THINGS AS THEY ARE IN AMERICA.

BY WILLIAM CHAMBERS.

RICHMOND, IN VIRGINIA.

'When does the carriage leave the door for the steamer down the Potomac?' I asked the book-keeper of Willard's Hotel in Washington.

'At six o'clock in the morning, and nine in the evening,' was the reply.

I preferred setting out in the morning, and was ready accordingly—Mr. Willard being up at this early hour, and considerately providing each guest at his departure with a cup of coffee (without charge.)

The ride to the landing-place of the steamers, across an open stretch of ground, occupies about half an hour, and on my arrival, I found that a number of persons who had just come by the northern train, were going on board a steamer, which was lying at the extremity of a wooden pier. Speedily everything was adjusted. A very droll-looking negro lad, in a kind of cocked-hat, and boots pulled over a pair of ragged pants, drew in the rope, and we were off.

The Potomac, more like an inland sea than a river, and here a mile in width, forms the connecting-link between the northern and southern railways. The line, as yet, stopped at Washington; and to get again upon the track, it was necessary to descend the Potomac fifty-five miles, to a place called Acquia Creek, where the railway to Richmond commences. An English traveller has said such sore things of the steamers on the Potomac, that I did not feel quite at ease in making so long an excursion in one of them: but I am bound in justice to say, that so far as my experience went, there was nothing to complain of. For a company of about fifty persons, two tables were prepared for breakfast in a manner that would have done no discredit to a first-class hotel. A good-humoured negro barber plied his vocation in his little apartment. And the toilet apparatus comprehended no wooden bowls—such articles having utterly vanished, if they ever existed anywhere but in the imagination

In fine weather, the sail down the Potomac from Washington must be exceedingly pleasant; for the river though broad, is not so wide as to give indistinctness to the scenery on the banks. On the right, we have the woody heights of Virginia, and on the left, the hills of Maryland, with frequent glimpses of villa-residences and farm-settlements on both sides. At the distance of six or seven miles below Washington, but on the Virginia side, we come abreast of Alexandria, a town of 10,000 inhabitants, with a good deal of shipping at its quays, and signs of manufacturing industry on a considerable scale. Eight miles further down, on the same side, is seen upon a green knoll among the picturesque woody eminences, an object of interest which, cold as the morning is, attracts nearly all the passengers from the well-warmed cabin. This is Mount Vernon, once the residence of General Washington, and where, in a vault amidst the grounds, the remains of the great man were intombed. It is a neat country residence, with a tall veranda in front, changed in no respect from what it was sixty years ago; but a local authority speaks of the grounds, which were kept in the greatest trimness by Washington, being now in a discreditable state of disorder—a circumstance which, if true, demands the attention of the American people. Unfortunately, the spot is not easily reached by land, otherwise I should have gladly made it the object of a pilgrimage.

As the day advanced, the chilliness of the atmosphere wore off, and on arriving at Acquia Creek, the air felt mild and agreeable, although it was the 1st of December. The train was in waiting on a long jetty, and in less than ten minutes it had received its freight of passengers and luggage, and was under-way. Such was my entrance into Virginia—that fine old state, settled by English gentlemen of family, and whose history calls up such melancholy thoughts of the unfortunate Raleigh.

Much of the country through which we passed was uncleared of woods, which had a wild appearance, and the land, where opened to agricultural operations, seemed to be of a poor description. Among the trees growing naturally in the patches of tangled forest, was the *arbor vitæ*, which here attains a considerable size. Rhododendrons hung their faded blossoms by the roadsides, where they grew like common weeds; and in other kinds of vegetation, there was still the lingering aspect of autumn. On crossing the Rappahannock, at Fredericksburg, the agricultural character of the country was much improved; but even at the best, and all the way to Richmond, a distance of sixty miles from the Potomac, it fell short of what I had seen in Western Canada and Ohio. Yet possessing, as it does, the elements of fertility, what might not be expected from the land, if put under an enlightened system of tillage! The ploughing, performed by slaves under the inspection of overseers riding about the fields on horseback, was very defective; for it seemed scarcely to tear up the soil, and left large pieces altogether untouched. As the train passed, the negro ploughmen invariably stopped in their labour to look at, and speculate on, the phenomenon, as if their heart was not in their work, and they took every opportunity of shirking it. From the way they seemed to be proceeding, I feel pretty safe in averring, that two ordinary Scotch ploughmen would get through as much labour in a day as any six of them, and do the work, too, in a greatly superior manner.

In the course of the journey, a number of passengers were set down at different stations, leaving so few in the train, that at length another gentleman and myself found ourselves alone in one of the cars. My companion was a man of probably forty years of age, stout made, with sandy hair and whiskers, and had I seen him in England, I should have said he was a working-mechanic, probably a stone-mason, dressed in his Sunday clothes, and out on a holiday. I am particular in referring to his appearance, in order, if possible, to throw some light on the habits in which he very freely indulged. Apparently engaged in deep thought, he continued chewing tobacco with a voracity I had never seen equalled, and which provoked such an incessant torrent of expectoration, that at last the floor around him presented a most unsightly spectacle.

I think travellers, generally, in their descriptions, exaggerate the chewing and spitting of the Americans. It is, in reality, only here and there you meet a person who abandons himself to these nauseous practices, while to the mass of the more respectable people in the States, they are probably as disagreeable as to any well-bred European. The invectives, however, directed against the Americans on this score, dispose me to believe that the English who visit the United States, and pick out so many faults, are either ignorant or neglectful of the manners of their own country. Among the less-instructed classes in Great Britain, spitting in the streets, and other places, is exceedingly common; and since young gentlemen betook themselves to smoking tobacco in common clay-pipes, the vice may be said to have become fashionable in the junior departments of high-life—at anyrate, we do not see that it meets with public censure. Now, if it be considered that in the United States, the rise from one condition of life to another is astonishingly rapid, and that all classes travel together in the same cars, and live together in the same hotels, it will not be difficult to understand how certain obnoxious practices should obtrude themselves on the notice of the more polished class of travellers.

The train arrived at Richmond about two o'clock in the afternoon; and by an omnibus in attendance, I was transferred to a hotel, which proved to be no way inferior to the establishments in the states further north. The whole of the waiters were negroes, in white jackets; but among the female domestics I recognised one or two Irish girls—the sight of them helping to make good what I had everywhere heard stated about the Irish dispossessing the coloured races. At Willard's Hotel, in Washington, all the waiters, as well as the female servants, were Irish, and here, also, they will probably be so in a short time

Situated on a high and sloping bank on the left side of the James River, Richmond is much less regular in outline than the greater number of American cities. Its streets, straggling in different directions on no uniform plan, are of an old-established appearance, with stores, churches, and numerous public buildings. Besides the principal thoroughfares, there are many narrow streets or lanes of a dismal, half-deserted appearance, generally dirty, and seemingly ill drained and ventilated. Everywhere, the number of black faces is considerable; for in a population of 27,000, as many as 9000 are said to be slaves. The dwellings occupied by the lower classes of coloured people are of a miserable kind, resembling the worst brick-houses in the back-lanes of English manufacturing towns. In the upper part of the city there are some rows of handsome villas, and in this quarter is a public square, with the Capitol, or seat of legislature, in a central and conspicuous situation. In walking through this public edifice towards dusk, I observed that it was guarded by an armed sentinel, the sight of whom had almost the startling effect of an apparition; for it was the first time I had seen a bayonet in the United States, and suggested the unpleasant reflection, that the large infusion of slaves in the composition of society was not unattended with danger.

A fine view is obtained from the front of the Capitol, overlooking the lower part of the city, the river with its falls, and the country in the distance. The falls of the James River appear to have determined the situation of the town. These falls unitedly amount to a descent of eighty feet, and are made available for turning a number of large mills for grinding flour, and other purposes. The occurrence of such falls is only one of a series of similar phenomena, along the east coast of America, where, by recessions of the sea, a terrace-range crosses the rivers at a less or greater distance from the ocean, causing an abrupt descent, which is valuable as a water-power. The falls of the James River cease in front of the city, where there are several rocky and woody islets, and at this point two long wooden bridges afford communication with a manufacturing suburb on the right bank.

Although, in many respects, inferior in point of appearance as compared with the smart New-England cities, Richmond shewed various symptoms of prosperity and progress. A species of dock for shipping was in process of excavation adjoining the bridges, and several large cotton-factories where in the course of erection, In the streets in this lower quarter, there was an active trade in the packing and sale of tobacco, quantities of which, like faded weeds, were being carted to the factories by negroes. The cotton manufacture is carried on in several large establishments, and will soon be extended, but principally, I was told, by means of northern capital, and the employment of hired white labourers, who, for factory purposes, are said to be preferable to persons of colour.

Richmond is known as the principal market for the supply of slaves for the south—a circumstance understood to originate in the fact that Virginia, as a matter of husbandry, breeds negro labourers for the express purpose of sale. Having heard that such was the case, I was interested in knowing by what means and of what prices slaves are offered to purchasers. Without introductions of any kind, I was thrown on my own resources in acquiring this information. Fortunately, however, there was no impediment to encounter in the research. The exposure of ordinary goods in a store is not more open to the public than are the sales of slaves in Richmond. By consulting the local newspapers, I learned that the sales take place by auction every morning in the offices of certain brokers, who, as I understood by the terms of their advertisements, purchased or received slaves for sale on commission.

Where the street was in which the brokers conducted their business, I did not know; but the discovery was easily made. Rambling down the main street in the city, I found that the subject of my search was a narrow and short thoroughfare, turning off to the left, and terminating in a similar cross thoroughfare. Both streets, lined with brick-houses, were dull and silent. There was not a person to whom I could put a question. Looking about, I observed the office of a commission-agent, and into it I stepped. Conceive the idea of a large shop with two windows, and a door between; no shelving or counters inside; the interior a spacious, dismal apartment, not well swept; the only furniture a desk at one of the windows, and a bench at one side of the shop, three feet high, with two steps to it from the floor. I say, conceive the idea of this dismal-looking place, with nobody in it but three negro children, who, as I entered, were playing at auctioning each other. An intensely black little negro, of four or five years of age, was standing on the bench, or lock, as it is called, with an equally black girl, about a year younger, by his side, whom he was pretending to sell by bids to another black child, who was rolling about the floor.

My appearance did not interrupt the merriment. The little auctioneer continued his mimic play, and appeared to enjoy the joke of selling the girl, who stood demurely by his side.

'Fifty dolla for de gal—fifty dolla—fifty dolla—I sell dis here fine gal for fifty dolla,' was uttered with extraordinary volubility by the woolly-headed urchin, accompanied with appropriate gestures, in imitation, doubtless, of the scenes he had seen enacted daily in the spot. I spoke a few words to the little creatures, but was scarcely understood; and the fun went on as if I had not been present: so I left them, happy in rehearsing what was likely soon to be their own fate.

At another office of a similar character, on the opposite side of the street, I was more successful. Here, on inquiry, I was respectfully informed by a person in attendance, that the sale would take place the following morning at half-past nine o'clock.

Next day I set out accordingly, after breakfast, for the scene of operations, in which there was now a little more life. Two or three persons were lounging about, smoking cigars; and, looking along the street, I observed that three red flags were projected from the doors of those offices in which sales were to occur. On each flag was pinned a piece of paper, notifying the articles to be sold. The number of lots was not great. On the first, was the following announcement:—'Will be sold this morning, at half-past nine o'clock, a Man and a Boy.'

It was already the appointed hour; but as no company had assembled, I entered and took a seat by the fire. The office, provided with a few deal-forms and chairs, a desk at one of the windows, and a block accessible by a few steps, was tenantless, save by a gentleman who was arranging papers at the desk, and to whom I had addressed myself on the previous evening. Minute after minute passed, and still nobody entered. There was clearly no hurry in going to business. I felt almost like an intruder, and had formed the resolution of departing, in order to look into the other offices, when the person referred to left his desk, and came and seated himself opposite to me at the fire.

'You are an Englishman,' said he, looking me steadily in the face; 'do you want to purchase?'

'Yes,' I replied, 'I am an Englishman; but I do not intend to purchase. I am travelling about for information, and I shall feel obliged by your letting me know the prices at which negro servants are sold.'

'I will do so with much pleasure,' was the answer; 'do you mean field-hands or house-servants?'

'All kinds,' I replied; 'I wish to get all the information I can.'

With much politeness, the gentleman stepped to his desk, and began to draw up a note of prices. This, however, seemed to require careful consideration; and while the note was preparing, a lanky person, in a wide-awake hat, and chewing tobacco, entered, and took the chair just vacated. He had scarcely seated himself, when, on looking towards the door, I observed the subjects of sale—the man and boy indicated by the paper on the red flag—enter together, and quietly walk to a form at the back of the shop, whence, as the day was chilly, they edged themselves towards the fire, in the corner where I was seated. I was now between the two parties—the white man on the right, and the old and young negro on the left—and I waited to see what would take place.

The sight of the negroes at once attracted the attention of Wide-awake. Chewing with vigour, he kept keenly eyeing the pair, as if to see what they were good for. Under this searching gaze, the man and boy were a little abashed, but said nothing. Their appearance had little of the repulsiveness we are apt to associate with the idea of slaves. They were dressed in a gray woollen coat, pants, and waistcoat, coloured cotton neckcloths, clean shirts, coarse woollen stockings, and stout shoes. The man wore a black hat; the boy was bareheaded. Moved by a sudden impulse, Wide-awake left his seat, and rounding the back of my chair, began to grasp at the man's arms, as if to feel their muscular capacity. He then examined his hands and fingers; and last of all, told him to open his mouth and shew his teeth, which he did in a submissive manner. Having finished these examinations, Wide-awake resumed his seat, and chewed on in silence as before.

I thought it was but fair that I should now have my turn of investigation, and accordingly asked the elder negro what was his age. He said he did not know. I next inquired how old the boy was. He said he was seven years of age. On asking the man if the boy was his son, he said he was not—he was his cousin. I was going into other particulars, when the office-keeper approached, and handed me the note he had been preparing; at the same time making the observation that the market was dull at present, and that there never could be a more favourable opportunity of buying. I thanked him for the trouble which he had taken; and now submit a copy of his price-current:—

'Best Men, 18 to 25 years old	$1200	to	1300
Fair do. do. do.	950	to	1050
Boys, 5 feet,	850	to	950
Do., 4 feet 8 inches,	700	to	800
Do., 4 feet 5 inches,	500	to	600
Do., 4 feet,	375	to	450
Young Women,	800	to	1000
Girls, 5 feet,	750	to	850
Do., 4 feet 9 inches,	700	to	750
Do., 4 feet,	350	to	452

(Signed) ————,
Richmond, Virginia.'

Leaving this document for future consideration, I pass on to a history of the day's proceedings. It was now ten minutes to ten o'clock, and Wide-awake and I being alike tired of waiting, we went off in quest of sales further up the street. Passing the second office, in which also nobody was to be seen, we were more fortunate at the third. Here, according to the announcement on the paper stuck to the flag, there were to be sold, 'A woman and three children; a young woman, three men, a middle-aged woman, and a little boy.' Already a crowd had met, composed, I should think, of persons mostly from the cotton-plantations of the south. A few were seated near a fire on the right-hand side, and others stood round an iron stove in the middle of the apartment. The whole place had a dilapidated appearance. From a back-window, there was a view into a ruinous courtyard; beyond which, in a hollow, accessible by a side-lane, stood a shabby brick-house, on which the word *Jail* was inscribed in large black letters on a white ground. I imagined it to be a depot for the reception of negroes.

On my arrival, and while making these preliminary observations, the lots for sale had not made their appearance. In about five minutes afterwards they were ushered in, one after the other, under the charge of a mulatto, who seemed to act as principal assistant. I saw no whips, chains, or any other engine of force. Nor did such appear to be required. All the lots took their seats on two long forms near the stoves; none shewed any sign of resistance; nor did any one utter a word. Their manner was that of perfect humility and resignation.

As soon as all were seated, there was a general examination of their respective merits, by feeling their arms, looking into their mouths, and investigating the quality of their hands and fingers—this last being evidently an important particular. Yet there was no abrupt rudeness in making these examinations—no coarse or domineering language was employed. The three negro men were dressed in the usual manner—in gray woollen clothing. The woman, with three children, excited my peculiar attention. She was neatly attired, with a coloured handkerchief bound round her head, and wore a white apron over her gown. Her children were all girls, one of them a baby at the breast, three months old, and the others two and three years of age respectively, rigged out with clean white pinafores. There was not a tear or an emotion visible in the whole party. Everything seemed to be considered as a matter of course; and the change of owners