

DOMESTIC MANNERS OF THE AMERICANS

by

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Edited by Duncan S. Campbell

PREFACE.

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In offering to the public these volumes on America, their author would rather be considered as endeavoring to excite fresh attention on a very important subject, than as pretending to furnish complete information upon it.

Although much has already been written on the great experiment, as it has been called, now making in government, on the other side of the Atlantic, there appears to be still room for many interesting details on the influence which the political system of the country has produced on the principles, tastes, and manners, of its domestic life,

The author of the following pages has endeavored, in some degree, to supply this deficiency, by carefully recording the observations she had an opportunity of making during a residence of three years and six months in different parts of the United States.

She leaves to abler pens the more ambitious task of commenting on the democratic form of the American government; while, by describing, faithfully, the daily aspect of ordinary life, she has endeavored to show how greatly the advantage is on the side of those who are governed by the few, instead of the many. The chief object she has had in view is to encourage her countrymen to hold fast by a constitution that ensures all the blessings which flow from established habits and solid principles. If they forego these, they will incur the fearful risk of breaking up their repose by introducing the jarring tumult and universal degradation which invariably follow the wild scheme of placing all the power of the State in the hands of the populace.

The United States of America contain a considerable variety of interesting objects in most branches of natural science, besides much that is new, a good deal that is beautiful, and some things that are wonderful. Nevertheless, as it is the moral and religious condition of the people which, beyond everything else, demands the attention of the philosophical inquirer, the author would consider

her work as completely successful, could she but awaken a more general interest on this subject.

HARROW, March 1832.

CHAPTER I.

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Entrance of the Mississippi — Balize.

On the 4th of November 1827, I sailed from London, accompanied by my son and two daughters; and after a favorable, though somewhat tedious voyage, arrived on Christmas-day at the mouth of the Mississippi.

The first indication of our approach to land was the appearance of this mighty river pouring forth its muddy mass of waters, and mingling with the deep blue of the Mexican Gulf. The shores of this river are so utterly flat, that no object upon them is perceptible at sea, and we gazed with pleasure on the muddy ocean that met us, for it told us we were arrived, and seven weeks of sailing had wearied us; yet it was not without a feeling like regret that we passed from the bright blue waves, whose varying aspect had so long furnished our chief amusement, into the murky stream which now received us.

Large flights of pelicans were seen standing upon the long masses of mud which rose above the surface of the waters, and a pilot came to guide us over the bar, long before any other indication of land was visible.

I never beheld a scene so utterly desolate as this entrance of the Mississippi. Had Dante seen it, he might have drawn images of another Bolgia¹ from its horrors. One only object rears itself above the eddying waters; this is the mast of a vessel long since wrecked in attempting to cross the bar, and it still stands, a dismal witness of the destruction that has been, and a boding prophet of that which is to come.

By degrees bulrushes of enormous growth become visible, and a few more miles of mud brought us within sight of a cluster of huts called the Balize,² by far the most miserable station that I ever saw made the dwelling of man, but I was told that many families of pilots and fishermen lived there.

¹ Bolgias— (ref. Dante's *Inferno*) the horrific ditches that encircle the mouth of Hell

² Balize — 18th century French settlement

For several miles above its mouth, the Mississippi presents no objects more interesting than mud banks, monstrous bulrushes, and now and then a huge crocodile luxuriating in the slime. Another circumstance that gives to this dreary scene an aspect of desolation, is the incessant appearance of vast quantities of drift wood, which is ever finding its way to the different mouths of the Mississippi. Trees of enormous length, sometimes still bearing their branches, and still oftener their upturned roots entire, the victims of the frequent hurricane, come floating down the stream. Sometimes several of these, entangled together, collect among their boughs a quantity of floating rubbish, that gives the mass the appearance of a moving island, bearing a forest, with its roots mocking the heavens; while the dishonored branches lash the tide in idle vengeance: this, as it approaches the vessel, and glides swiftly past, looks like the fragment of a world in ruins.

As we advanced, however, we were cheered, notwithstanding the season, by the bright tints of southern vegetation. The banks continue invariably flat, but a succession of planters' villas, sometimes merely a residence, and sometimes surrounded by their sugar grounds and negro huts, varied the scene. At no one point was there an inch of what painters call a second distance; and for the length of one hundred and twenty miles, from the Balize to New Orleans, and one hundred miles above the town, the land is defended from the encroachments of the river by a high embankment which is called the *levée*; without which the dwellings would speedily disappear, as the river is evidently higher than the banks would be without it. When we arrived, there had been constant rains and of long continuance, and this appearance was, therefore, unusually striking, giving to "this great natural feature" the most unnatural appearance imaginable; and making evident, not only that man had been busy there, but that even the mightiest works of nature might be made to bear his impress; it recalled, literally, Swift's mock heroic,

"Nature must give way to art;"

yet she was looking so mighty, and so unsubdued all the time, that I could not help fancying she would someday take the matter into her own hands again, and if so, farewell to New Orleans.

It is easy to imagine the total want of beauty in such a landscape; but yet the form and hue of the trees and plants, so new to us, added to the long privation we had endured of all sights and sounds of land, made even these swampy shores seem beautiful. We were, however, impatient to touch as well as see the land; but the navigation from the Balize to New Orleans is difficult and tedious, and the two days that it occupied appeared longer than any we had passed on board.

In truth, to those who have pleasure in contemplating the phenomena of nature, a sea voyage may endure many weeks without wearying. Perhaps some may think that the first glance of ocean and of sky show all they have to offer; nay, even that that first glance may suggest more of dreariness than sublimity; but to me their variety appeared endless, and their beauty unfailling. The attempt to describe scenery, even where the objects are prominent and tangible, is very rarely successful; but where the effect is so subtle and so varying, it must be vain. The impression, nevertheless, is perhaps deeper than any other; I think it possible I may forget the sensations with which I watched the long course of the gigantic Mississippi; the Ohio and the Potomac may mingle and be confounded with other streams in my memory, I may even recall with difficulty the blue outline of the Alleghany mountains, but never, while I remember anything, can I forget the first and last hour of light on the Atlantic.

The ocean, however, and all its indescribable charm, no longer surrounded us; we began to feel that our walk on the quarter-deck was very like the exercise of an ass in the mill; that our books had lost half their pages, and that the other half were known by rote; that our beef was very salt, and our biscuits very hard; in short, that having studied the good ship, *Edward*, from stem to stern, till we knew the name of every sail, and the use of every pulley, we had had enough of her, and as we laid down, head to head, in our tiny beds for the last time, I exclaimed with no small pleasure.

“To-morrow to fresh fields and pastures new.”

CHAPTER II.

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*New Orleans—Society—Creoles and Quadroons—
Voyage up the Mississippi.*

On first touching the soil of a new land, of a new continent, of a new world, it is impossible not to feel considerable excitement and deep interest in almost every object that meets us. New Orleans presents very little that can gratify the eye of taste, but nevertheless there is much of novelty and interest for a newly-arrived European. The large proportion of blacks seen in the streets, all labor being performed by them; the grace and beauty of the elegant Quadroons, the occasional groups of wild and savage looking Indians, the unwonted specter of the vegetation, the huge and turbid river, with its low and slimy shore, all help to afford that species of amusement which proceeds from looking at what we never saw before.

The town has much the appearance of a French *ville*³ de Province,⁴ and is, in fact, an old French colony taken from Spain by France. The names of the streets are French, and the language about equally French and English. The market is handsome and well supplied, all produce being conveyed by the river. We were much pleased by the chant with which the Negro boatmen regulate and beguile their labor on the river; it consists but of very few notes, but they are sweetly harmonious, and the Negro voice is almost always rich and powerful.

By far the most agreeable hours I passed at New Orleans were those in which I explored with my children the forest near the town. It was our first walk in "the eternal forests of the western world," and we felt rather sublime and poetical. The trees, generally speaking, are much too close to be either large or well grown; and, moreover, their growth is often stunted by a parasitical plant, for which I could learn no other name than "Spanish moss;" it hangs gracefully from the boughs, converting the outline of all the trees it hangs upon into that of weeping willows. The chief beauty of the forest in this region is from the

³ *ville* — (French) town

⁴ Province — (perhaps) French region named Provence

luxuriant under-growth of palmettos, which is decidedly the loveliest colored and most graceful plant I know. The pawpaw, too, is a splendid shrub, and in great abundance. We here, for the first time, saw the wild vine, which we afterwards found growing so profusely in every part of America, as naturally to suggest the idea that the natives ought to add wine to the numerous productions of their plenty-teeming soil. The strong pendant festoons made safe and commodious swings, which some of our party enjoyed, despite the sublime temperament above-mentioned.

Notwithstanding it was mid-winter when we were at New Orleans, the heat was much more than agreeable, and the attacks of the mosquitos incessant, and most tormenting; yet I suspect that for a short time, we would rather have endured it, than not have seen oranges, green peas, and red pepper, growing in the open air at Christmas. In one of our rambles we ventured to enter a garden, whose bright orange hedge attracted our attention; here we saw green peas fit for the table, and a fine crop of red pepper ripening in the sun. A young Negress was employed on the steps of the house; that she was a slave made her an object of interest to us. She was the first slave we had ever spoken to, and I believe we all felt that we could hardly address her with sufficient gentleness. She little dreamed, poor girl, what deep sympathy she excited; she answered us civilly and gaily, and seemed amused at our fancying there was something unusual in red pepper pods; she gave us several of them, and I felt fearful lest a hard mistress might blame her for it. How very childish does ignorance make us! and how very ignorant we are upon almost every subject, where hear-say evidence is all we can get!

I left England with feelings so strongly opposed to slavery, that it was not without pain I witnessed its effects around me. At the sight of every Negro man, woman, and child that passed, my fancy wove some little romance of misery, as belonging to each of them; since I have known more on the subject, and become better acquainted with their real situation in America, I have often smiled at recalling what I then felt.

The first symptom of American equality that I perceived, was my being introduced in form to a milliner; it was not at a boarding-house, under the indistinct outline of "Miss C*****," nor in the street, through the veil of a

fashionable toilette, but in the very penetralia of her temple, standing behind her counter, giving laws to ribbon and to wire, and ushering caps and bonnets into existence. She was an English woman, and I was told that she possessed great intellectual endowments, and much information; I really believe this was true. Her manner was easy and graceful, with a good deal of French *tournure*;⁵ and the gentleness with which her fine eyes and sweet voice directed the movements of a young female slave, was really touching: the way, too, in which she blended her French talk of modes with her customers, and her English talk of metaphysics with her friends, had a pretty air of indifference in it, that gave her a superiority with both.

I found with her the daughter of a judge, eminent, it was said, both for legal and literary ability; and I heard from many quarters, after I had left New Orleans, that the society of this lady was highly valued by all persons of talent. Yet were I, traveler-like, to stop here, and set it down as a national peculiarity, or republican custom, that milliners took the lead in the best society, I should greatly falsify facts. I do not remember the same thing happening to me again; and this is one instance, among a thousand, of the impression every circumstance makes on entering a new country, and of the propensity, so irresistible, to class all things, however accidental, as national and peculiar. On the other hand, however, it is certain that if similar anomalies are infrequent in America, they are nearly impossible elsewhere.

In the shop of Miss C***** I was introduced to Mr. McClure,⁶ a venerable personage, of gentlemanlike appearance, who, in the course of five minutes, propounded as many axioms, as “Ignorance is the only devil;” “Man makes his own existence;” and the like. He was of the New-Harmony⁷ school, or rather the New-Harmony school was of him. He was a man of good fortune, (a Scotchman,) I believe, who, after living a tolerably gay life, had “conceived high thoughts,

⁵ *tournure* — (French) demeanor

⁶ William McClure (1763-1840) — Scottish geologist; naturalized American; president of the American Academy of Natural Sciences from 1817 to 1840; from 1824 to 1828 active in the utopian community of New Harmony, Indiana, led by the social reformer Robert Owen (1771-1858). Resided in Mexico from 1828 until his death.

⁷ New Harmony — see footnote 6 (above)

such as Lycurgus⁸ loved, who bade flog the little Spartans,” and determined to benefit the species, and immortalize himself, by founding a philosophical school at New-Harmony. There was something in the hollow square legislations of Mr. Owen⁹ that struck him as admirable; and he seems, as far as I can understand, to have intended aiding his views, by a sort of incipient hollow square drilling; teaching the young ideas of all he could catch to shoot into parallelogramic form and order. This venerable philosopher, like all of his school that I ever heard of, loved better to originate lofty imaginings of faultless systems than to watch their application to practice. With much liberality he purchased and conveyed to the wilderness a very noble collection of books and scientific instruments; but not finding among men one whose views were liberal and enlarged as his own, he selected a woman to put into action the machine he had organized. As his acquaintance with this lady had been of long standing, and, as it was said, very intimate, he felt sure that no violation of his rules would have place under her sway; they would act together as one being: he was to perform the functions of the soul, and will everything; she, those of the body, and perform everything.

The principal feature of the scheme was, that (the first liberal outfit of the institution having been furnished by Mr. McClure,) the expense of keeping it up should be defrayed by the profits arising from the labors of the pupils, male and female, which were to be performed at stated intervals of each day, in regular rotation with learned study and scientific research. But unfortunately the soul of the system found the climate of Indiana uncongenial to its peculiar formation, and, therefore, took its flight to Mexico, leaving the body to perform the operations of both, in whatever manner it liked best; and the body, being a French body, found no difficulty in setting actively to work without troubling the soul about it; and soon becoming conscious that the more simple was a machine, the more perfect were its operations, she threw out all that related to the intellectual part of the business, (which, to do poor soul justice, it had laid great stress upon,) and stirred herself as effectually as ever body did, to draw wealth from the thews¹⁰ and sinews of the youths they had collected. When last I heard of this philosophical establishment, she, and a nephew-son, were said

⁸ Lycurgus (fl. c. 820 BC) —said to be an ancient Greek reformer of Spartan society

⁹ Robert Owen — see footnote 6 (above)

¹⁰ thews — muscles

to be reaping a golden harvest, as many of the lads had been sent from a distance by indigent parents, for gratuitous education, and possessed no means of leaving it.

Our stay in New Orleans was not long enough to permit our entering into society, but I was told that it contained two distinct sets of people, both celebrated, in their way, for their social meetings and elegant entertainments. The first of these is composed of Creole families, who are chiefly planters and merchants, with their wives and daughters; these meet together, eat together, and are very grand and aristocratic; each of their balls is a little Almack's,¹¹ and every portly dame of the set is as exclusive in her principles as a lady patroness. The other set consists of the excluded but amiable Quadroons,¹² and such of the gentlemen of the former class as can by any means escape from the high places, where pure Creole blood swells the veins at the bare mention of any being tainted in the remotest degree with the Negro stain.

Of all the prejudices I have ever witnessed, this appears to me the most violent, and the most inveterate. Quadroon girls, the acknowledged daughters of wealthy American or Creole fathers, educated with all of style and accomplishments which money can procure at New Orleans, and with all the decorum that care and affection can give; exquisitely beautiful, graceful, gentle, and amiable, these are not admitted, nay, are not on any terms admissible, into the society of the Creole families of Louisiana. They cannot marry; that is to say, no ceremony can render a union with them legal or binding; yet such is the powerful effect of their very peculiar grace, beauty, and sweetness of manner, that unfortunately they perpetually become the objects of choice and affection. If the Creole ladies have privilege to exercise the awful power of repulsion, the gentle Quadroon has the sweet but dangerous vengeance of possessing that of attraction. The unions formed with this unfortunate race are said to be often lasting and happy, as far as any unions can be so, to which a certain degree of disgrace is attached.

¹¹ Almack's — Fashionable London social club founded 1765

¹² quadroon — person one-fourth part black by descent

There is a French and an English theatre in the town; but we were too fresh from Europe to care much for either; or, indeed, for any other of the town delights of the city, and we soon became eager to commence our voyage up the Mississippi.

Miss Wright,¹³ then less known (though the author of more than one clever volume) than she has since become, was the companion of our voyage from Europe; and it was my purpose to have passed some months with her and her sister at the estate she had purchased in Tennessee.¹⁴ This lady, since become so celebrated as the advocate of opinions that make millions shudder, and some half-score admire, was, at the time of my leaving England with her, dedicated to a pursuit widely different from her subsequent occupations. Instead of becoming a public orator in every town throughout America, she was about, as she said, to seclude herself for life in the deepest forests of the western world, that her fortune, her time, and her talents, might be exclusively devoted to aid the cause of the suffering Africans. Her first object was to show that nature had made no difference between blacks and whites, excepting in complexion; and this she expected to prove, by giving an education perfectly equal to a class of black and white children. Could this fact be once fully established, she conceived that the Negro cause would stand on firmer ground than it had yet done, and the degraded rank which they have ever held amongst civilized nations would be proved to be a gross injustice. This question of the mental equality, or inequality, between us and the Negro race, is one of great interest, and has certainly never yet been fairly tried; and I expected for my children and myself both pleasure and information from visiting her establishment, and watching the success of her experiment.

The innumerable steamboats, which are the stage coaches and fly wagons of this land of lakes and rivers, are totally unlike any I had seen in Europe, and greatly superior to them. The fabrics which I think they most resemble in appearance, are the floating baths (les bains Vigier)¹⁵ at Paris. The annexed

¹³ Frances ("Fanny") Wright (1795-1852) — Scottish-born; 1825 naturalized American; prominent abolitionist and social reformer

¹⁴ Property known as Nashoba

¹⁵ Vigier Baths — Two thermal baths installed on ships moored along the River Seine in late 18th - early 19th C.

drawing will give a correct idea of their form. The room, to which the double line of windows belongs, is a very handsome apartment; before each window a neat little cot is arranged in such a manner as to give its drapery the air of a window curtain. This room is called the gentlemen's cabin, and their exclusive right to it is somewhat uncourteously insisted upon. The breakfast, dinner, and supper, are laid in this apartment, and the lady passengers are permitted to take their meals there.

On the first of January, 1828, we embarked on board the *Belvidere*, a large and handsome boat; though not the largest or handsomest of the many which displayed themselves along the wharfs; but she was going to stop at Memphis, the point of the river nearest to Miss Wright's residence, and she was the first that departed after we had got through the custom-house, and finished our sight-seeing. We found the room, destined for the use of the ladies, dismal enough, as its only windows were below the stern gallery; hut both this and the gentlemen's cabin were handsomely fitted up, and the latter well carpeted; but oh! that carpet! I will not, I may not describe its condition; indeed, it requires the pen of a Swift¹⁶ to do it justice. Let no one who wishes to receive agreeable impressions of American manners, commence their travels in a Mississippi steamboat; for myself, it is with all sincerity I declare, that I would infinitely prefer sharing the apartment of a party of well-conditioned pigs to the being confined to its cabin.

I hardly know any annoyance so deeply repugnant to English feelings, as the incessant, remorseless spitting of Americans. I feel that I owe my readers an apology for the repeated use of this, and several other odious words; but I cannot avoid them, without suffering the fidelity of description to escape me. It is possible that in this phrase, "Americans," I may be too general. The United States form a continent of almost distinct nations, and I must now, and always, be understood to speak only of that portion of them which I have seen. In conversing with Americans, I have constantly found that if I alluded to anything which they thought I considered as uncouth, they would assure me it was local, and not national; the accidental peculiarity of a very small part, and by no means a specimen of the whole. "That is because you know so little of America,"

¹⁶ Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) — Anglo-Irish satirist

is a phrase I have listened to a thousand times, and in nearly as many different places. It may be so—and having made this concession, I protest against the charge of injustice in relating what I have seen.

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CHAPTER III.

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*Company on board the Steamboat—Scenery of the Mississippi—Crocodiles—
Arrival at Memphis—Nashoba.*

The weather was warm and bright, and we found the guard of the boat, as they call the gallery that runs round the cabins, a very agreeable station; here we all sat as long as light lasted, and sometimes, wrapped in our shawls, we enjoyed the clear bright beauty of American moonlight long after every passenger but ourselves had retired. We had a full complement of passengers on board. The deck, as is usual, was occupied by the Kentucky flat-boat men, returning from New Orleans, after having disposed of the boat and cargo which they had conveyed thither, with no other labor than that of steering her, the current bringing her down at the rate of four miles an hour. We had about two hundred of these men on board, but the part of the vessel occupied by them is so distinct from the cabins, that we never saw them, except when we stopped to take in wood; and then they ran, or rather sprung and vaulted over each other's heads to the shore, whence they all assisted in carrying wood to supply the steam engine; the performance of this duty being a stipulated part of the payment of their passage.

From the account given by a man servant we had on board, who shared their quarters, they are a most disorderly set of persons, constantly gambling and wrangling, very seldom sober, and never suffering a night to pass without giving practical proof of the respect in which they hold the doctrines of equality and community of property. The clerk of the vessel was kind enough to take our man under his protection, and assigned him a berth in his own little nook; but as this was not inaccessible, he told him by no means to detach his watch or money from his person during the night. Whatever their moral characteristics may be, these Kentuckians are a very noble-looking race of men; their average height considerably exceeds that of Europeans, and their countenances, excepting when disfigured by red hair, which is not infrequent, extremely handsome.

The gentlemen in the cabin (we had no ladies) would certainly, neither from their language, manners, nor appearance, have received that designation in Europe; but we soon found their claim to it rested on more substantial ground, for we heard them nearly all addressed by the titles of general, colonel, and major. On mentioning these military dignities to an English friend some time afterwards, he told me that he too had made the voyage with the same description of company, but remarking that there was not a single captain among them; he made the observation to a fellow-passenger and asked how he accounted for it. "Oh, sir, the captains are all on deck," was the reply.

Our honors, however, were not all military, for we had a judge among us, I know it is equally easy and invidious to ridicule the peculiarities of appearance and manner in people of a different nation from ourselves; we may, too, at the same moment be undergoing the same ordeal, in their estimation; and, moreover, I am by no means disposed to consider whatever is new to me as therefore objectionable; but, nevertheless, it was impossible not to feel repugnance to many of the novelties that now surrounded me.

The total want of all the usual courtesies of the table, the voracious rapidity with which the viands were seized and devoured, the strange uncouth phrases and pronounciation; the loathsome spitting, from the contamination of which it was absolutely impossible to protect our dresses; the frightful manner of feeding with their knives, till the whole blade seemed to enter into the mouth; and the still more frightful manner of cleaning the teeth afterwards with a pocket knife, soon forced us to feel that we were not surrounded by the generals, colonels, and majors of the old world; and that the dinner hour was to be anything rather than an hour of enjoyment.

The little conversation that went forward while we remained in the room was entirely political, and the respective claims of Adams and Jackson to the presidency were argued with more oaths and more vehemence than it had ever been my lot to hear. Once a colonel appeared on the verge of assaulting a major, when a huge seven-foot Kentuckian gentleman horse-dealer asked of the heavens to confound them both, and bade them sit still and be d——d. We too thought we should share this sentence; at least, sitting still in the cabin seemed

very nearly to include the rest of it, and we never tarried there a moment longer than was absolutely necessary to eat.

The unbroken flatness of the banks of the Mississippi continued unvaried for many miles above New Orleans; but the graceful and luxuriant palmetto, the dark and noble ilex, and the bright orange, were everywhere to be seen, and it was many days before we were weary of looking at them. We occasionally used the opportunity of the boat's stopping to take in wood, for a ten minutes' visit to the shore; we in this manner explored a field of sugar-canes, and loaded ourselves with as much of the sweet spoil as we could carry. Many of the passengers seemed fond of the luscious juice that is easily expressed from the canes, but it was too sweet for my palate. We also visited, in the same rapid manner, a cotton plantation. A handsome spacious building was pointed out to us as a convent, where a considerable number of young ladies were educated by the nuns.

At one or two points the wearisome level line of forest is relieved by *bluffs*, as they call the short intervals of high ground. The town of Natchez is beautifully situated on one of these high spots; the climate here, in the warm season, is as fatal as that of New Orleans; were it not for this, Natchez would have great attractions to new settlers. The beautiful contrast that its bright green hill forms with the dismal line of black forest that stretches on every side, the abundant growth of the pawpaw, palmetto, and orange, the copious variety of sweet-scented flowers that flourish there, all make it appear like an oasis in the desert. Natchez is the furthest point to the north at which oranges ripen in the open air, or endure the winter without shelter. With the exception of this sweet spot, I thought all the little towns and villages we passed wretched-looking in the extreme. As the distance from New Orleans increased, the air of wealth and comfort exhibited in its immediate neighborhood disappeared, and but for one or two clusters of wooden houses, calling themselves towns, and borrowing some pompous name, generally from Greece or Rome, we might have thought ourselves the first of the human race who had ever penetrated into this territory of bears and alligators. But still, from time to time, appeared the hut of the wood-cutter, who supplies the steamboats with fuel, at the risk, or rather with the assurance of early death, in exchange for dollars and whiskey. These sad dwellings are nearly all of them inundated during the winter, and the best

of them are constructed on piles, which permit the water to reach its highest level without drowning the wretched inhabitants. These unhappy beings are invariably the victims of ague, which they meet recklessly, sustained by the incessant use of ardent spirits. The squalid look of the miserable wives and children of these men was dreadful; and often as the spectacle was renewed, I could never look at it with indifference. Their complexion is of a blueish white, that suggests the idea of dropsy; this is invariable, and the poor little ones wear exactly the same ghastly hue. A miserable cow and a few pigs, standing knee-deep in water, distinguish the more prosperous of these dwellings; and on the whole I should say, that I never witnessed human nature reduced so low as it appeared in the wood-cutters' huts on the unwholesome banks of the Mississippi.

It is said that, at some points of this dismal river, crocodiles are so abundant as to add the terror of their attacks to the other sufferings of a dwelling there. We were told a story of a squatter, who having located himself close to the river's edge, proceeded to build his cabin. This operation is soon performed, for social feeling and the love of whiskey bring all the scanty neighborhood round a newcomer, to aid him in cutting down trees, and in rolling up the logs, till the mansion is complete. This was done; the wife and five young children were put in possession of their new home, and slept soundly after a long march. Towards day-break the husband and father was awakened by a faint cry, and looking up, beheld relics of three of his children scattered over the floor, and an enormous crocodile, with several young ones around her, occupied in devouring the remnants of their horrid meal. He looked round for a weapon, but finding none, and aware that unarmed he could do nothing, he raised himself gently on his bed, and contrived to crawl from thence through a window, hoping that his wife, whom he left sleeping, might with the remaining children, rest undiscovered till his return. He flew to his nearest neighbor and besought his aid; in less than half an hour two men returned with him, all three well-armed: but alas! they were too late! the wife and her two babes lay mangled on their bloody bed. The gorged reptiles fell an easy prey to their assailants, who, upon examining the place, found the hut had been constructed close to the mouth of a large hole, almost a cavern, where the monster had hatched her hateful brood.

Among other sights of desolation which mark this region, condemned of nature, the lurid glare of a burning forest was almost constantly visible after sunset; and when the wind so willed, the smoke arising from it floated in heavy vapor over our heads. Not all the novelty of the scene, not all its vastness, could prevent its heavy horror wearying the spirits. Perhaps the dinners and suppers I have described may help to account for this; but certain it is, that when we had wondered for a week at the ceaseless continuity of forest; had first admired, and then wearied of the festooned drapery of Spanish moss; when we had learned to distinguish the different masses of timber that passed us, or that we passed, as a "snag," a "log," or a "sawyer;" when we had finally made up our minds that the gentlemen of the Kentucky and Ohio military establishments were not of the same genus as those of the Tuileries and St. James's,¹⁷ we began to wish that we could sleep more hours away. As we advanced to the northward, we were no longer cheered by the beautiful border of palmettos; and even the amusement of occasionally spying out a sleeping crocodile was over.

Just in this state, when we would have fain believed that every mile we went carried us two towards Memphis, a sudden and violent shock startled us frightfully.

"It is a sawyer!" said one.

"It is a snag!" cried another.

"We are aground!" exclaimed the captain.

"Aground? Good heavens! and how long shall we stay here?"

"The Lord in his providence can only tell, but long enough to tire my patience, I expect."

And the poor English ladies, how fared they the while?

¹⁷ French and British respectively

Two breakfasts, two dinners, and a supper did they eat, with the Ohio and Kentucky gentlemen, before they moved an inch. Several steamboats passed while we were thus enthralled; but some were not strong enough to attempt drawing us off, and some attempted it, but were not strong enough to succeed; at length a vast and mighty "thing of life" approached, threw out grappling irons; and in three minutes the business was done; again we saw the trees and mud slide swiftly past us; and a hearty shout from every passenger on deck declared their joy.

At length we had the pleasure of being told that we had arrived at Memphis; but this pleasure was considerably abated by the hour of our arrival, which was midnight, and by the rain, which was falling in torrents.

Memphis stands on a high bluff, and at the time of our arrival was nearly inaccessible. The heavy rain which had been falling for many hours would have made any steep ascent difficult, but unfortunately a new road had been recently marked, out, which beguiled us into its almost bottomless mud, from the firmer footing of the unbroken cliff. Shoes and gloves were lost in the mire, for we were glad to avail ourselves of all our limbs, and we reached the grand hotel in a most deplorable state.

Miss Wright was well known there, and as soon as her arrival was announced, everyone seemed on the alert to receive her, and we soon found ourselves in possession of the best rooms in the hotel. The house was new, and in what appeared to me a very comfortless condition, but I was then new to Western America, and unaccustomed to their mode of "getting along," as they term it. This phrase is eternally in use among them, and seems to mean, existing with as few of the comforts of life as possible.

We slept soundly, however, and rose in the hope of soon changing our mortar-smelling quarters for Miss Wright's Nashoba.

But we presently found that the rain which had fallen during the night would make it hazardous to venture through the forests of Tennessee in any sort of carriage; we therefore had to pass the day at our queer comfortless hotel. The

steamboat had wearied me of social meals, and I should have been thankful to have eaten our dinner of hard venison and peach-sauce in a private room; but this, Miss Wright said, was impossible; the lady of the house would consider the proposal as a personal affront, and, moreover, it would be assuredly refused. This latter argument carried weight with it, and when the great bell was sounded from an upper window of the house, we proceeded to the dining-room. The table was laid for fifty persons, and was already nearly full. Our party had the honor of sitting near "the lady," but to check the proud feelings to which such distinction might give birth, my servant, William, sat very nearly opposite to me. The company consisted of all the shop-keepers (store-keepers as they are called throughout the United States) of the little town. The mayor also, who was a friend of Miss Wright's, was of the party; he is a pleasing gentlemanlike man, and seems strangely misplaced in a little town on the Mississippi. We were told that since the erection of this hotel, it has been the custom for all the male inhabitants of the town to dine and breakfast there. They ate in perfect silence, and with such astonishing rapidity that their dinner was over literally before ours was began; the instant they ceased to eat they darted from the table in the same moody silence which they had preserved since they entered the room, and a second set took their places, who performed their silent parts in the same manner. The only sounds heard were those produced by the knives and forks, with the unceasing chorus of coughing, &c. No women were present except ourselves and the hostess; the good women of Memphis being well content to let their lords partake of Mrs. Anderson's turkeys and venison, (without their having the trouble of cooking for them) whilst they regale themselves on mush and milk at home.

The remainder of the day passed pleasantly enough in rambling round the little town, which is situated at the most beautiful point of the Mississippi; the river is here so wide as to give it the appearance of a noble lake; an island, covered with lofty forest trees divides it, and relieves by its broad mass of shadow the uniformity of its waters. The town stretches in a rambling irregular manner along the cliff, from the Wolf River, one of the innumerable tributaries to the Mississippi, to about a mile below it. Half a mile more of the cliff beyond the town is cleared of trees, and produces good pasture for horses, cows, and pigs; sheep they had none. At either end of this space the forest again rears its dark wall, and seems to say to man, so far shalt thou come, and no farther!" Courage

and industry, however, have braved the warning. Behind this long street the town straggles back into the forest, and the rude path that leads to the more distant log dwellings becomes wilder at every step. The ground is broken by frequent water-courses, and the bridges that lead across them are formed by trunks of trees thrown over the stream, which support others of smaller growth, that are laid across them. These bridges are not very pleasant to pass, for they totter under the tread of a man, and tremble most frightfully beneath a horse or a wagon; they are, however, very picturesque. The great height of the trees, the quantity of pendant vine branches that hang amongst them; and the variety of gay-plumaged birds, particularly the small green parrot, made us feel we were in a new world; and a repetition of our walk the next morning would have pleased us well, but Miss Wright was anxious to get home, and we were scarcely less so to see her Nashoba. A clumsy sort of caravan drawn by two horses was prepared for us; and we set off in high spirits for an expedition of fifteen miles through the forest. To avoid passing one of the bridges above described, which was thought insecure, our negro driver took us through a piece of water, which he assured us was not deep "to matter;" however, we soon lost sight of our pole, and as we were evidently descending, we gently remonstrated with him on the danger of proceeding, but he only grinned, and flogged in reply; we soon saw the front wheels disappear, and the horses began to plunge and kick most alarmingly, but still without his looking at all disturbed. At length the splinter-bar gave way, upon which the black philosopher said very composedly, "I expect you'll best be riding out upon the horses, as we've got into an unhandsome fix here." Miss Wright, who sat composedly smiling at the scene, said, "Yes, Jacob, that is what we must do" and with some difficulty we, in this manner, reached the shore, and soon found ourselves again assembled round Mrs. Anderson's fire.

It was soon settled that we must delay our departure till the waters had subsided, but Miss Wright was too anxious to reach home to endure this delay, and she set off again on horseback, accompanied by our man servant, who told me afterwards that they rode through places that might have daunted the boldest hunter, but that "Miss Wright took it quite easy."

The next day we started again, and the clear air, the bright sun, the novel wildness of the dark forest, and our keenly awakened curiosity, made the

excursion delightful, and enabled us to bear without shrinking the bumps and bruises we encountered. We soon lost all trace of a road, at least so it appeared to us, for the stumps of the trees, which had been cut away to open a passage, were left standing three feet high. Over these, the high-hung Dearborn, as our carriage was called, passed safely; but it required some miles of experience to convince us that every stump would not be our last; it was amusing to watch the cool and easy skill with which the driver wound his horses and wheels among these stumps. I thought he might have been imported to Bond-street with great advantage. The forest became thicker and more dreary-looking every mile we advanced, but our ever-grinning negro declared it was a right good road, and that we should be sure to get to Nashoba.

And so we did and one glance sufficed to convince me that every idea I had formed of the place was as far as possible from the truth. Desolation was the only feeling—the only word that presented itself: but it was not spoken. I think, however, that Miss Wright was aware of the painful impression the sight of her forest home produced on me, and I doubt not that the conviction reached us both at the same moment, that we had erred in thinking that a few months passed together at this spot could be productive of pleasure to either. But to do her justice, I believe her mind was so exclusively occupied by the object she had then in view, that all things else were worthless, or indifferent to her. I never heard or read of any enthusiasm approaching hers, except in some few instances, in ages past, of religious fanaticism.

It must have been some feeling equally powerful which enabled Miss Wright, accustomed to all the comfort and refinement of Europe, to imagine not only that she herself could exist in this wilderness, but that her European friends could enter there, and not feel dismayed at the savage aspect of the scene. The annexed plate gives a faithful view of the cleared space and buildings which form the settlement. Each building consisted of two large rooms furnished in the most simple manner; nor had they as yet collected round them any of those minor comforts which ordinary minds class among the necessaries of life. But in this our philosophical friend seemed to see no evil: nor was there any mixture of affectation in this indifference; it was a circumstance really and truly beneath her notice. Her whole heart and soul were occupied by the hope of raising the African to the level of European intellect; and even now, that I have

seen this favorite fabric of her imagination fall to pieces beneath her feet, I cannot recall the self-devotion with which she gave herself to it, without admiration.

The only white persons we found at Nashoba were my amiable friend, Mrs. W**** the sister of Miss Wright, and her husband. I think they had between thirty and forty slaves, including children, but when I was there no school had been established. Books and other materials for the great experiment had been collected, and one or two professors engaged, but nothing was yet organized. I found my friend Mrs. W**** in very bad health, which she confessed she attributed to the climate. This naturally so much alarmed me for my children, that I decided upon leaving the place with as little delay as possible, and did so at the end of ten days.

I do not exactly know what was the immediate cause which induced Miss Wright to abandon a scheme which had taken such possession of her imagination, and on which she had expended so much money; but many months had not elapsed before I learnt, with much pleasure, that she and her sister had also left it. I think it probable that she became aware, upon returning to Nashoba, that the climate was too hostile to their health. All I know farther of Nashoba is, that Miss Wright having found (from some cause or other) that it was impossible to pursue her object, herself accompanied her slaves to Haiti, and left them there, free, and under the protection of the President.

I found no beauty in the scenery round Nashoba, nor can I conceive that it would possess any even in summer. The trees were so close to each other as not to permit the growth of underwood, the great ornament of the forest at New Orleans, and still less of our seeing any openings, where the varying effects of light and shade might atone for the absence of other objects. The clearing round the settlement appeared to me inconsiderable and imperfect; but I was told that they had grown good crops of cotton and Indian corn. The weather was dry and agreeable, and the aspect of the heavens by night surprisingly beautiful. I never saw moonlight so clear, so pure, so powerful.

We returned to Memphis on the 26th of January, 1828, and found ourselves obliged to pass five days there, awaiting a steamboat for Cincinnati, to which

metropolis of the west I was now determined to proceed with my family to await the arrival of Mr. Trollope. We were told by everyone we spoke to at Memphis, that it was in all respects the finest situation west of the Alleghanies. We found many lovely walks among the broken forest glades around Memphis, which, together with a morning and evening enjoyment of the effects of a glowing horizon on the river, enabled us to wait patiently for the boat that was to bear us away.

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