

MEN AND MANNERS
IN AMERICA.

CHAPTER I.

JOURNEY—BALTIMORE—WASHINGTON.

THE mail sleigh in which I found myself a passenger, was one of the most wretched vehicles imaginable. The wind—a north-wester—penetrated the curtains of the machine, at a thousand crevices, and, charged with particles of snow so fine as to be almost impalpable, communicated to the faces of the passengers the sensation of suffering under a hurricane of needles. Our route lay through a country flat and uninteresting, which presented no object to

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Thomas Hamilton

Excerpt

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JOURNEY TO BALTIMORE.

arrest the attention of a traveller. We breakfasted at a wretched *cabaret*, and the pretensions of the dinner house were not much greater. The fare, however, though coarse, was abundant; and proceeding on our journey about six o'clock, we reached Lancaster, a town of some note, and famous for its manufacture of rifles. After an hour's halt, we again started in a sort of covered sledge-waggon, and the number of passengers being reduced to myself, my servant, and a Hungarian pedlar, we without ceremony ensconced ourselves among the straw in the bottom of the cart.

This part of the journey was comparatively comfortable. I had passed the night before leaving Philadelphia in writing, and "tired nature's kind restorer" now visited my eyelids very pleasantly. The rumbling of the waggon on the vast wooden bridge which crosses the Susquehanna at length broke my slumber. I rose to gaze on the scenery, which showed finely in the moonlight. There were rocks, and giant trees, and a frozen river, and the thought of Wyoming lent a charm to them all. In a few minutes, however, the Susquehanna was no longer

THE SUSQUEHANNA.

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visible, and resuming my former position, I again became as happy as an oblivion of all earthly cares could make me.

How long I enjoyed this happiness I know not, but it was at length effectually dissipated by a most unpleasant disturbance. The waggon had stopped, and the rascal of a pedlar, in scrambling out of the machine, chose to plant his great hobnailed foot on the pit of my stomach. My first confused impression was that I had been crushed to death by the wheel of the Newcastle waggon, or the great elephant in Exeter Change. But by degrees the truth dawned on my bewildered intellect, and though not, I trust, much given to swearing, I confess I did indulge in a profane objurgation at finding myself thus unceremoniously converted into the footstool of a Magyar pedlar.

Even to my own perceptions at the moment, however, there was something laughable in the whole affair. To be stretched alongside of my servant in straw on the bottom of a cart, and in such pickle to be trampled on by a common hawker of thimbles and pocket-handkerchiefs! But travelling in America

is like misery, for it occasionally brings a man acquainted with strange bedfellows.

I had already found, that in travelling, it was impossible to adhere to those conventional regulations in regard to servants which in England are held to be inviolable. It is the invariable custom in this country for *all* the passengers of a stage-coach to eat at the same table, and the time allowed for meals is so short, that unless John dines with his master, the chances are that he goes without dinner altogether. I had already learned that in the United States no man can put forward pretensions to superiority of any kind, without exciting unpleasant observation. A traveller, to get on comfortably, must take things as he finds them, assume nothing, and get rid as soon as possible of all superfluous refinement. He must often associate with men, whose companionship he cannot but feel carries with it something of degradation. Yet a person of true breeding will rarely be treated with disrespect. He will receive tribute without exacting it, and even in this democratic country, may safely leave it “to men’s opinion, to tell the world he is a gentleman.”

The day's journey terminated at York, where, after all its annoyances and fatigues, I found efficacious restoratives in an excellent supper and comfortable bed. In America, a traveller's sufferings are rarely connected with the table. Go where he may, he always finds abundance of good and wholesome food. To be sure, if the devil send cooks to any part of the world, it is to the United States, for in that country it is a rare thing to meet any dish dressed just as it ought to be. No attention is paid to the preserving of meat, which is generally transferred direct from the shambles to the spit. Then the national propensity for grease is inordinate. It enters largely into the composition of every dish, and constitutes the sole ingredient of many. The very bread is, generally, not only impregnated with some unctuous substance, but when sent up to the breakfast table, is seen to float in a menstruum of oleaginous matter. But with all this, a traveller—*not* a “very particular gentleman”—will have very little cause of complaint. At dinner he will always find ham, turkey, and a joint of some kind; and if with such materials he cannot contrive to make a tolerable meal, it is pretty

evident that he has mistaken his vocation, and should limit his journeys to an annual migration between Pall-Mall and the Palais Royal.

In the morning we left York. Inured, as I had been, on the present journey, to what appeared the most wretched vehicles on earth, I soon discovered in the one in which I now embarked, an illustration of the adage, that in every depth there is a deeper still. Our sleigh was a machine apparently got up for the nonce, and consisted merely of rough boards nailed together in the form of an oblong box, with a drapery and roof of common calico. There were narrow cross boards for seats, on which the passengers—six in number—were compelled to sit bolt upright without support of any kind. This was not comfortable, but the snow was smooth and firm, and we rattled on very fast and very smoothly, and soon after nightfall, I found myself in Baltimore.

Before leaving Philadelphia, I had written to a fellow-passenger to secure apartments for me in the Indian Queen, and on my arrival found every thing prepared. On the whole, I was, perhaps, more com-

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ARRIVAL AT BAL TIMORE.

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fortable in this hotel than in any other during the whole course of my tour. The culinary arrangements of the establishment were excellent, and the assiduity of an old negro waiter in even anticipating my wants, left me only the apprehension, that, by excess of present comfort, I might become less patient under future privations.

I was now in a slave state, and the knowledge of being so, brought with it something of excitation. I had never even seen a slave, and my fancy had framed a sort of abstract impersonation of the whole class,—a being of strong passions and melancholy aspect, crushed by labour, degraded by ignorance, brutalized by the lash; in short, a monster like that of Frankenstein, human in form, but subject only to the influences which affect the animal part of our nature. I found the domestics in the hotel were all slaves, and there was a certain novelty of sensation, half pleasant and half painful, connected with their services. For the first time in my life, did I bless God for the whiteness of my skin.

It was not in the class of domestic servants, however, that I could reasonably expect to discover the

marked peculiarities which my imagination had pictured as the badge of all the tribe. My idea of a slave had always been associated with field labour, a burning sun, and the splendid peculiarities of tropical scenery. In the hotel, I saw only decent-looking waiters and housemaids, observant of all external proprieties of demeanour, discharging their several duties with exactitude, and distinguishable from European servants by nothing but colour.

Of the secrets of the prison-house,—of the modes adopted to enforce obedience in those unhappy creatures, I know nothing from personal observation, and certainly those with whom I conversed made no complaints of their condition. My servant, however, was admitted rather more behind the scenes, and made some rather shocking reports of inflictions by broomsticks and cow-hides, which it had been his fortune to witness. In regard to one atrocity, I remember he was particularly eloquent. The master or mistress of the establishment, for reasons no doubt deemed satisfactory, judged it expedient to lay open the skull of poor Boots with the spit or poker, and in corroboration of the charge,

I can certainly testify having observed that functionary with his dexter organ of secretiveness covered by a plaster. But in gentlemen's families, of course, such disgraceful scenes do not occur, being utterly irreconcilable with that benevolent intelligence, by which the citizens of Baltimore are eminently distinguished.

It is indeed highly probable that Maryland will not long continue to be disgraced by the existence of slavery within its boundaries. The agricultural staples of the State are corn and tobacco, the climate is healthy and temperate, nor is there any possible reason why the system of slave labour might not be instantly abolished. The continuance of the curse—and a curse deeper and more deadly never was inflicted on any community—is entirely gratuitous, the consequence of long habit and deep-rooted prejudice, rather than any beneficial result which it can even be imagined to produce. In the more southern states it is different. The climate is less salubrious, and the cultivation of rice or sugar certainly could not be carried on without slave labour. The immediate interests of the proprietors, therefore, are deci-

dedly opposed to emancipation. Whenever it shall take place, it is certain that vast tracts of country, at present highly productive, will be thrown out of cultivation. But in Maryland, and even in Virginia, such difficulties do not occur. There slave labour would instantly be replaced by that of freemen, to the infinite benefit of the landed proprietors, and the general advancement of morals in the whole community. In the adjoining state of Pennsylvania, the experiment has been already tried, with the most complete success. The introduction of free labour seemed to operate like a charm. A load was instantly removed which had impeded the natural energies of the population, and Pennsylvania has since continued to advance in intelligence and prosperity, with a vigour and rapidity, to which no parallel can be found among her slave-holding competitors.

Baltimore stands on the Patapsco, a small river which discharges its waters into the Chesapeake. Its general aspect very much resembles that of Boston, though the streets display somewhat more of regularity in their architecture. The trade of Baltimore is very considerable, yet there is less appear-