

## DOMESTIC MANNERS

OF THE

## AMERICANS.

## CHAPTER XXI.

*Stonington—Great Falls of the Potomac.*

THE greatest pleasure I had promised myself in visiting Washington was the seeing a very old friend, who had left England many years ago, and married in America; she was now a widow, and, as I believed, settled in Washington. I soon had the mortification of finding that she was not in the city; but ere long I learnt that her residence was not more than ten miles from it. We speedily met, and it was settled that we should pass the summer with her in Maryland, and after a month devoted to Washington, we left it for Stonington.

We arrived there the beginning of May, and the kindness of our reception, the interest we felt in

becoming acquainted with the family of my friend, the extreme beauty of the surrounding country, and the lovely season, altogether, made our stay there a period of great enjoyment.

I wonder not that the first settlers in Virginia, with the bold Captain Smith of chivalrous memory at their head, should have fought so stoutly to dispossess the valiant father of Pocohontas of his fair domain, for I certainly never saw a more tempting territory. Stonington is about two miles from the most romantic point of the Potomac River, and Virginia spreads her wild, but beautiful, and most fertile Paradise, on the opposite shore. The Maryland side partakes of the same character, and perfectly astonished us by the profusion of her wild fruits and flowers.

We had not been long within reach of the great falls of the Potomac before a party was made for us to visit them ; the walk from Stonington to these falls is through scenery that can hardly be called forest, park, or garden ; but which partakes of all three. A little English girl accompanied us, who had but lately left her home ; she exclaimed, “ Oh ! how many English ladies would glory in such a

## OF THE AMERICANS.

3

garden as this !” and in truth they might ; cedars, tulip-trees, planes, shumacs, junipers, and oaks of various kinds, most of them new to us, shaded our path. Wild vines, with their rich expansive leaves, and their sweet blossom, rivalling the mignonette in fragrance, clustered round their branches. Strawberries in full bloom, violets, anemonies, heart’s-ease, and wild pinks, with many other, and still lovelier flowers, which my ignorance forbids me to name, literally covered the ground. The arbor judæ, the dog-wood, in its fullest glory of star-like flowers, azalias, and wild roses, dazzled our eyes whichever way we turned them. It was the most flowery two miles I ever walked.

The sound of the falls is heard at Stonington, and the gradual increase of this sound is one of the agreeable features of this delicious walk. I know not why the rush of waters is so delightful to the ear ; all other monotonous sounds are wearying, and harass the spirits, but I never met any one who did not love to listen to a water-fall. A rapid stream, called the “ Branch Creek,” was to be crossed ere we reached the spot where the falls are first visible. This rumbling, turbid, angry

little rivulet, flows through evergreens and flowering underwood, and is crossed *à plusieurs reprises*, by logs thrown from rock to rock. The thundering noise of the still unseen falls suggests an idea of danger while crossing these rude bridges, which hardly belongs to them ; having reached the other side of the creek, we continued under the shelter of the evergreens for another quarter of a mile, and then emerged upon a sight that drew a shout of wonder and delight from us all. The rocky depths of an enormous river were opened before our eyes, and so huge are the black crags that inclose it, that the thundering torrents of water rushing through, over, and among the rocks of this awful chasm, appear lost and swallowed up in it.

The river, or rather the bed of it, is here of great width, and most frightful depth, lined on all sides with huge masses of black rock of every imaginable form. The flood that roars through them is seen only at intervals; here in a full heavy sheet of green transparent water, falling straight and unbroken; there dashing along a narrow channel, with a violence that makes one dizzy to see and hear. In one place an un-

## OF THE AMERICANS.

5

fathomed pool shews a mirror of inky blackness, and as still as night; in another the tortured twisted cataract tumbles headlong in a dozen different torrents, half hid by the cloud of spray they send high into the air. Despite this uproar, the slenderest, loveliest shrubs, peep forth from among these hideous rocks, like children smiling in the midst of danger. As we stood looking at this tremendous scene, one of our friends made us remark, that the poison alder, and the poison vine, threw their graceful, but perfidious branches, over every rock, and assured us also that innumerable tribes of snakes found their dark dwellings among them.

To call this scene beautiful would be a strange abuse of terms, for it is altogether composed of sights and sounds of terror. The falls of the Potomac are awfully sublime; the dark deep gulf which yawns before you, the foaming, roaring cataract, the eddying whirlpool, and the giddy precipice, all seem to threaten life, and to appal the senses. Yet it was a great delight to sit upon a high and jutting crag, and look and listen.

I heard with pleasure that it was to the Vir-

ginian side of the Potomac that the “felicity hunters” of Washington resorted to see this fearful wonder, for I never saw a spot where I should less have liked the annoying “how d’ye,” of a casual rencontre. One could not even give or receive the exciting “is it not charming,” which Rousseau talks of, for if it were uttered, it could not be heard, or, if heard, would fall most earthly dull on the spirit, when rapt by the magic of such a scene. A look, or the silent pressure of the arm, is all the interchange of feeling that such a scene allows, and in the midst of my terror and my pleasure, I wished for the arm and the eye of some few from the other side of the Atlantic.

The return from such a scene is more soberly silent than the approach to it; but the cool and quiet hour, the mellowed tints of some gay blossoms, and the closed bells of others, the drowsy hum of the insects that survive the day, and the moist freshness that forbids the foot to weary in its homeward path, have all enjoyment in them, and seem to harmonize with the half wearied, half excited state of spirits, that such an excursion is sure to produce: and then the entering the cool

## OF THE AMERICANS.

7

and moonlit portico, the well-iced sangarce, or still more refreshing coffee, that awaits you, is all delightful; and if to this be added the happiness of an easy sofa, and a friend like my charming Mrs. S——, to sooth you with an hour of Mozart, the most fastidious European might allow that such a day was worth waking for.

## CHAPTER XXII.

*Small Landed Proprietors—Slavery.*

I NOW, for the first time since I crossed the mountains, found myself sufficiently at leisure to look deliberately round, and mark the different aspects of men and things in a region which, though bearing the same name, and calling itself the same land, was, in many respects, as different from the one I had left, as Amsterdam from St. Petersburg. There every man was straining, and struggling, and striving for himself (heaven knows!) Here every white man was waited upon, more or less, by a slave. There, the newly-cleared lands, rich with the vegetable manure accumulated for ages, demanded the slightest labour to return the richest produce; where the plough entered, crops the most abundant followed; but where it came not, no spot of native verdure, no native fruits, no



## OF THE AMERICANS.

9

native flowers cheered the eye; all was close, dark, stifling forest. Here the soil had long ago yielded its first fruits; much that had been cleared and cultivated for tobacco (the most exhausting of crops) by the English, required careful and laborious husbandry to produce any return; and much was left as sheep-walks. It was in these spots that the natural bounty of the soil and climate was displayed by the innumerable wild fruits and flowers which made every dingle and bushy dell seem a garden.

On entering the cottages I found also a great difference in the manner of living. Here, indeed, there were few cottages without a slave, but there were fewer still that had their beef-steak and onions for breakfast, dinner, and supper. The herrings of the bountiful Potomac supply their place. These are excellent "relish," as they call it, when salted, and, if I mistake not, are sold at a dollar and a half per thousand. Whiskey, however, flows every where at the same fatally cheap rate of twenty cents (about one shilling) the gallon, and its hideous effects are visible on the countenance of every man you meet.

The class of people the most completely unlike any existing in England, are those who, farming their own freehold estates, and often possessing several slaves, yet live with as few of the refinements, and I think I may say, with as few of the comforts of life, as the very poorest English peasant. When in Maryland, I went into the houses of several of these small proprietors, and remained long enough, and looked and listened sufficiently, to obtain a tolerably correct idea of their manner of living.

One of these families consisted of a young man, his wife, two children, a female slave, and two young lads, slaves also. The farm belonged to the wife, and, I was told, consisted of about three hundred acres of indifferent land, but all cleared. The house was built of wood, and looked as if the three slaves might have overturned it, had they pushed hard against the gable end. It contained one room, of about twelve feet square, and another adjoining it, hardly larger than a closet; this second chamber was the lodging-room of the white part of the family. Above these rooms was a loft, without windows, where I was told the “staying