. A few gasps from the asthmatic engine, and we are off. A few turns of the lumbering wheel, and we have reached the western bank. Old-fashioned stages stand by the landing, awaiting our arrival. In a little while our trunks are strapped on behind; and, seated each in his place, we swing about, and are jolted up and down, as the huge vehicles roll through the little village of Catskill.



South Lake.

We have presently crossed the bridge which spans the mouth of the Kauterskill, and have fairly begun our ride toward the mountains. The day is intensely hot. The road stretches before us white and dusty in the sunshine. On either side the trees stand drooping, unstirred by a breath of air; and often, as our horses slowly pull their heavy burden up a rise in the road, and stop a moment to rest, a locust, perched on a tree by the road-side, begins his grating cry. In the meadows the cows stand under the trees, switching away the buzzing flies; and the recently-cut grass breathes out its life in the soft perfume of new-mown hay. In the distance, the clouds have begun to gather on the tops of the mountains; and, now and then, a long rumble of thunder reverberates through them, and comes rolling down into the valley. Here Mr. Fenn pauses to make his first sketch. Beside us, the little Kauterskill, wearied with its rough journey down from the heights yonder, winds among the trees that line its banks, placidly smiling in the sun. Half a dozen cows are standing in the stream to cool themselves. In front, the valley rolls gradually (about a thousand feet in



First Leap of the Falls.

seven or eight miles) up to the base of the mountains, which rise in the distance like a wall. Round Top and High Peak are buried in a dark cloud, but the scarred head of the North Mountain is in full view, and the Mountain House is clearly defined against a background of pines.

A ride of several hours across the fertile valley, climbing the ridges that lead like steps from the level of the river to the foot of the mountains, brings us at length to a toll-gate, from which we see the road straight before us, ascending steadily. We have now begun to climb in earnest. This excellent road takes advantage of a deep glen, or ravine, through which in the winter the melting snow finds its way into the valley. By clinging closely to the mountain—now creeping around a projecting rock; now crossing the beds of little streams, which, in the midsummer heat, trickle down the mossy rocks beneath the overshadowing trees—it brings us, at last, nearly to the highest point of the ravine. On every side huge trees overhang the road. On the right, the mountain towers straight up above our heads; on the left, the precipice plunges headlong down among the scattered rocks. As you climb up this steep road, and see, here and there, great boulders lying on the slope of the mountain, covered with moss and fern, and in the perpetual shade of the forest-trees that interlace their leafy arms above you—catching a glimpse, every now and then, through some



CATSKILL FALLS.

opening in the tree-tops, of the valley, a thousand feet below, and the river glistening in the distance—you can hardly blame him who, seeking a scene for Irving's immortal story, wandered into the romantic beauties of this wild ravine, and called it "Rip Van Winkle's Glen." And, indeed, I am reminded of the legend; for, as we stop to rest the horses at a point where the road crosses the bed of a stream, from which we can look at the gorge and see a triangular piece of the valley, set in the dark foliage on both hands like a picture in its frame, a sudden clap of thunder breaks on the peaks, and echoes among the cliffs above our heads, rolling off slowly, fainter and fainter, till it dies away. Here, by the side of a little stream, which trickles down the broad, flat surface of a large rock, is the shanty called "Rip Van Winkle's House," which is represented in Mr. Fenn's sketch. The artist is looking up the glen from a point on the left of the road. On the right, one may notice the corner of a house, built for a tavern some time ago, which serves for a resting-place and half-way house between the foot of the mountain and the hotel on the summit. From this point the glen grows narrower and steeper, until it is finally lost among the crevices on the cliffs of the mountain.

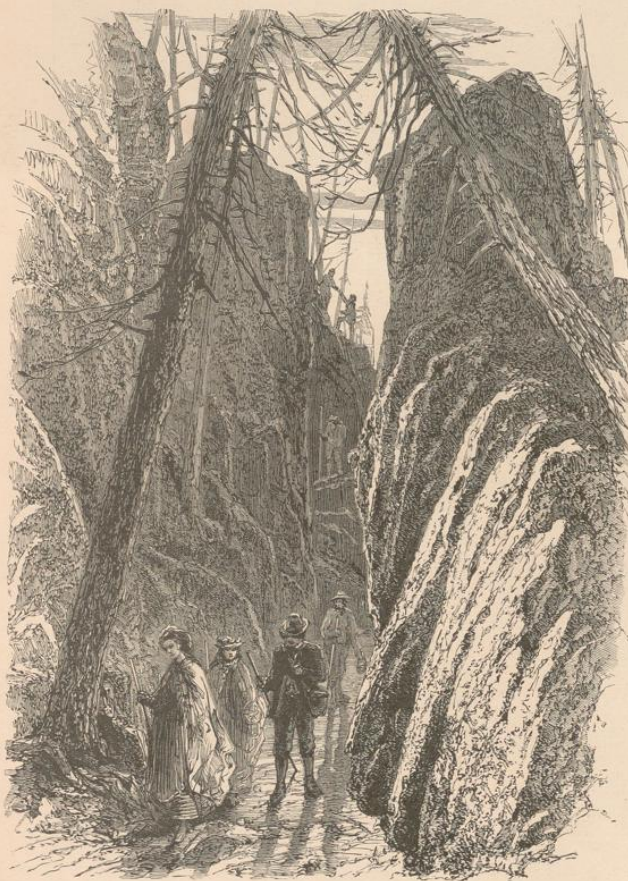
The road now winds around the side of the North Mountain, creeping at times on the edge of the precipice, and steadily ascending. Mr. Fenn has sketched one of its most striking points of view. At a certain place it turns abruptly, and commences to climb in zigzags. At the first turn you suddenly see the Mountain House directly before you, apparently at the distance of half a mile. Perched upon a piece of rock which juts out far over the side of the mountain, in the bright sunshine glistening and white against the pine-clad shoulders of the South Mountain, the pile of buildings forms a singular feature of the view. On the left of the picture you may notice the opening of the Kauterskill Clove, between the sloping side of the South Mountain and that of the more distant High Peak, and, above the clouds, which are floating, like bits of gauzy drapery, about the sides of the mountains, see the valley of the Hudson fading off toward the south. One feature of these views is strikingly shown in this sketch. The face of the cliffs is broken into ledges of rock, sharp and jagged, and often overhanging the precipice for more than a thousand feet.

From this point there is a steady climb of three miles, the last part through a narrow gorge shaded by drooping hemlocks, when you have at last reached the plateau on which the hotel stands. The Mountain House is built on a flat rock, on the very edge of the precipice. Beneath it the cliff falls almost perpendicularly about eighteen hundred feet. The view from the piazza is wonderful. Two or three trees, growing on the broken stones twenty or thirty feet below the level of the house, peep up above the rock in front; and between their waving tops the landscape for miles lies spread out before you. The Indian Ridge, and the smaller ridges beneath you, though in some places as much as seven hundred feet in height, are dwarfed into nothingness; and the hill-country, through which you have ridden from the river, looks like a flat and level



UNDER THE CATSKILL FALLS.

plain. Through the centre of this, at a distance of eight miles, the Hudson winds along like a silver ribbon on a carpet of emerald, from the hills below Albany on the north to where, toward the south, its glittering stream disappears behind the Highlands at West Point. Directly beneath you, the fertile valley, dotted with farms, and broken here and there by patches of rich woodland, is smiling in the sunlight, constantly



pudding-stone Hall.

changing, as the waves of shadow chase each other across the varied mass of green. And, beyond, an amphitheatre of mountains rises on the horizon, stretching, in jagged lines, from the southern boundaries of Vermont to Litchfield, in Connecticut — rolling off, peak after peak, wave after wave of deepening blue, until they are lost in the purple of the Berkshire Hills.

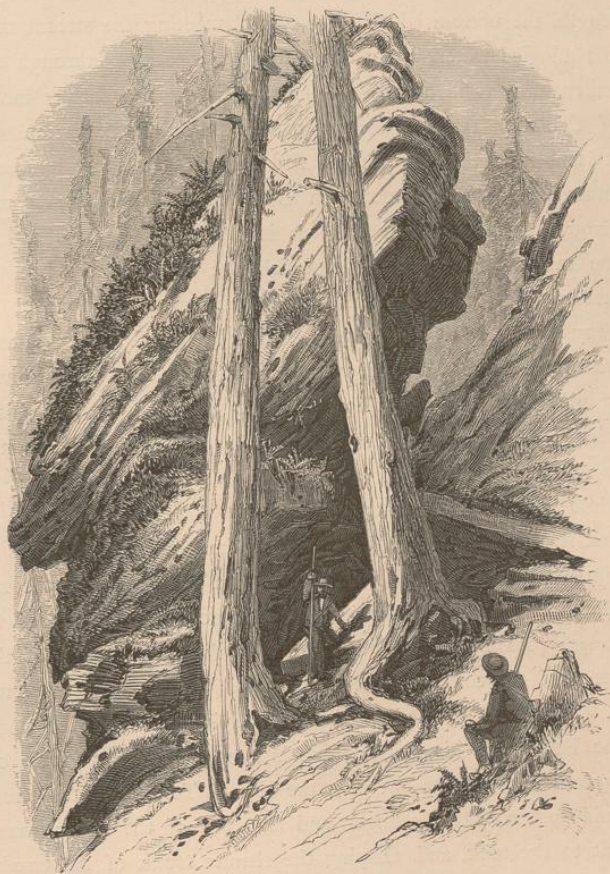
On the wide face of this extended landscape the atmosphere is constantly producing strange effects. In the morning, when the sun peeps above the distant hills, and the valley is filled with clouds that lie massed a thousand feet beneath you, the effect is that of an arctic sea

of ice. At times, Righi himself affords no more wonderful sight than when the rosy light of sunset falls from behind the Catskills upon huge masses of *cumulus* clouds, heaped up upon one another like peaks of snow. Day by day, the scene is changing with the hours, and ever revealing some new beauty. Mr. Fenn's sketch of the view at sunrise (see steel engraving) was taken from a point on the face of the South Mountain, near the entrance to the Clove. The morning had just broken when we scrambled

over the edge of the cliff down, a hundred feet or more, to a point where the rocks, broken off from the mountain, stood up like huge monuments, towering out over the abyss below.

As we sat upon a ledge, from which a pebble would have fallen perpendicularly more than five hundred feet, the sun rose up above the hills in Massachusetts, pouring a flood of light upon the western side of the valley. The eastern, from the river to the foot of the distant mountains, was still in shadow, filled with a mass of clouds, out of which the smaller hills peeped up like rocky islets in a frozen sea. Directly beneath us light, fleecy clouds, white as snow, came creeping out of the valley, throwing into bold relief the gnarled and twisted pines that clung to the rocks in front of us. Steadily the sun mounted into the heavens, and the clouds, gathering into a snowy curtain, and for a few moments obscuring all beneath, presently broke into pieces and melted away, and there lay the exquisite landscape smiling in the sunshine.

The most famous beauty of the region is the Fall of the Kauterskill. On the high table-land of the South and North Mountains lie two lakes, buried in a dense forest. Of one of these, the South Lake, Mr. Fenn has given us a sketch. It was taken from a high ledge on the North Mountain, looking southward. The shores are dark with pines, and the surface of the lake is dotted here and there with the broad leaves of the water-lily, but the most striking feature of the view is the summit of Round Top reflected as



Druid Rocks.

in a mirror. A little brook, making its way from these lakes, westward along the shoulder of the mountain, soon reaches the edge of a very steep declivity, over which it leaps into a deep pool in the centre of a great amphitheatre of rock.

Gathering its strength again, the torrent makes a second leap over huge boulders, which have fallen from the ledges above and lie scattered down the glen, dashing itself into foam in its headlong fury. Tumbling from one ledge to another, it reaches, at length, the bottom of the glen, when, meeting the stream that flows from Haines's Fall, the mingled waters hurry down the stony pathway through the Clove, and out into the valley, until, swollen to a wide stream, they glide placidly into the Hudson at the village of Catskill. There is nothing more beautiful in American scenery than this water-fall as it leaps from the lofty height and dashes into spray in the hollow basin below. The strata of which the mountain is formed lie piled upon one another horizontally, and through them the water has cut its way smoothly like a knife. Some distance above the margin of the pool, in which the fallen waters boil as in a caldron, there is a stratum of soft stone, which has broken up and crumbled in the dampness. Wearing away several yards deep into the cliffs, it has left a pathway all around the Fall, from which you have a fine view, and often, when the stream above is swollen, through a veil of glittering drops dripping from the rocks above. Exquisite as is the effect of the whole Fall, when seen from the rocks at the foot of its second leap, this last point of view is even more striking. Standing on the narrow pathway, you look through the great white veil of falling waters, leaping out over your head and sending up clouds of spray that float off down the gorge. Sometimes, when the sun is shining brightly, a dancing rainbow will keep pace with you as you creep around the semicircle beneath the rock. Here, too, you get an enchanting glimpse of the edges of the Clove, down which the stream goes headlong, and can mark the wild figures of the pines that cling to the verge of the cliffs, and seem, with their black spears, to pierce the sky.

Upon the very edge of the precipice, close to the narrow channel through which the Fall makes his plunge, there is a tree which has grown out from a crevice, and then upward until it juts out over the abyss. To this solitary tree the lad who acts as your guide points with his finger, and tells you of the adventurous young woman who crept out to the rock, and, clasping the slender trunk of the tree with her hands, swung her body far out over the Fall, and then, with a cry of triumph, back again in safety.

Beneath the second fall the gorge is wild in the extreme. On both sides the mountains rise almost perpendicularly, clad with a dense forest, and, through the shade beneath, the torrent roars, ceaselessly, among the rocks.

One of the most beautiful walks is over the South Mountain. Immediately after leaving the House you plunge into a dense thicket of pines, and commence to climb a steep pathway among the rocks. The roots of trees, interlacing across the path, form a series of steps, and, here and there, a huge rock serves for a resting-place in the con-

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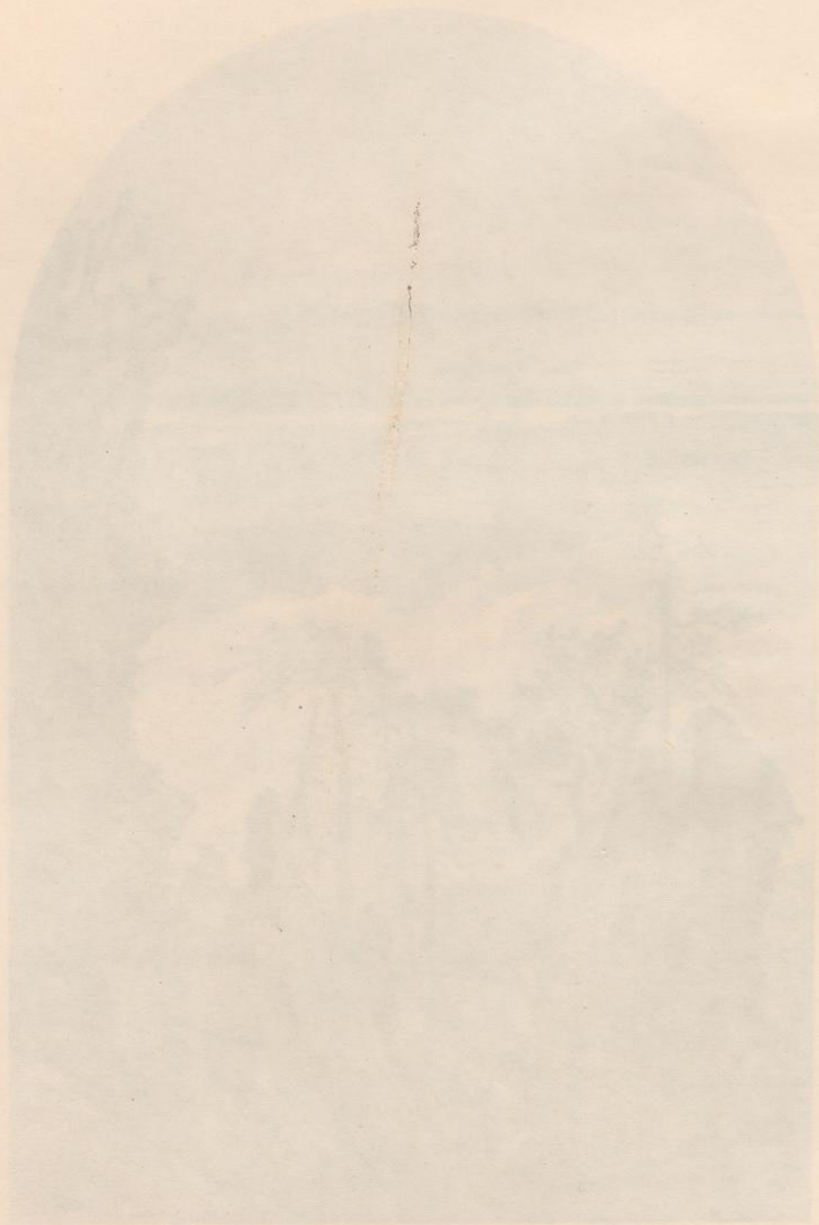


Engraved by H.S. 1851. Published by D. Appleton & Co. in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington. C.V. 111211.

The Catskills.

SUNRISE FROM SOUTH MOUNTAIN

New York, D. Appleton & Co.



stant ascent. In a few minutes you have reached the level of a stratum of conglomerate of many feet in thickness, which lies across the top of this and the North Mountain. Some convulsion of Nature has riven off a piece of it, which now lies on the hill-side, many feet in thickness, and eighteen or twenty high. Between this and the solid rock is a passage several feet in length and two or three in width, to which some



Looking South from South Mountain.

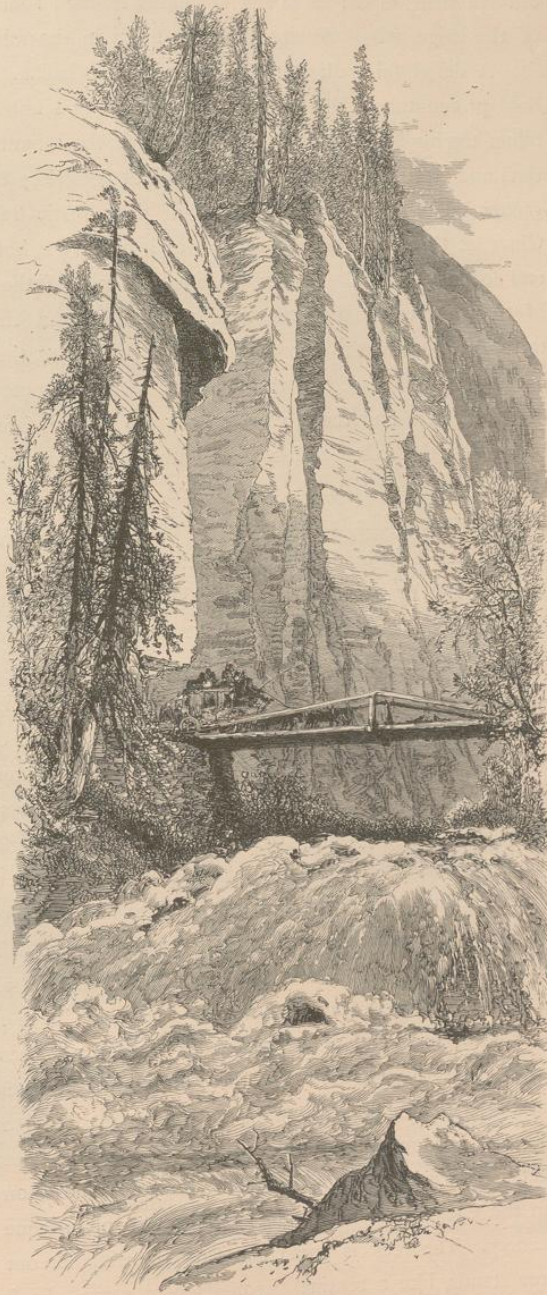
one has given the name of "Pudding-Stone Hall." Ferns are growing in the dark recesses of the rock, and water drips constantly into the cavity. Your path leads through this chasm, and, by means of a pile of stones at the farther end, as shown in the sketch, you climb up to the top of the ledge of conglomerate. Here the trees are white and dead, having been killed by repeated fires, and the path winds among the rocks, half buried in long mountain-grass or blueberry-bushes, until it comes out to the



Glimpse of Catskill Clove from Indian Head.

eastern face of the mountain. You are, of course, high above the level of the Mountain House, which lies beneath you to the left, and the view over the surrounding country and the valley of the Hudson is even more extended than that from the piazza of the hotel. With a good glass you can distinguish a round object glittering on the summit of a hill on the northern horizon. It is the Capitol at Albany, forty miles off as the crow flies. Farther along, still keeping southward, and occasionally climbing up steep steps, you find the cliffs exceedingly fine. Some of them are sharply cut, and overhang the tops of the tallest trees that grow from the *debris* at their base. On a promontory of high rock, near the entrance to the Kauterskill Clove, lies "the Boulder," which is often the goal of walking-parties. It is a huge block of the pudding-stone brought here, doubtless, by the ice in the glacial period, and left by some strange chance on the very verge of the precipice. A few feet farther and it would have toppled over the edge and crashed downward two thousand feet into the bottom of the Clove. Mr. Fenn has sketched the Boulder and the cliffs on top of which it lies. From his point of view you look south-

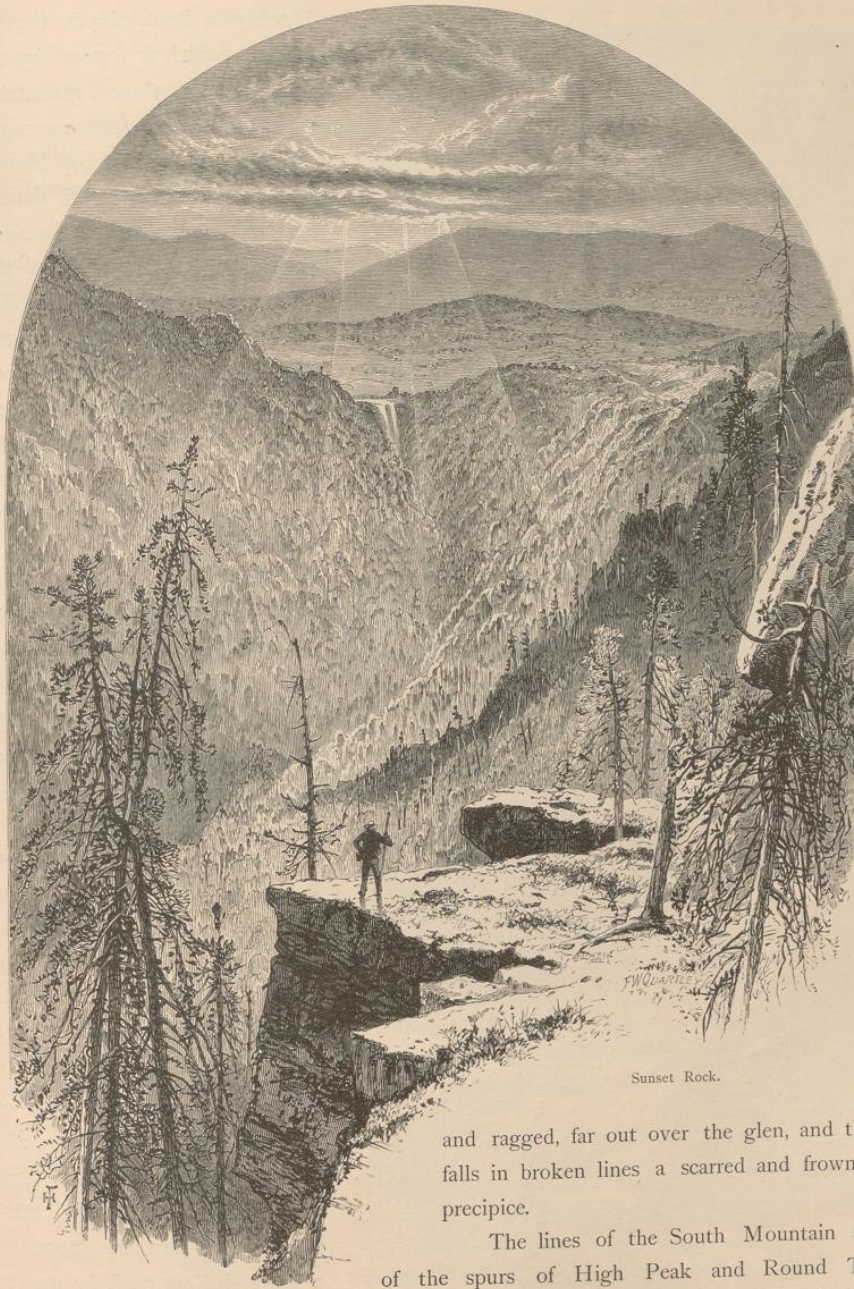
ward, across the mouth of the Clove, the great shoulder of High Peak and Round Top rising up abruptly beyond. Here, as in the sketch of the sunrise, the precipitous walls of rock hardly afford foothold for the weather-beaten pines that grow out of the crevices and wave their twisted arms from the dizzy heights. Sometimes, after passing through Pudding-Stone Hall, you keep straight along the path through the woods instead of turning eastward toward the face of the mountain. After a time you come to a point where the bits of rock have fallen from the ledge above and lie scattered along the hill-side, like the boulders hurled about in the giant warfare of the Titans. The wood is dense and dark: the pines interlacing their arms above your head throw a perpetual twilight on the hill-side, and, as you sit on the soft carpet of their fallen leaves, and see these huge fantastic rocks scattered around you, one cannot but feel that the name of "Druid Rocks," which has been given to the place, is at once suggestive and appropriate. At times the path keeps close along the sloping hill-side, finding a doubtful way beneath the base of tall cliffs



Bridge in Catskill Clove.

covered with moss; at others it climbs through some crevice, and, ascending to the top of the ledge, winds among the gray rocks in the full glare of a summer's sun.

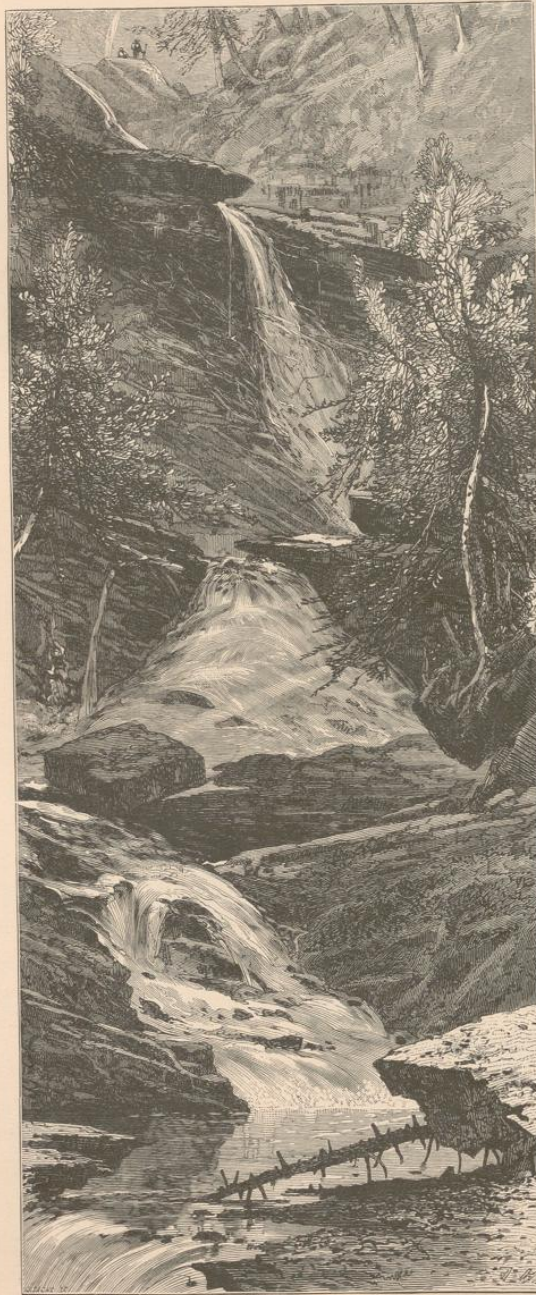
A delightful walk brings you at last to Indian Head. This name is given to a bold promontory which juts out over the Clove until it overhangs the bed of the tumbling, tossing Kauterskill. From this rock the mountain falls eighteen hundred or two thousand feet. Half a dozen tall pines, growing out of the cliff, divided into two groups on either hand, form a sort of dark, rustic frame for the exquisite picture. The Clove at this place is very narrow, and, along the bottom, the Kauterskill goes tumbling and foaming over the stones. Along the base of the cliff, on the left or southern side of the glen, winds the little road that leads from the village at its mouth up to the table-land beyond the famous falls. On both sides, the mountains tower high above your heads, heavily wooded to the summits with chestnut and pine, through the rich green of which, here and there, you can see the rugged face of a huge precipice, scarred and broken by the frosts, and spotted with dark lichen and moss. As we gazed down into the Clove a heavily-laden stage came lumbering into view, looking, as it does in Mr. Fenn's sketch, like a mere speck upon the winding road. We watched it creeping along, often half hidden by the trees, until it passed over the little rustic bridge that spans a brawling cataract, and vanished behind the dark shoulder of the mountain. It was a perfect day. About the great head of High Peak the clouds had thrown a scarf of white, the shadow of which darkened his mighty shoulders and the gorge beneath. The colors were constantly changing with the moving clouds, and the sunlight played and danced upon the walls of rock and the masses of deepest green, while the sound of the Kauterskill came floating up to us from its stony bed, where it dashed along, now sparkling in the sunlight and then plunging over mossy rocks into the shade. The wonderful effect of this play of light and shade is perfectly shown by the accompanying picture. The little rustic bridge which is seen in the view from Indian Head spans the stream at one of the most striking points in the Clove. Of it Mr. Fenn has made a sketch from a rock just below it in the stream. The light structure, hardly strong enough, apparently, to bear the heavy stage that is about to cross it, hangs over the Kauterskill where it comes tumbling over some huge rocks that have fallen in its path. The water boils and tosses into foam, and then dashes headlong down a succession of ledges beneath. On one side, the cliff towers high into the air, sharp and smooth as masonry, looking like the walls of a great mediæval castle. On the other, the spurs of the South Mountain, densely covered with trees, rise rapidly more than fifteen hundred feet. It is a most romantic spot. As you stand upon Sunset Rock and look westward up the Clove, you have one of the most picturesque views in the range of mountain scenery. The rock is broad and flat, projecting far out over the precipice. An old pine-tree stands, like a sentinel, upon its very verge. In front of and behind you, as you sit by the old tree on the dizzy edge, the mountain pushes two great, gray cliffs, bald



Sunset Rock.

and ragged, far out over the glen, and then falls in broken lines a scarred and frowning precipice.

The lines of the South Mountain and of the spurs of High Peak and Round Top blend so gently together, as they meet beneath, that it is difficult to trace the bed of the Kauterskill or its tributary even by the shadows in the dense forest of green.



The Five Cascades, Kauterskill Clove.

Directly in front of you the table-land, which is formed by the shoulders of these mountains, rolls off toward the westward, where the sharp lines of Hunter Mountain are clearly defined against the sky among its sister peaks. Over the edge of this table-land leaps Haines's Fall. As in the accompanying engraving, it looks, from Sunset Rock, like a white spot in the dark forest—glittering for an instant in the sunlight, and then plunging down behind the waving tree-tops.

One of the most beautiful of all the sketches made by Mr. Fenn is that of the Five Cascades, as they are improperly called. A stiff climb from the bottom of the Kauterskill Clove—commencing at the point where the carriage-road leaves it and following the bed of the stream that comes down from Haines's, now clambering over boulders and fallen trees, and again scrambling up the wet rocks or clinging to the vine-clad banks—brought us at last to the Five Cascades. It was an enchanting spot. The stream, after plunging over the cliff—as shown in the view from Sunset Rock—like a far-off feathery vapor into a large shallow pool, jumps rapidly over a series of ledges from ten to forty feet in height, that

lead like steps down into the Clove. Through the succession of the ages it has worn its way among the rocks until, for most of the distance, its path is hidden from the sunshine. In many places the branches of the trees on the high banks above are intertwined across the ravine, down which the little stream dashes in hundreds of beautiful cataracts in a perpetual twilight. There are, in truth, hundreds of these falls, but five of them are peculiarly striking—and three of these are represented in the engraving. As we sat upon a fallen tree and gazed upon the stream, dashing its cold, gray waters over the black rocks, a shaft of sunlight broke through the tree-tops above our heads and fell upon the middle fall. The change was instantaneous. Above it and below, the cataracts were still in shadow, but the central one, in the bright sunshine, threw over the glistening rock a myriad of diamonds. For five minutes the water seemed to rejoice in the glorious light, when suddenly it faded—the spell was broken, and the little cataract went tumbling over the dark rocks in the gloom again.



Stony Clove.

The last engraving is a distant view of Stony Clove—a pass in the mountains famous for the wildness of its scenery. It is always dark and cool, and even in mid-August you may find ice among the crevices of the rocks that have fallen in great numbers from the cliffs above. The sketch was made as we drove toward the northern entrance. A thunder-storm was gathering about the southern gate of the pass, and a rainbow seemed to rest upon the mountains hovering above the Clove.

Such are a few of the attractions of this charming region. Of course there are drives over fine roads among the hill-tops, and countless walks through the forests and over the ledges, with the usual results of torn clothes, sunburnt faces, and hearty appetites. To the dweller in a city of the plain, weary of work and worn with the tumult of its life, there are few places in the whole range of American scenery so attractive and refreshing as the Catskill Mountains.