



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 Mohawk, Albany, And Troy.

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THE MOHAWK, ALBANY, AND TROY.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY MESSRS. FENN AND WOODWARD.



THERE is a part of New-York State around which the spell of the pastoral ages has surely been thrown, and which gives to it a sentiment of extreme antiquity for which history refuses to account. A round two hundred and fifty years are all for which the Muse of History considers herself responsible; and yet, throughout this region, there is an atmosphere of peace and quiet, as if æons of happy years had glided away since first man led cows to graze and sheep to nibble at the fat pastures. This pastoral country is the valley of the Mohawk, a river whose true Indian designa-

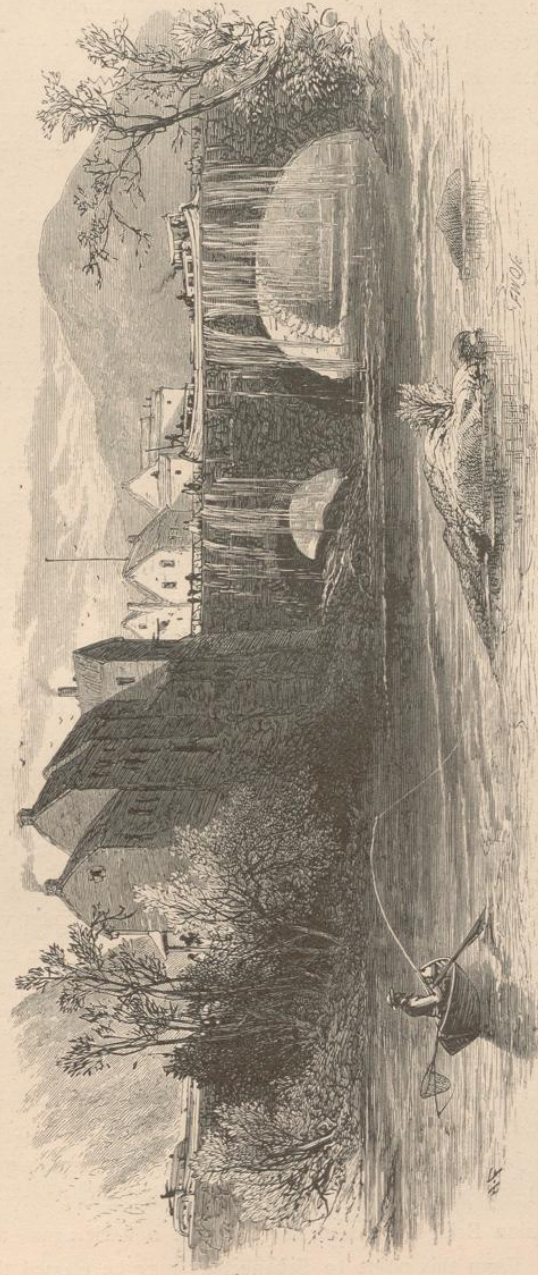


The Mohawk at Utica.

tion is unknown, but which has preserved the name of the aborigines who dwelt upon its banks.

The Mohawk rises in Oneida County, about twenty miles north of Rome; flows southeast and east, falling into the Hudson, after a stretch of one hundred and thirty-five miles, ten miles above Albany. It is but a petty stream near its origin, nor is it fed by important tributaries until it has passed the city of Utica. It is clear that the impetus of the city was not derived from the river, but from the Erie Canal; for the streets are all built in the proximity of the latter, and the former is outside of the town altogether. It meanders placidly past, traveling very slowly, and with more turns and bends than that famous river in Asia Minor which Xenophon has immortalized, and from which

we get the word *meander*. But, though the town neglects it, the farms do not; and on every side are long, tranquil meadows, studded with trees that mount up from the water's edge with a most gradual ascent. The Erie Canal, going still more slowly than the placid Mohawk, is on one side of it; and the puffing, panting locomotives of the New-York Central Railroad go shrieking past on the other. Beyond the meadows rise gentle hills, whose sides are thick with trees that glance and gleam in the sunlight as the frolicsome winds display the upper and the lower sides of the leaves. The cattle graze close to the river, near the bulrushes; and the sheep feed higher up, where the grass is shorter and less rank. All kinds of birds that love the fat worms of the rich pastoral soil flit from bush to bush, or perch upon the tame backs of the cows, or even upon the horns of some dignified old ram. And the river goes murmuring on through this scene of quiet happiness until it comes to a place where the Adirondack Mountains have thrown out a line of skirmishing rocks, and here



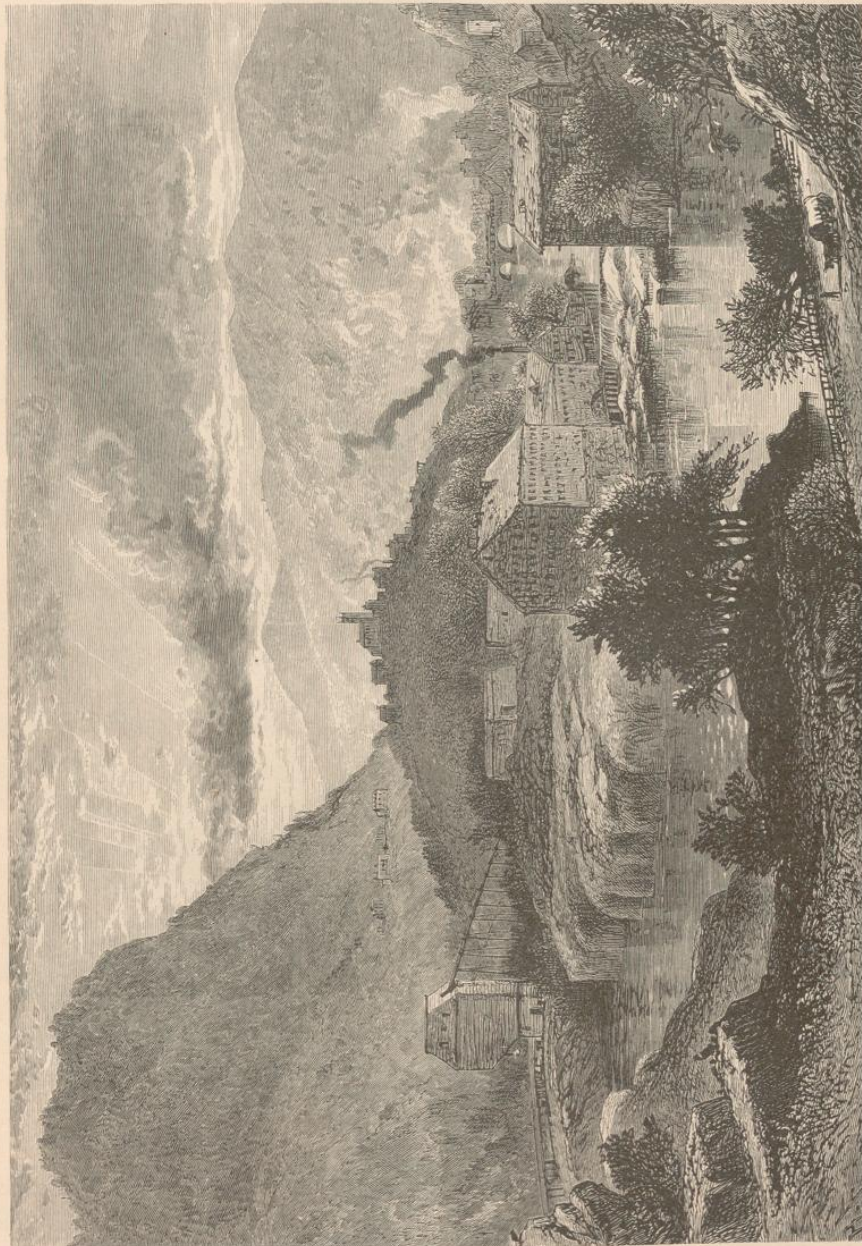
At Little Falls.

the tranquillity of the Mohawk is brought to an abrupt conclusion. This is at Little Falls. It must be confessed that the skirmishers of the mountains, in pursuance of the eternal war waged between the rocks and the rivers, have here made a most tremendous and determined onslaught, for the place is literally heaped with rocks. They are everywhere—cropping up between the houses, over the roofs, in the gardens; bursting out of the sides of the green hills, that here become really mountains; and starting up in the bed of the river in the most perplexing manner. The river here makes a descent of over forty feet, accomplishing the effort in three small falls, which have been turned to great profit by the people of the town, for they furnish water-power to a great many factories. These, for the most part, are upon the island which springs up in the river below the first fall; and this island is perhaps the rockiest part of the whole settlement. The Erie Canal runs through a channel blasted out of the solid rock at the foot of a steep hill, which rises on the east side of the river, and is called the Rollaway.

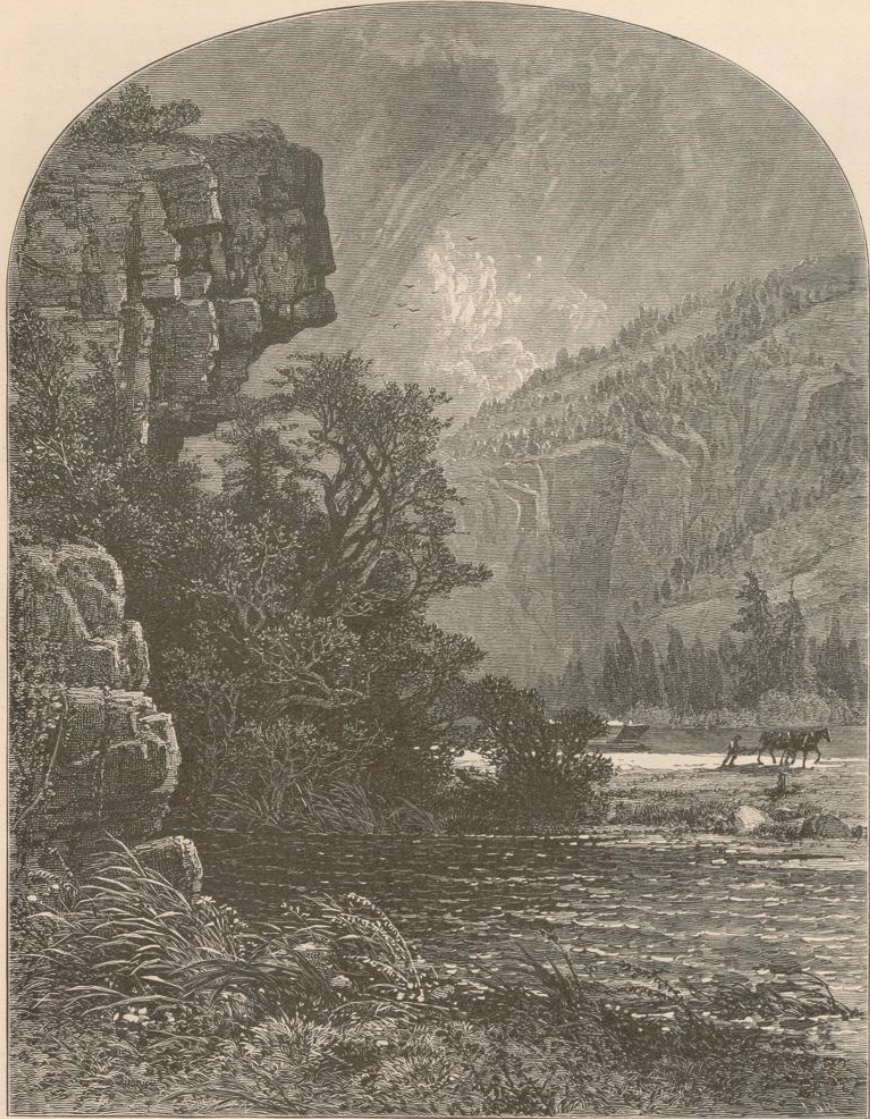
On the other side rises another hill, not so precipitous, but higher, and terraced upward with grand, curving lines, that show clearly the erosive power of the Mohawk in past times. It had its turbulent youth, also; and the day was when it swept these hills with a fierce current that laughed at such puny obstacles. Now it glides peacefully onward, and sings with a pleased murmur to the fat cattle, and the impudent birds that sip of its waters and toss their heads half disdainfully.

But there are witnesses still extant of what the waters did in the remote past; for here is Profile Rock, where the hard stone has been so mauled, and had its stratification so handled, that the very fair likeness to a human profile has been washed out. That tow-path, where the canal-horses tug and strain so, is the favorite drive of the townspeople, and, indeed, the good folks have nowhere else to drive, being circumvented and hemmed in by their rocky girdle. Accordingly, the Profile Rock is one of the institutions of the place; and the stranger within the gates who should, out of pure "cussedness," refuse to see any resemblance to the human visage, would be considered very—impolite, to say the least of it. The view along the canal tow-path is exceedingly interesting. The side of the Rollaway runs along the canal for several miles, and is clothed with a fine growth of trees—stately, dark pines; white beeches, with gleaming, silvery trunks; and bending aspens, here and there. On the other side is the Mohawk, once more united, for the rocky island terminates at the end of the town. The rocks, however, continue; and, though of no height, are strangely varied in shape, and beautifully mingled with bosky shrubs and thick bushes, waving grasses and delicate harebells. But gradually the Rollaway dwindles to a bank, and the rocks to pebbles; and, after the Suspension Bridge is passed, the Mohawk is itself again, and the pastoral era is renewed.

From this point to Schenectady may be termed the heart of the Mohawk Valley. It is difficult to say which offers the most picturesque and pleasing view—the valley of



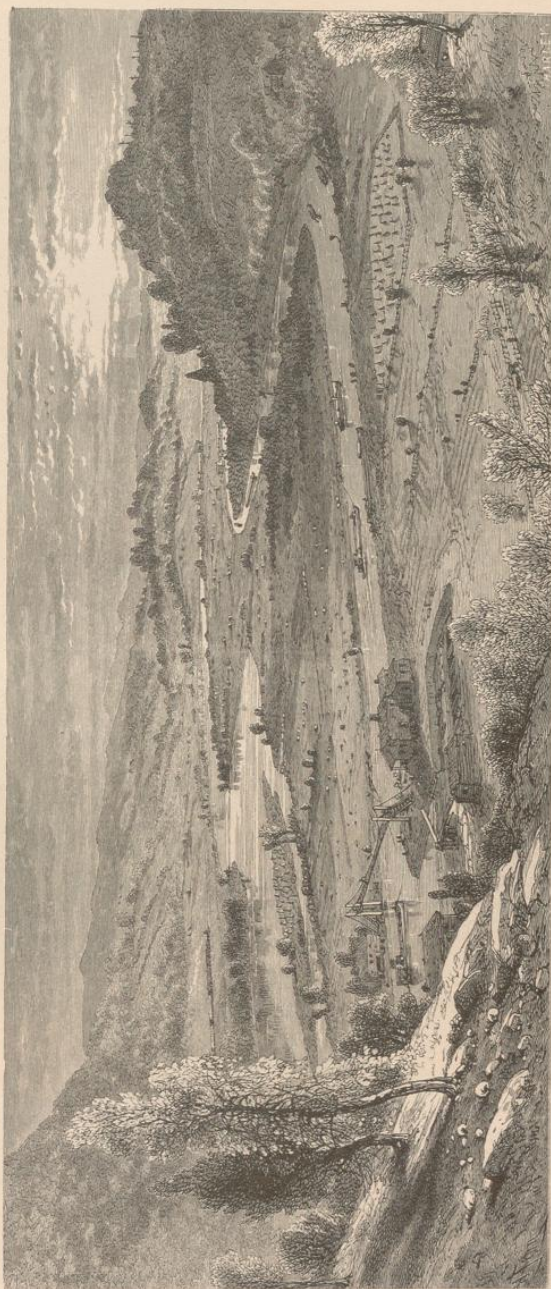
LITTLE FALLS.



Profile Rock.

the Mohawk from the Rollaway, looking westward, or from the Suspension Bridge, below Little Falls, looking eastward. Both have the same pastoral beauty; both have the same low hills, the same embowering trees. There is a regularity about the lines of the former which will commend itself to the lovers of symmetry, and there is a picturesque looseness about the latter which many will deem more artistic. To Americans—eager,

pushing, bustling, ever on the lookout for spheres of action, for possibilities of enterprise—there is a something here of peaceful enjoyment which sinks deep into the heart. It is a restful place, emphatically. Hence we cannot be surprised when we find Schenectady, the capital of this region, partaking of this quiet, unenergetic character; and this city has this, also, in common with the surroundings, that it appears much older than it really is. Its lovers—and it has many—claim for it the title of the oldest city in the State. This claim rests entirely upon the date of the first settlement of Albany, which some declare to have taken place in 1614, and others in 1623; but there is some confusion about the matter, because there was undeniably a time when the Indians called both *Skaunoghtada*, which means "town across the plains." However that may be, in those remote times it is certain that Schenectady proper was more flourishing than Albany. It was at the head of the rich Mohawk Valley, and did an immense business in dairy produce



The Mohawk Valley.



Schenectady, from the West.

and Indian peltries. The Indians seem to have lived in harmony with the Dutch settlers for many years, and it was not until 1690 that they suddenly became enemies. On this occasion, the whole population, save sixty souls, was annihilated; and the town was destroyed by fire. It was burned again in 1748, which gives it quite a history; and the most astonishing thing about it is, that it looks as if it had been existing for untold generations. The Mohawk, at this point, is broad and deep, and the old wooden bridge that spans it is a pretty long one; for the stream has been recruited by several large tributaries since it swept by the city of Utica, the chief contribution coming from the West Kanahtha Creek, which, after dashing down the wildly-beautiful Trenton Falls, glides peaceably enough into the placid bosom of the Mohawk, and remembers its past furious excitement only in dreams.

Beyond Schenectady the river sweeps on with a majesty obtained from its increased volume, but the country is not so pastoral as it was. The soil is shaly, and the hills are



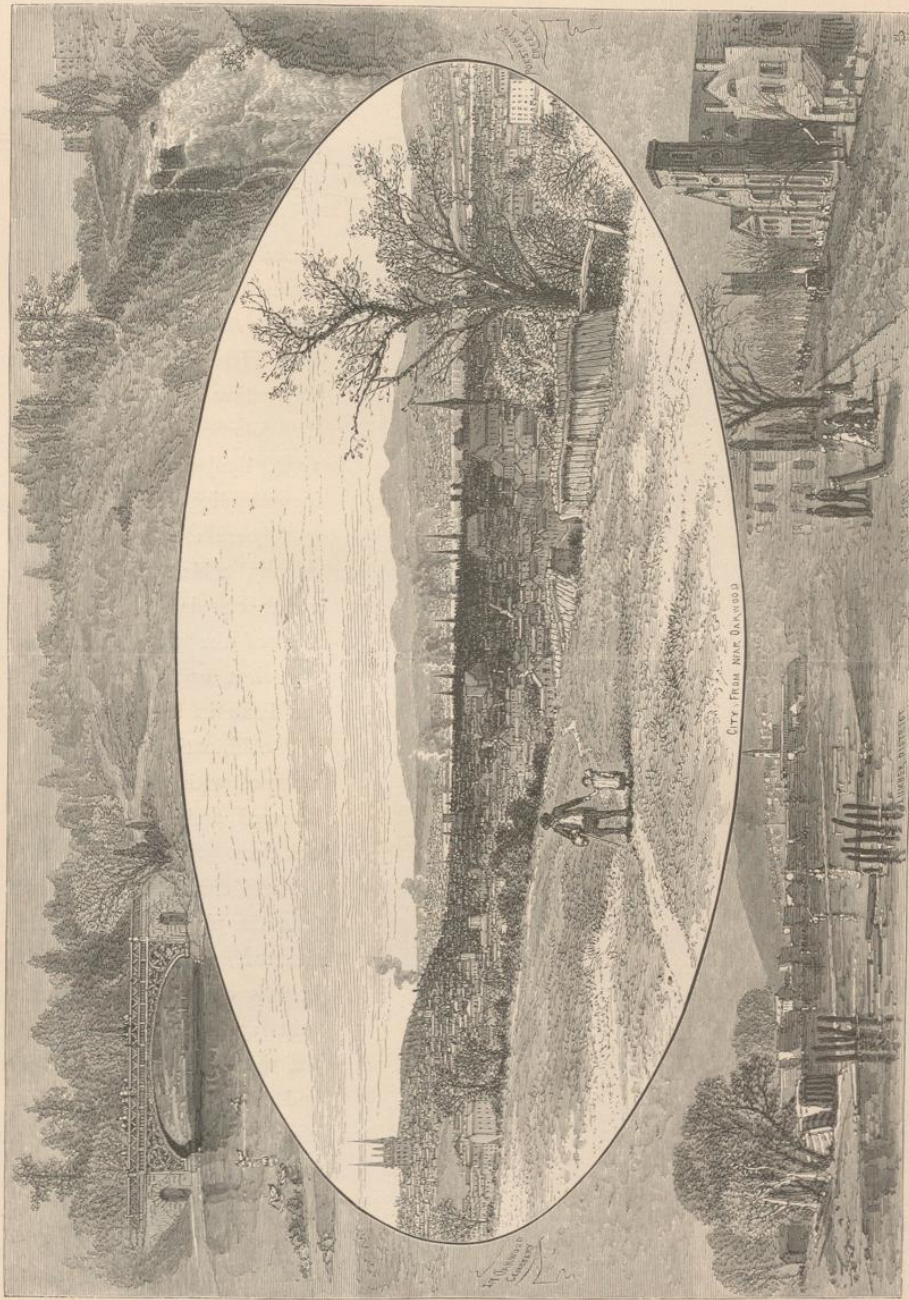
Cohoes Falls.

low. At Cohoes there is a great fall; about a mile above the falls, the river, broad and deep as it is, has been hemmed in by a dam, and a great portion of its waters drawn off by a water-power company. The little town of Cohoes is entirely manufacturing. It is the Lowell of New York. Here are the great Harmony Cotton-Mills; and here, also, are some twenty-five woollen-mills, besides paper-factories and other industries. The falls of Cohoes are quite close to the Harmony Mills; and a capital view can be obtained of them, either from the bank in rear of one of the mills, or from an island in

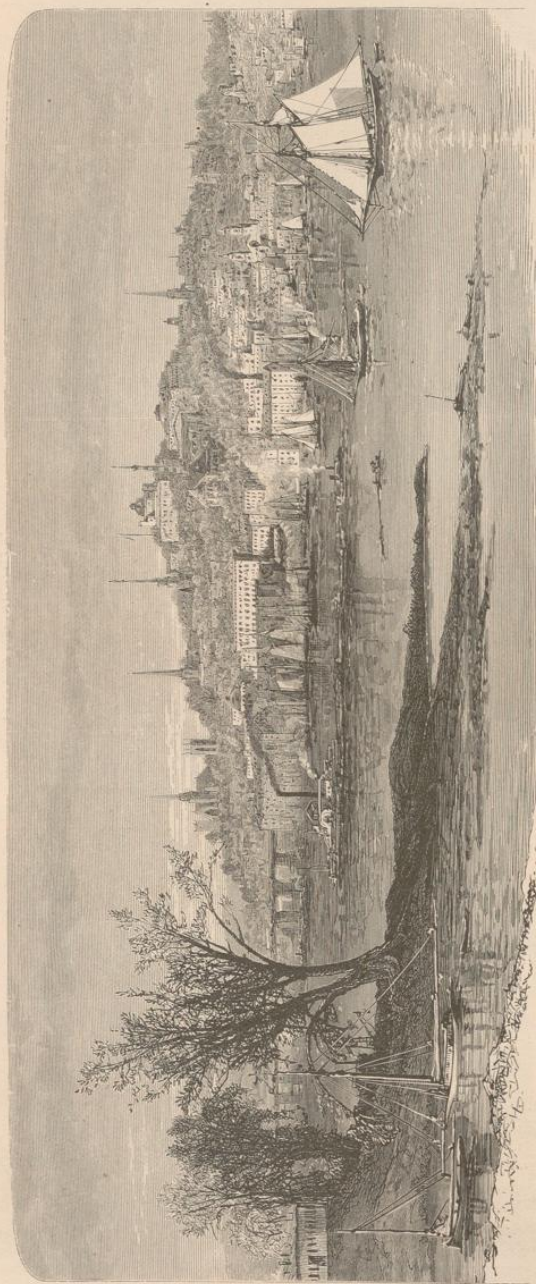
the river, at some distance below. Very much depends upon the season of the year as regards the impression which the falls make upon the mind of a traveller. In the dry season there is but little water, and hence the upper part of the falls appears like a series of grand rapids. In the early summer there is one tremendous descent of water, falling over seventy feet. The banks on either side are high and shaly, crowned generally with dark pines at the summit, and showing, below, a diagonal stratification, as if they had been upheaved.

Below the falls the river is divided by a green island, the favorite resort of picnickers from the neighboring city of Troy. This is a great manufacturing centre, especially of metals, and therefore abounding in tall chimneys vomiting forth black smoke. For this reason the inhabitants, who love to call themselves Trojans, prefer to dwell upon the other side of the river, which is only a mile or so from Cohoes. It is here that the junction of the Mohawk and the Hudson takes place, between East and West Troy. There is here, also, a large island, on which the Troy Bridge finds a support for its central part. The view here of the bustling place is inspiriting, and makes one as eager to be up and doing as the pastoral scenes of the Mohawk Valley made us wish to live and die shepherds. Troy is a city of some fifty thousand inhabitants, situated at the mouth of Poestenkill Creek, six miles above Albany, and a hundred and fifty-one miles above New York—an active, enterprising, and bustling city.

Albany, which now numbers over seventy thousand souls within its borders, is a great railroad centre, and the main point of departure for Western travellers. It is the terminus of nearly all the great steamboat lines of the Hudson; but its chief importance is that of being the capital of the great Empire State. Albany is the oldest settlement in the original thirteen colonies, except Jamestown, Virginia. Henry Hudson, in the yacht *Half-Moon*, moored in September, 1609, at a point which is now in Broadway, Albany. Several Dutch navigators ascended the river to the same place during the next three or four years; and in 1614 the Dutch built the first fort on an island below the present city, which is hence called Castle Island. In 1617 a fort was built at the mouth of the Normanskill; and in 1628 another was erected near the present steamboat-landing in the south part of the city, and named Fort Orange. A quadrangular fort, called Fort Frederick, was afterward built on the high ground, now State Street, between St. Peter's Church and the Geological Hall, with lines of palisades extending down Steuben and Hudson Streets to the river. These fortifications were demolished soon after the Revolution. The place was called, by the Dutch, New Orange, and retained that name until the whole province passed into possession of the English, in 1664, when New Orange was changed to Albany, in honor of the Duke of York and Albany, afterward James II. In 1686 Albany City was incorporated by patent. Peter Schuyler was the first mayor. The Schuyler family possessed the good-will of the Indians to such a degree that, while other settlements were desolated by Indian forays, Albany was never attacked



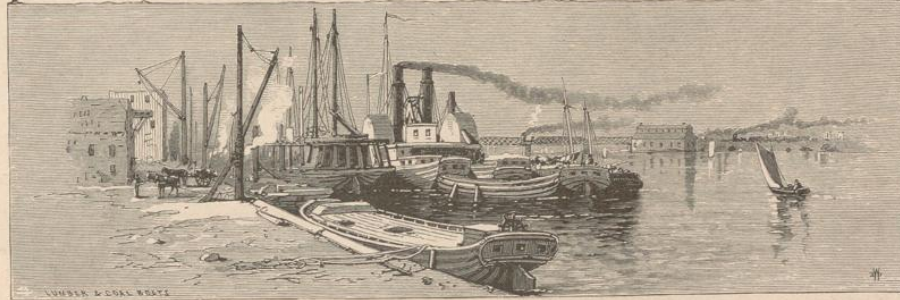
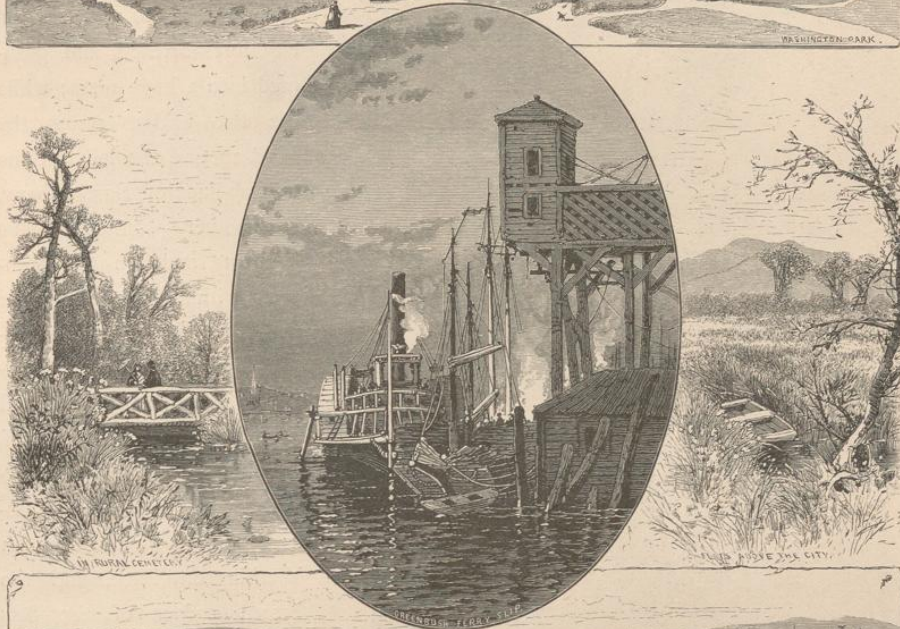
TROY AND VICINITY.



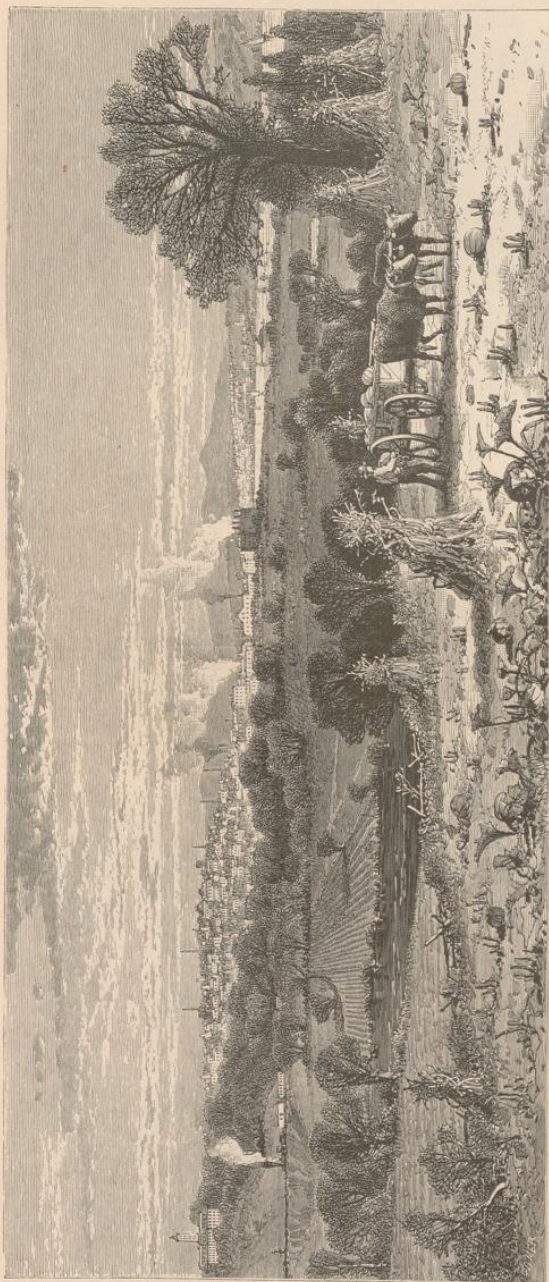
Albany, from East Albany.

by them. Besides its ancient importance as a centre of the Indian trade, Albany afterward became the point where the great military expeditions against Canada were fitted out. It was fortified at an early period; and, although often threatened with invasion, no hostile army ever reached the city. Here assembled the first convention for the union of the colonies. It was held in 1754, Benjamin Franklin being presiding officer.

There are two views of Albany which are specially good; one is from the other side of the river, where the city rises up from the western bank in irregular terraces, the culminating point being crowned with the capitol, embowered amid the foliage of old trees. Soon a more palatial and dazzling building will take the place of the present structure, and will give to the heights of Albany a magnificent apex. Up, and down the river, the city stretches far and wide, with coaling-stations and founderies to the south, and, to the north, long ranges of cattle-wards. Above, the hills of the town rise, covered with fine old houses, and towering churches, and massive legislative halls, and huge



SCENES IN AND AROUND ALBANY.



Albany, from Kenwood.

caravansaries of hotels. The other view shuts out the river almost—at least, all the activity along the western bank—and gives to the eye a wider stretch of vision. Looking from Kenwood, one sees the city foreshortened, and gathered into a huge mass; while the two bridges across the Hudson, and the labyrinthine railway-lines of East Albany, become very prominent. The elevators, and the tall chimneys, with their black smoke above, and jet of red fire below, rising from the iron-works, and all the industrial part upon the extremity of the city, come plainly into view. One can see the masses of foliage of the trees in Washington Park, and the brown sedges of the flats above the town. Far in the distance lie quiet hills, on whose sides the reapers are at work on the browned wheat; while at the base are serried lines of trees that may have stood there in the old days, when the Mohawks ruled the land. From the summits of those hills, looking northward, one can see, with the utmost distinctness, the junction of the broad Hudson with the quiet Mohawk.