

A PICTURESQUE AND HISTORIC VALLEY IN MASSACHUSETTS.



O those readers of the OWL who have never visited historic Massachusetts, and who would be interested in one of its valleys, rich in remarkable associations and natural scenery, the writer respectfully addresses this article.

Within the limits of the County of Hampshire lies a rich, alluvial basin, twenty miles long, and fifteen miles wide, whose present form not only furnishes to the geologist one of the most interesting spots on the continent, but also presents an inexhaustible panorama to the artist. It is sheltered on the west by the perpendicular walls of the Mt. Tom range, while on the east the shaggy crag of Mt. Holyoke keeps vigilant watch over the placid Connecticut, thirteen hundred feet below. The Green Mountains rise in perpetually varying and undulating arches to the northern and western sky. Within this basin lies the city of Northampton, together with several large towns, while the surrounding hills are dotted with picturesque villages. But, in order to thoroughly enjoy the majestic view the valley presents, let us climb Mt. Nonotuck, which is the northernmost point of the Mt. Tom range, and which stands one mile south of Northampton. We ascend by a long and tortuous road, lined with columnar walls of trap rock, and over-topped with a luxuriant growth of forest foliage. Upon reaching the summit, the finest view in all New England commands the admiration of the observer. He sees acres of fertile fields, hillside pastures alive with flocks and herds, broad meadows and woodlands rising in successive tiers as they recede from view, forest trees rising everywhere at short intervals, and occasional orchards studded with fruit trees common to the region. But the greatest element in the completion of this landscape is the river and the islands and peninsulas formed by its meanderings. Here it is about one fourth of a mile wide, and its banks are beautifully adorned with alternating series of shrubs, shady lawns and lofty trees.

Chas. Sumner, as he stood on the summit of Nonotuck, and scanned the landscape before him, gave voice to his sentiments in these words: "I have been all over New England, have travelled through the Highlands of Scotland; I have passed up and down Mont Blanc, and stood on the Campagna at Rome, but have never seen anything so surpassingly lovely as this."

Perhaps the most unique and interesting sight in this panorama, is what usually goes by the name of the "Ox-bow." It lies right at our feet as we stand on Mt. Nonotuck, and from our elevated position we see that it is formed by a deviation in the course of the river, which describes an arc of 4 miles, to gain 70 yards, enclosing a peninsula of fertile land, whose form and verdure is pleasant to look upon, and adorned at the northern end with a beautiful grove. Added to this natural beauty, are three large bridges, spanning the river in beautiful arches, and on the southern corner of the "bow," are mills, mingling their smoke with a sort of vapory sea, which rises over the valley and forms wreath after wreath, as it slowly moves up the side of the hills. Immediately back of the "bow," and forming the artificial background, is the city of Northampton. The spires of its several churches, with a large number of public buildings, give to the picture its architectural setting.

Before leaving the mountain we can point out several neighboring villages, to which one could make a pleasant and profitable visit, on account of their natural scenery and classic associations.

On the opposite bank of the river is a picturesque rural settlement, known as Smith's Ferry. Here, in the midst of rolling meadows and well cultivated farms, under the shade of Mt. Holyoke, we see the ruins of an old mill—a relic of colonial days—standing on an eminence, a short distance from the highway. The scene is one for a painter, and defies description. But for us it has another interest, as being the spot where Nancy Priest Wakefield wrote her beautiful ode to the River of Death. Was it at all surprising that, dwelling here upon the banks of this, the queen of New