

# THE CENTURY MAGAZINE

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## “THE LORDLY HUDSON.”

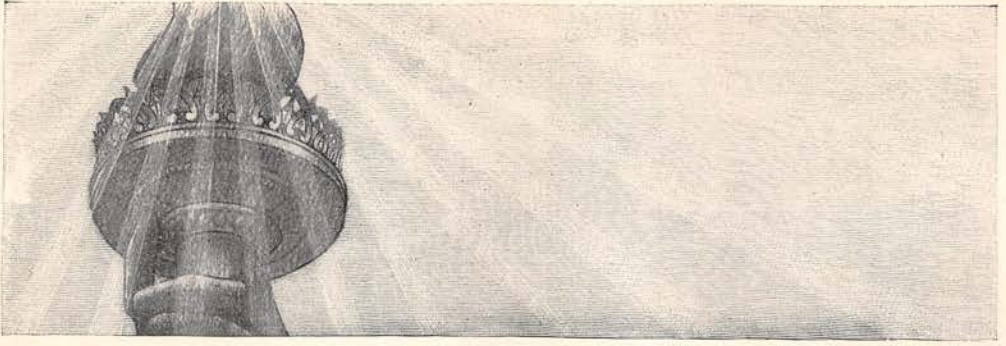
Now let him climb the Catskill, to behold  
The lordly Hudson marching to the main,  
And say what bard, in any land of old,  
Had such a river to inspire his strain.

T. W. PARSONS.

WITH PICTURES BY A. CASTAIGNE.

THE Hudson River valley, and the aspect of the river itself, have passed through many changes since the eye of fifty years and over first knew them. The old manorial estates, the many-acred “places” derived from grants, or by purchase when land was worth but little money, were then in the full flower of their hospitable occupancy, and, with the exception of a few market-towns, themselves of small importance,—Hudson, Poughkeepsie, Newburg,—over all the region else between Albany and New York there brooded a sleepy, pastoral peace, not to be broken until the demon of steam should come with ear-splitting scream and thundering tread, asserting its right of eminent domain. At the sound of that unruly voice the white-winged brood of sloops and sailing-vessels of all kinds disappeared, never to return—a loss ill supplied by the splendid steamboats which, ablaze with lights like so many Aaron’s breastplates, plow their way through the hills, sending their magic search-lights from shore to shore. The generation that knew and loved the valley in this pastoral time is rapidly passing away, and the newcomers who are remaking the land are in large measure of a different race; or, at

least, it may be said there has been so strong an infusion of new peoples that the surface complexion of the towns and villages has been strangely altered. Where, in this still-remembered time, the names of the inhabitants betrayed, for the most part, a remote Dutch or German origin, with a scattering contingent of English and Huguenot strain, our rural postmasters find the labor of having every few years to learn the names of even the older residents enormously increased by the necessity of answering the calls for their letters of a swarm of outlandish folk—Bohemians, Hungarians, Italians, Syrians. In the town where the writer lives, a Pole, who for several years was the only man of an origin more removed from the common than the one or two villagers of pure German birth, plied the peaceful trade of a shoemaker, sitting with his one apprentice by his wide window, distinguished, as became his birth, from his matter-of-fact neighbors by always having about him some pots of plants in full flower—his gloxinias, I remember, were of the finest. But all of a sudden the picturesque window and its occupant disappeared, the lap-stone and bench were discarded, and our shoemaker reap-



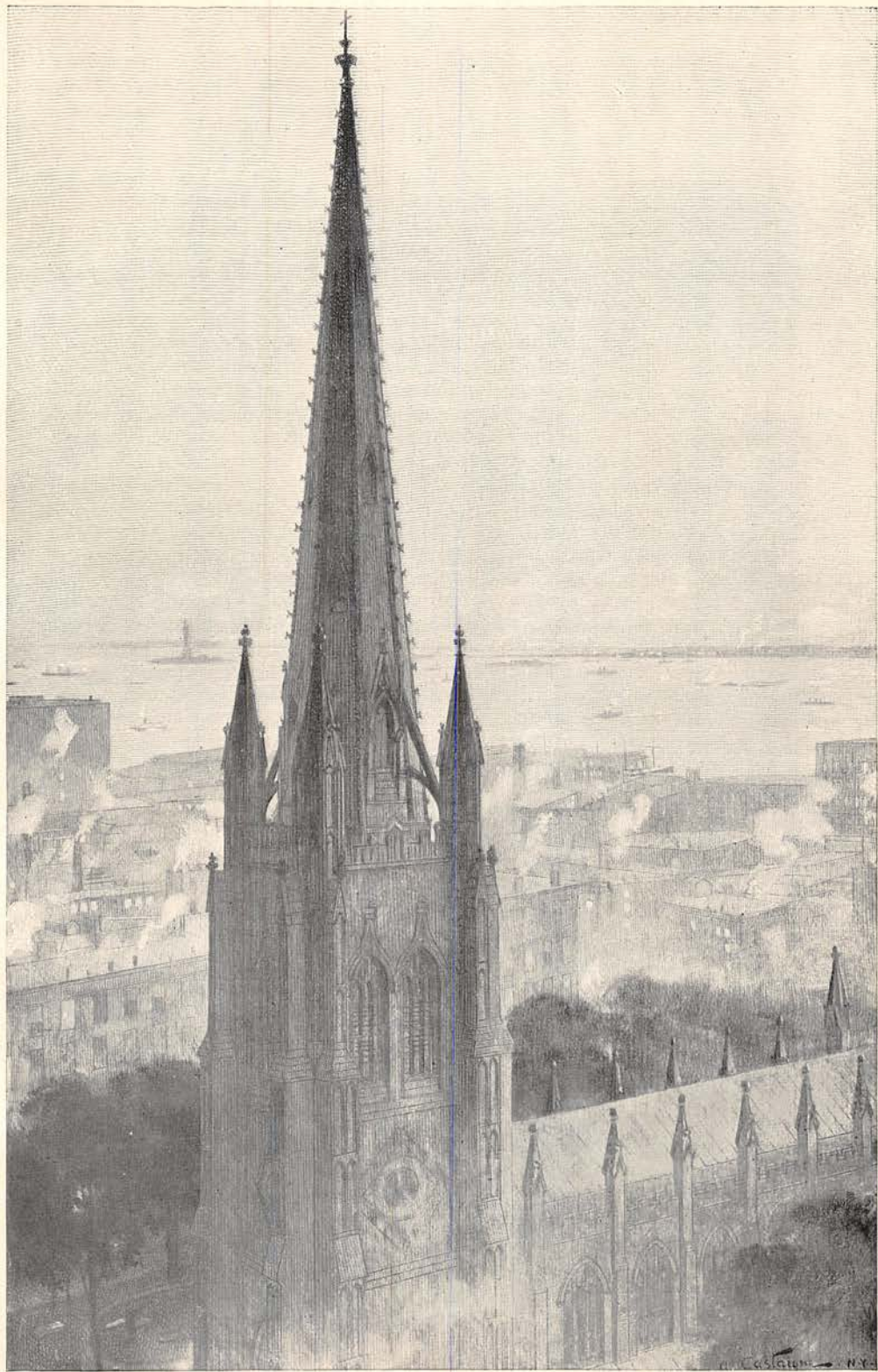
peared in another quarter, transformed into an agent for the huddling swarm of Slavic brickyarders and railroad-menders, who find in him a most helpful and efficient letter-writer, letter-reader, and money-changer. His circular in half a dozen dialects, printed side by side like a six-text edition of Chaucer, astonishes the native villagers, hardly skilled in the management of one birthright tongue. And so, all through the once homogeneous valley, the old order is changing, giving place to new.

And not the inhabitants alone are slipping away from the past. The old country-seats, the many-acred farms with their generous houses, built for use, not show, and the hospitality of which was, so to speak, in their blood, not a borrowed fashion—these are fast dis-

appearing, if, indeed, there be any anywhere left. Our writers of magazine stories, with their rather wearisome iteration of the idealized glories of a vanished South, might have found subjects quite as suggestive in the histories of some of these old Hudson River places, while the ordinary life of their occupants was, as many still live to bear witness, as capable of poetic interpretation as any that has been immortalized by the genius of a Sand, an Eliot, or a Tolstoi. What individualities of character were nursed in these solitudes; what curious tragedies, not of bleeding bodies, but of hearts, were enacted on these rustic stages, with no reporters at the keyhole to dress them up, and no illustrated newspaper to distort them, for the grinning delight of the mob! What likely



THE ENTRANCE OF



THE HUDSON.



material, not merely for an Edgeworth or a Jane Austen, but for a Balzac or a Thackeray, budded and blossomed in these seeming quiet places—the white lily and its poison-yellow sister rising from the surface of the same tranquil water! The time is fast slipping away when these stories can be recorded with verisimilitude; for those who lived them are dead, and those who heard them from the living are old, and the new generation are,

healthily, no doubt, absorbed in their own time of other manners, other thoughts.

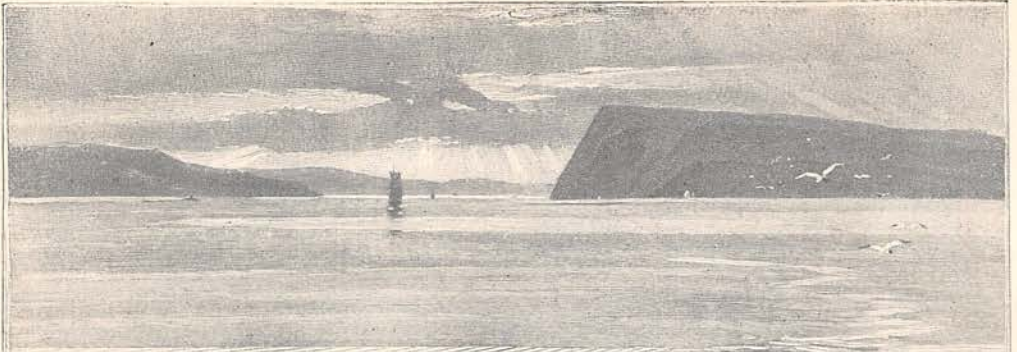
The recent jubilee festival of Trinity parish is a reminder of the day when the shapely spire was rising. The building was watched with lively interest by those of the new generation who, in the dull monotony of house and shop, were glad of even the crumbs of architecture dropped from the Old-World table, and who pleased themselves with the lath-and-plaster simulacrum of the much-read-of «high-embowed roof,» and the cheap substitutes for the «storied windows, richly dight,» without too much questioning of the reality of the esthetic gift. The outline of the city was then very agreeable to the eye as seen from the river, accented by the Wren-like spires of St. John's and St. Paul's, and by the more correct and logical, but less genuine, lines of Trinity. Trinity was, in fact, for a long time used not only as a standard of taste, but as a standard of measure. The statue of Liberty was so much higher than Trinity's





A. CASTAIGNE. N.Y. 95

MAUSOLEUM.



spire; the first of the sky-scrapers was so much higher than Trinity. But now Trinity has disappeared in the swarm of sky-scrapers, and the amorphous monsters are become the standards in turn for their own progeny. The ungainly brood is increasing so fast that it cannot be long before the whole lower part of the city will be a solid mass of stone, divided only by narrow cañons offering, at the best, a slightly indented sky-line. The only remaining chance for picturesqueness will be in the management of Morningside Heights, where already the competition for preëminence has begun, and where, it is to be feared, the poor sky-line, chased from the city proper, will stand but a poor chance of holding its own. Still, we must not reproach ourselves as if we were the only barbarians, since Paris herself has had no more pride in her civic beauty than to blot it with the hideous Eiffel tower, and London has disgusted her own artists and artistic people with that monstrosity, the new Tower bridge.

It is, however, pleasant to remember that nothing which the obliviousness of business competition to esthetic considerations can do will ever make New York harbor less noble as the portal of a great city than it is. In time the mass of lofty buildings filling the lower part of the island will, no doubt, have an esthetic value of its own, becoming more homogeneous and expressive as it dominates the lesser structures, which in time will have ceased to play their





THE PALISADES—INDIAN HEAD.

parts. The churches on the island are all insignificant in size; even now it is difficult to disentangle their spires from the mesh of factory chimneys and tall buildings, while the only one among them that bulks to the eye from the river at all like an Old-World cathedral—the church of the Paulists—is dangerously rivaled by the grain-elevators of the West Side; these have a basilica-like nobility of their own. It would seem that the commercial spirit must long dominate the civic expression of New York; indeed, the character of its surface, and the unfortunate plan on which it is laid out, combine to make the erection of a really large building impossible.

As we leave the harbor and enter the mouth of the great estuary which calls itself a river (though it really has no right to the name, being, as it is for more than

half its length, only an arm of the sea), the eye is satisfied with the sense of proportion. The river is suited not only to what the city is, but to what it is to be. If we have to wince a little, or not a little, at the design of the Grant tomb, we must rejoice in the noble fitness of its site. No monarch's dust is housed in such a glorious frame of earth, sky, and water; nor does any city boast of such a majestically beautiful approach to the shrine of a hero as New York has in her Riverside drive. The stranger must acknowledge that such a river is first fitly seen from such a vantage-ground.

So much has been said of the beauties of the Palisades, and their threatened mutilation by the quarrymen has been so loudly lamented, that I shall doubtless be challenged for saying that I find a little of the Palisades in the landscape



BATTLE MONUMENT, WEST POINT.





THE CATSKILLS.

goes a great way! They begin well at the north, and they die away gracefully enough at the southern end; but between these two extremities they seem to me, after fifty-odd years of familiarity, rather forbidding than grand, rather mannered than graceful. How they may look after another half-century, when their heights shall be crowned by buildings, — cottages and palaces, churches and monasteries, — their now rude and threatening sides hung with terraced gardens and made accessible by roads of Roman build, we may please ourselves by fancying. Mr. Castaigne, with an artist's instinct, has shown them in perspective, not in full face, and so enables them to do themselves more than justice.

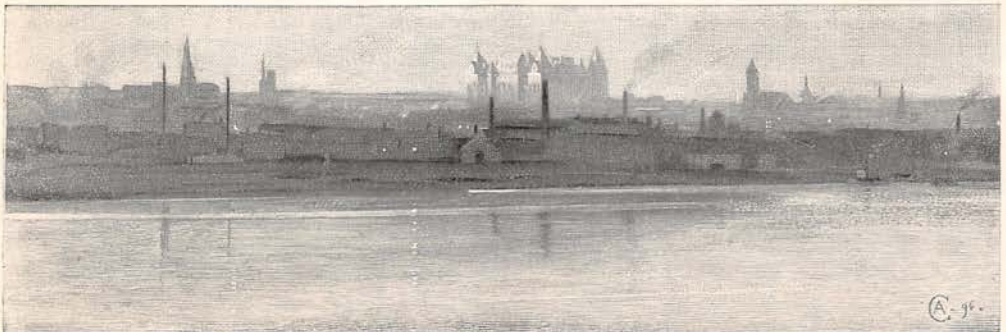
It is true that to people who are familiar with the really great mountains of the world the Hudson River Highlands are but foot-hills; but looked at for themselves, and in relation to their own domain, they deserve all the praises they receive. Their lines are of noble beauty, and their mass is in due proportion to the width of the stream, neither belittling it by their own too great height nor belittled by its too great width, while the almost vertical plunge to the water of the lines of Butter Hill and Sugar Loaf threaten a depth not to be despised.

If it must be admitted that the Hudson River, once we are well past the Highlands and the Catskills, becomes tame and featureless, and rather a weariness to the traveler, it must also be allowed that the beauties of the country-side, either in the Highlands or on the shores of the great bay that widens above the mountain pass, more than atone for the dullness of the upper region. Yet much depends on atmospheric conditions. The wall of the Catskills, or even the lesser height of the Shawangunk Mountains, has as many moods as there are hours in the

day, and no doubt are loved as much by those that live among them as we who live by the Highland mountains learn to love their hourly changes; to watch honest Butter Hill put on and off her robe of mist, or Skunny-munk fade from his solid base and become « a cloud that taketh shape.»

The Highland region is the home of many a legend of the Revolutionary war, and we take it as a matter of course when the plowman brings in cannon-balls sent from British guns, or old copper coins, or even an enamel medallion of George Washington, carelessly dropped from some lady's dress in the old time. Then there are earthworks for defending the mountain passes, and names like those of South Beacon and North Beacon in the Fishkill range, to tell of military signaling by bonfires, while people still puzzle out by which window in the old church at Fishkill Cooper's «spy» made his escape. And on the Newburg side of the river, beside the historic Hasbrouck house, the soldiers' camping-ground is seen, with the ruined foundation walls and hearths of their huts. But history looks back further still to the Indian whose arrow-heads and pestles are still plowed up in the fields, and to the ranging mammoth whose bones exhumed were the foundation of Peale's Museum. These are familiar matters, but the wonder is that so few have as yet made it their pleasant task to glean and garner in the less-known field of adventure and discovery, of heroic endurance, of humor, of romance, lying fair before us in the Hudson River valley, and only waiting its poet and historian. It might have had its «sacred poet» in Irving, who found one old-world legend surviving in these mountains, and, making it his own, shows what he could have done had he been less influenced by the literary fashions of his time. The pleasant quest is left for others.

*Clarence Cook.*



AT ALBANY.