CHAPTER II.


"Queen of the Lakes, whose tributary seas
Stretch from the frozen regions of the North
To Southern climates, where the wanton breeze
O'er field and forest goes rejoicing forth:—

"Thou art the sovereign City of the Lakes,
Crowned and acknowledged—may thy fortunes be
Vast as the domain which thine empire takes,
And onward, as thy waters to the sea."

HE several towns, villages, and other important places bordering on the Niagara strait, claim our first attention, and will be noticed in the order of succession suggested by their relative situation, beginning at the commencement of the stream, and ending with its termination at Lake Ontario. This arrangement, following the course of the river, is sufficiently recommended by its simplicity, and natural harmony of parts. They form a series of links of which the strait is the connecting chain; and starting at the lake
from which it depends, we trace it down to that which it sustains. **Buffalo** is then the proper point of departure, and from that city we accordingly set forth.

**Buffalo from Above Port Erie, U. C.**

**Buffalo,** the **Queen of the Lakes,** lies at the foot of Lake Erie, at the mouth of Buffalo Creek, at the effluence of the Niagara River, or Strait, and at the head of the Erie Canal. It has an excellent harbour, protected by a massy stone pier, at the extremity of which, there is a substantial stone light-house, constructed of the best materials, and in the most durable manner—a perfect model of that kind of architecture.

It was laid out in 1801, became a military post in 1812, was burnt by the British in 1813, was incorporated as a village in 1823, and chartered as a city in 1832. It is divided into five wards, and contains about two thousand houses, and nearly twenty thousand inhabitants. Most of the buildings are good, many of them large, and quite a number uncommonly spacious and elegant.

There are thirteen churches, two large markets, a splendid theatre, a fine court-house, and several other public edifices of creditable size and architecture. The principal hotels are, the American Hotel, the Western Hotel, the Mansion House, and the United States Hotel. These are all large and well conducted, and pleasantly situate. The two first have a fine and commanding appearance, and are surmounted by noble domes, from whence extensive views are presented of the city, lake, river and surrounding country.

The **Mansion House** at the junction of Main and Exchange streets, and opposite to the Terrace Market, is an old-established and excellent stand, conveniently near the principal points of departure, of high reputation, and deserving a generous share of patronage. Under the management of
its present worthy and experienced proprietors, Messrs. Hall and Van Tuyl, we are confident that it will merit and receive ample assurances of public favour.

The Western Hotel, an extensive and beautiful building, at the intersection of Pearl-street with the Terrace, is just completed, and opened under the most flattering auspices. The site of this noble hotel is very fine; and its proximity to the harbour, the canal, and the rail-roads, commends it to the patronage of business men; while its extensive accommodations, and the unsurpassed views it affords of the Lake, the Niagara River, and the

Canada shore, make it an attractive sojourn for pleasure-travellers. Its numerous advantages of construction and position, assure its becoming immediately one of the most popular, and best sustained hotels in the country.

The American Hotel is one of the best and most commodious in the Union, and cost nearly one hundred thousand dollars. This hotel, the theatre, several of the churches, and a large number of other buildings, comprising many of the best in the city, were erected by Benjamin Rathbun, to whom, more than to any other individual, Buffalo
him in its result. The streets were filled with his men, teams, and materials; his store-houses, work-shops, and stables formed, as it were, villages of themselves; and he, a plain, frugal, unobtrusive, but active and talented man, was the "Girard of the West." Industrious, persevering, indefatigable, he had but one great fault, and that he is now expiating in the penitentiary. He trusted too implicitly in others.

The whole management and control of all the financial affairs, growing out of, and united with his extensive business and building operations, were intrusted to persons connected with him by the closest ties of blood and interest, whose integrity he could not doubt, and of whose affection he felt fully assured. By these persons a system of forgery, narrow at first, but widening rapidly as time advanced, was commenced, and continued,—solely, however, for convenience, and not from any intention to defraud,—for many months before it came to his knowledge. When it did, he made every exertion in his power to call in the fictitious paper they had issued, and in the effort to accomplish this, and when at the very point of success, he fell a victim to the rapacity and duplicity of men, who had all been benefitted, almost enriched by his exertions and improvements; and
some of whom were under personal obligations to him for many, and by no means inconsiderable, favours.

He was arrested, thrown into prison, and immured in a cell about three feet by seven, where he languished for nearly two years. His vast property was seized upon, under a deed of assignment, obtained by artifice; and thus fettered and powerless, he was left to contend against a fate, dreadful to him, but necessary to the interests of his opposers. Wealth and influence—even of his own large possessions—were arrayed against one penniless and imprisoned, but still proof against temptation, and great even in his downfall. His unhappy destiny, aided by high talent, and urged by infamous means, could not be averted, though in spite of every art and every intrigue, it was long delayed. Indictments were procured against him for forgery, and eminent counsel engaged to support the prosecution. He was tried at Batavia, but the jury could not agree. At Buffalo he was afterwards tried and acquitted. And finally, he was again tried at Batavia, convicted, and sentenced to the state-prison for five years. Eighteen months of this term remain unexpired.

Mr. Rathbun had been for a long period so intimately and closely connected with the growth and business of Buffalo, that no apology will be deemed necessary for this brief outline sketch of his failure and fate; nor for his portrait on a preceding page; the more particularly, that travellers are curious to learn all they can concerning one of whom they have heard so much, but know so little, and often ask many questions about him, which do not always succeed in eliciting truth. The streets of the city are lined with proofs of his taste, genius and enterprise, and for years the history of the place could have been little else than a record of his improvements. His reputation as a landlord extended over the Union; and the fame of his subsequent greatness and fall, had a still wider celebrity. Whatever may be the opinions of men as to the justice of his present condition, his great ability must be admitted by all, and his errors and misfortunes be remembered with regret.

Shortly before the catastrophe which put an end to his operations, Mr. Rathbun commenced a noble structure on Main-street opposite the churches; to make room for which, a whole block of four-story brick stores had been taken down. It was to have been called the "Buffalo Exchange," would have covered the whole square, measuring two hundred and forty-five by two hundred feet, and was designed to rear its proud
and portly dome to a height of no less than two hundred and twenty-two feet. Had this building (the massive foundation of which was partly laid) been completed, it would have been the pride of Buffalo and the West. The site is now an uncovered sepulchre of rubbish. At the Falls, too, the visitor will perceive many evidences of the talent and energy of this extraordinary man, and of the vastness of his designs, not one of which was illusory or impracticable;—but the consummation of these and other extensive plans of improvement was prevented by his arrest, imprisonment, and consequent failure.

Buffalo is admirably situated for a commercial place of great importance; its growth has been rapid beyond all precedent, and it is destined to take a high rank among the great cities of the Union. It is principally built upon an elevated sandy plain; its streets are broad, straight, and dry, and some of its noblest avenues radiate from the central point on which the Exchange was to have been erected. An air of bustle and business pervades it, especially in the summer season, by which it is likened to many a city of much older date, and of far greater pretensions. The climate is highly salubrious, the atmosphere fresh and invigorating, and it has few if any local sources of disease.

About fifty steamboats—some of them literally floating palaces—a large number of ships, brigs, schooners, and sloops, and canal boats almost innumerable, arrive at and depart from Buffalo, making regular trips, and generally freighted with produce, merchandize and passengers to the utmost extent of their capacity and accommodations. Between this city and the village of Attica, a few
miles of rail-road, are all of a continuous and unbroken line, reaching from Boston to Buffalo, that remain unfinished, and in July next, it is intended to have even that portion completed. The ocean and the lakes will then be connected by rail-road as well as canal communication. Boston and New-York will be rivals for the rich trade of the West, and Buffalo will exact tribute from the commerce of both.

Poinsett Barracks, an extensive and commodious cantonment for troops, occupy a conspicuous and commanding position near the upper or northern limit of the city. Several companies of artillery are stationed there, who are paraded weekly for manouvre and review; on which occasions, and especially on field days, citizens and strangers in considerable numbers attend, and seemingly take great interest in these martial displays. Government is also about to erect a strong fortification on the high lands, at the northwest corner of the city, for the protection of Buffalo and Black Rock, and the harbours of both, and also to secure the command of the river. A site for this fort has already been selected, and engineers are expected soon to commence operations.

Excursions from Buffalo to the Seneca Indian village, and to the ruins of old Fort Erie, are not uncommon with both citizens and strangers. They are the only places of much resort in the immediate vicinity of the place. To the former, it is a pleasant ride of three miles; to the latter, a delightful sail of about the same distance.

Buffalo is connected with the Falls, distant twenty-two miles, by a rail-road, on which the cars, propelled by steam, make two trips a day; leaving the former place at nine in the morning, and at five o'clock in the afternoon. With the ferry at Black Rock, two miles distant, there is also rail-road communication, and the cars leave every half hour. The depot for both is on the Terrace, at its junction with Pearl-street, and fronting both the Western Hotel and the United States Hotel.
Steamboats leave the dock every morning for the Falls, and return the same day. They land passengers both at Chippewa and Schlosser, where carriages are in waiting to take them over the two or three remaining miles. Travellers can therefore choose between this mode of conveyance and the cars. Both routes are pleasant, and it may be advisable to go by one and return by the other. By adopting this plan, every part of the beautiful river and forest scenery above the falls will be seen; nor will Chippewa, Navy-Island, or Schlosser—now memorable places—be overlooked; or a splendid view from the river, of the rapids, and islands, be lost.

CHAPTER III.


"In crumbling ruins on the lake-laved shore,
Its shattered walls and bastions ivied o'er,
Stands a stern fortress that has oft withstood
The fiery brunt of battle, blushing blood,
Its curtains, parapets, and ramparts gray
War-wasted and corroding by decay,
On frowning battlement and salient stone,
Has time the unfinished work of foeman done;
And creeping plants, and blooming wild-flowers wave,
Where floated proudly once the banner brave."

OPPOSITE to Buffalo, at the efflux of the river, and on the Canada side, stand the ruins of Fort Erie. This fortification, originally built by the French about a century ago, was a small but extremely well planned and constructed post, and must have been considered of no little importance by those who were at the trouble of its erection. All its defences were laid out and arranged in the exactest style of art; and the masonry bears witness, even at this distant date, to the solidity with which it was put together.