



TWENTY-BUILDINGS.

WHEN one nowadays speaks or writes of early Washington and contrasts its penury then with its prosperity now, "for the same reason that influences individuals who have obtained wealth and position to exaggerate the poverty and difficulties which surrounded their early days,"* he summons to his aid that cynic from the nutmeg State. I have tried to neglect the Hon. John Cotton Smith, and if his allusion had not been so direct to the subject, the issue would have been success.

Hon. Mr. Smith was of the first House of Representatives that sat in the Capitol and in later years recorded his recollections of 1800:†

Nor was the desolate aspect of the place a little augmented by a number of unfinished edifices at *Greenleaf's Point*, and on an eminence a short distance from it, commenced by an individual whose name they bore, but the state of whose funds compelled him to abandon them, not only unfinished but in a ruinous condition.

Mr. Smith's "edifices on an eminence" were by the common people of the neighborhood dubbed "twenty buildings" on "twenty-building hill;" which plebian phrases although not so elegant are as expressive.

Perhaps I ought not to have stigmatized Mr. Smith as a cynic, and perhaps, I ought to overlook his exaggeration as he wrote for the entertainment of his contemporaries and his prophetic soul divined the assistance he would be to those who should make oratoric and graphic contrasts.

*Quoted from Removal of the Seat of Government to Washington—*Wilhelmus B. Bryan*.

† The Correspondence and Miscellanies of the *Hon. John Cotton Smith, LL.D.*

And this is all that was "visible" to Mr. Smith except the unfinished edifices at Greenleaf's Point and on the eminence nearby.

Instead of recognizing the avenues and streets portrayed on the plan of the city, not one was visible, unless we except a road with two buildings on each side of it, called New Jersey Avenue. * * * Between the president's house and Georgetown a block of houses had been erected, which they bore, and may still bear, the name of the *Six Buildings*. There were also two other blocks, consisting of two or three dwelling houses in different directions, and now and then an insulated wooden habitation. * * * There appeared to be but two really comfortable habitations, in all respects, within the bounds of the city, one of which belonged to Dudley Carroll, Esquire, and the other to Notley Young, who were the former proprietors of a large proportion of the land appropriated to the city, but who reserved for their own accommodation ground sufficient for gardens and other useful appurtenances.

The enumeration of improvements at that date in Hines' *Early Recollections of Washington City* is dissimilar quite with Mr. Smith's census.

The Commissioners through their clerk, Thomas Munroe, submitted a statement of the buildings in the city to the President—*American State Papers, Vol. I, pp. 254-257*: Houses in a habitable state, 15th May, 1800: brick 109, frame 263, total 372; finished since 15th May, 1800: brick 82 frame 145, total 227; purposed to be finished before 15th November, 1801: brick 16, frame 6; houses unfinished: brick 79, frame 35, total 114; or houses finished and unfinished brick 286, frame 449, total 735.

On September 26, 1793, Greenleaf and Daniel Carroll of Duddington entered into an agreement whereby the former was to purchase of the latter every alternate lot allotted in the division to the proprietor (Carroll) between the forks of the canal for £30 (\$80) each; Carroll was to invest the proceeds and Greenleaf £3000 in two years and £3000 in four years, in improvements in that latitude. As Greenleaf was to receive the public lots he would have had with the proprietor's three-fourths of all, within the forks aforesaid. Greenleaf and Carroll July 8, 1794, effected a preliminary division of lots; and Morris and Nicholson with Carroll in the summer of 1796, a permanent.

On the same day, by separate articles, Carroll covenanted with Greenleaf to convey him twenty lots fronting on South Capitol street in all convenient speed after the division with the

Commissioners, upon the condition he should erect thereon twenty good brick houses, each twenty-five feet front by forty deep, two stories high, to be completed within three years from date, and if not, the condition of conveyance was to be void and a penalty incurred of £100 (\$266) for each lot not built upon.

On June 8, 1795, the building agreement was so amended that Greenleaf could build houses of any description he desired if they covered an equal extent and were of same height; ten to be built on the south side of square 651, the residue on the east side.

Pursuant to agreement, July 10, 1795, both contracts were assigned, May 13, 1796, by Greenleaf to Morris and Nicholson.

Mr. Cranch says that on February 16, 1796, having eight thousand dollars in notes of the Bank of the United States in his pocket, he offered the same to Mr. Carroll on account of the land contract provided he would concede Morris and Nicholson an extension of one year on the building contract; that Carroll refused and on the next day in writing reiterated the refusal.

From my youth I have heard of Mr. Carroll's obstinacy and how his exorbitant demands defeated the growth of the Eastern end and wrought his own disaster. In this incident is verification.

Mr. Morris upon receiving Mr. Carroll's refusal, resolved at all hazards to complete the houses within the contract time, so curtailed by the tardiness of the proprietor (Carroll) and the Commissioners in the formal division. He wrote, May 20, 1796, to Mr. Cranch, that he (Cranch) and Mr. Lovering in conjunction should act in his behalf in the drafting of plans; and that he should disburse the money and Lovering supervise the work; and Morris also diplomatically hinted a preference for drafts at longest time. I refrain from reciting the sacrifice and struggle of Morris in this connection, on account of the reader that he may tire of repetition of the Financier's trials and troubles and, on my own account, from sympathy for the sufferer. Mr. Nicholson directed Mr. William Prentiss to be for him both fiscal and building agent. As contractor Prentiss put up four of the N street houses. The hardship and heroism of Nicholson were none the less than that of Morris.

The twenty buildings were, in fact, thirty; the enterprise being designated by the contract term. Morris built fifteen and

Nicholson, fifteen. Nicholson built the south eight surely, eleven, probably, on South Capitol street and four on N street.

To September 26, Morris expended \$19,372; Nicholson, \$22,000. On South Capitol street beginning at M, southward, were five houses each twenty-nine feet five inches front; then an alley twenty-five feet wide; then twelve houses each twenty feet wide; then an alley twenty feet wide, then five houses each twenty-nine feet five inches front, the most southern on the corner with N street. On N, were four houses each eighteen feet one inch front; then a vacant space; then four houses each eighteen feet nine inches front, the most western on the corner with Half street. The houses on South Capitol street had "breast summer fronts" and were "capable of making a handsome row of shops." Six were complete at the stipulated time; the others were covered in. Morris had his covered three days before and Nicholson some hour in the forenoon of—that eventful day.

It is Monday, the twenty-sixth day of September, 1796. A fortnight previous Mr. Prentiss had received from Messrs. Morris and Nicholson direction what to do and the wherewithal to do it. He had despatched messengers with invitations in polite phrase. And now, are here, some of the first citizens and more of the useful ones, some who earn their livelihood by their heads, and more who earn it by their hands, exponents of thought and exponents of toil, spick and span, for the jollification, two hundred strong. The sun is in the meridian; it is the appointed hour yet where are the hosts? With the morning of the second Mr. Morris journeyed toward the federal city; he had accomplished the wearisome jog and jumble from the brotherly city and for a few weeks had quartered at the Union Tavern in George Town with Mr. Nicholson who had preceded him.* And still—but around the curve the coach comes in view; a minute and another, the alert Nicholson alights and then the stout Morris. Right in the center of the wide South Capitol street, in front of the edifices, from M extending to N are two parallel impro-

**The Washington Gazette.*

Mr. Nicholson being now in the City of Washington invites all persons who have business to transact with him, or with Mr. Morris and himself, to call upon him, during his stay, either at Scott's Tavern, near the President's house, from three to four o'clock in the afternoon, or at the Union Tavern, in George-Town till 7 o'clock in the morning.

August 31.

vised tables of sheathing and along these tables the guests dispose themselves and at the upper end a similar table connects the two and here the hosts take their seats and there too and close by the first citizens, theirs.

Here's neither want of appetite nor mouths;
Pray Heaven we be not scant of meat nor mirth!

No there is no scantiness of meat at least—for—within the tables upon the frames are, roasted whole, bullocks two, and mutton too, sable and savory, and the appropriate accompaniments, potato, pickle and all sorts. The cooks are in aprons and caps of white and so, the waiters; the cooks carve and the waiters, or some of them, hustle with might and main, to assist the attack on the good cheer, as the others hurry to apply the needful antidote against choking, the cautious Prentiss has had the precaution to provide.

And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,
That cheer, but not inebriate wait on each.

For the abstainers is here the coffee pot and the tea pot.

Come, my lad, and drink beer!

For the temperate is the malt beverage, and very good brew it is, for is it not from *Greenleaf's* Brewery?

A few gill-sippers their modicum of strong waters.

For the hardened is "a moderate circulation of the bottle."

The cork shall start obsequious to the thumb.

The effervescent and exquisite patrician refreshing seems to be monopolized by the first citizens. The cigars circulate and the collation ceases.

Outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine.

And now the feast intellectual. Mr. Prentiss, the master of toasts and of the occasion, briefly introduces Mr. Morris. Up rises, The Financier, mighty in stature, mighty in speech; he extols the excellence of the workmanship of the artisans and mechanics, he tells of the little he has already done to build "the city" (meaning he has done a great deal) and of what great things he intends to do; and in peroration exhorts pride in their city and patriotism for their country. And here it is

in a wave of enthusiastic homage, all rising, the first citizens with outstretched arms exalt their glasses and the excited "Knights" toss their caps and hats in the air, break forth in a cheer, so like a cannonade, as to affright the dames and daughters at "The Point." The first citizens say something in stilted style and the Knights, emulous, in a homely way, make honest response.

The speaking is over and the company commingle, congratulating and complimenting. The ruddy faced, robust Morris, in his bluff way, grasps the hand of each and catches on; to the married it is: "happy man, happy man," to the bachelor, "lucky dog, lucky dog;" makes each feel that he has known him from the days of the cradle and watched his progress with the solicitude of a parent; the nimble and nervous Nicholson bustles around like a bee negotiating neighborly fraternity; Daniel Carroll of Duddington, directs to the mansion on the river bank where he first the daylight saw and tells of the changes in the landscape during his score and ten; William Cranch, the learned in books, unbends and chats with the skilled in tools; Benjamin More, the editor, warns not to miss the next issue of the *Washington Gazette*; Clotworthy Stephenson, Captain and carpenter, describes the laying of the corner stone of the Capitol for he was the marshal; Nicholas King, the draftsman and surveyor of Morris, emphasizes the city's requirement for a public library;* William Tunnicliff, who serves Nicholson in the same capacity, says the eastern end needs a hotel;† William Lovering looks with pride to his proportion of the edifices; Dr. Frederick May discourses—no, he is too taken with the houses to talk, he hires one and engages the painter to make the proper lettering on the front transom; and—but I cannot particularize every one. *Entente cordiale* is not to be lasting; the master of ceremonies, Prentiss,

*A library called the Washington Library was formed in 1797; the Librarian was N. King afterwards surveyor of the city—*George Wallerston's manuscript.*

† Tunnicliff's hotel was at the corner of Pennsylvania avenue and Ninth street, S. E. The building remains—square 925. A. C. C.

The Washington Gazette.

FLBECY HOSIERY,
FOR SALE.

Those who consult their health and comfort at this season of the year, are informed, that the Subscriber has a number of articles, such as Socks, Ankle Socks, Night-Caps, Gloves, Stockings, Drawers and Shirts—All of which he will sell cheap, at the Eastern-Branch Hotel.

WILLIAM TUNNICLIFF

Washington, Jan. 25. (1797.)

espies a dark cloud, yet small, above the horizon and he takes note:

Carroll was or appeared to be on the very best terms with Morris and Nicholson; he appeared well pleased and satisfied; he never heard that Carroll had at any time expressed any sentiments in regard to the erection of the twenty buildings which were not approbatory and much to the honor of said Morris and Nicholson.

Entertainers and entertained disperse and depart with the declining day; and on his beat, the watchman; no—there are no watchmen save the watchful

Owls, that mark the setting sun,

and perched upon the boughs remain in undisturbed sovereignty; and on his round, the lamplighter—no, there is no lamp save the moon, and her willing lamp of liquid light to bless the night.

And sure enough in the next issue of the *Washington Gazette*, Wednesday, the 28th, the editor gives his account and if it is correct can be ascertained by comparing with the one which precedes:

Last week twenty two-story brick dwelling-houses, begun by Mr. Robert Morris and Mr. John Nicholson, about the 28th of June last, was completely covered.

And on Monday the above gentlemen treated themselves, a few of their acquaintance, the architects, workmen and laborers,—being nearly two hundred in number, with a barbecue on the spot.

We do not recollect ever to have seen a greater appearance of social glee on similar occasion.

The above buildings are the greatest effect of private enterprise of any in the city, and for the time in which they were building, we believe the greatest in the United States.

They stand on square 651, taking the whole front on South Capitol Street; and greater part of the front on South N Street. We must note that this is the first and only entire front built on any square in the City.

The birth, 1802, of Methodism in the city of Washington was in the twenty buildings. The house at the intersection of South Capitol and N streets is designated as the honored one where the Society first held divine worship under the ministry of the Rev. William Walters. It is published in this connection the houses were two story and basement, the basement of stone and the remainder of good quality brick.

This is how they looked to a wandering Englishman in 1804, Charles Wm. Janson, *The Stranger in America* :

In proof of this observation, a traveller need only cast his eye on what is called the twenty buildings, at Greenleaf's Point, begun by the gentleman above alluded to, Nickolson and others, first-rate speculators. A long range of houses there was so advanced before they discovered their mistake, as to be covered in, but they remain unfinished, and are dropping piecemeal.

Mr. Morris expresses in a letter an opinion that if the houses in course of construction are not completed it would be better for the city they had not been commenced. And true their forlorn condition made the mark for sarcastic hits by the British tourists. The twenty buildings by their elevated situation first attracted the tourists' attention; and, by them, they gave general description to all.

Thomas Moore, the poet, 1804, writes :

The private buildings exhibit the same characteristic display of arrogant speculation and premature ruin; and the few ranges of houses which were begun some years ago have remained so long waste and unfinished that they are now for the most part dilapidated.

The Federal City (if it must be called a city) has not been much increased since Mr. Weld visited it. Most of the public buildings, which were then in some degree of forwardness, have been since utterly suspended. The hotel is already a ruin; a great part of its roof has fallen in, and the rooms are left to be occupied gratuitously by the miserable Scotch and Irish emigrants.

Charles Wm. Janson, 1806, writes :

Arrived at the city, you are struck with its grotesque appearance. In one view from the capitol hill, the eye fixes upon a row of uniform houses, ten or twelve in number, while it faintly discovers the adjacent tenements to be miserable wooden structures consisting, when you approach them, of two or three rooms one above another. Again, you see the hotel, which was vauntingly promised, on laying the foundation, to rival the large inns in England. This, like every other private adventure failed: the walls and the roof remain, but not a window! and, instead of accommodating the members of Congress, and travellers of distinction, as proposed, a number of the lowest order of Irish have long held the title of *naked possession*.

I have accorded to the tourists a full repetition of their overdrawn descriptions of the federal city. They give truth yet not the whole truth. Their animus affords amusement. Not all English travellers are national libellers, *one* is not chargeable with exaggeration and enmity. Mr. Twining's book is a delight; he tells what he hears and sees in a chatty and easy

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way. The transgressors invariably "protest too much" their innocence of bias in their preface of defamation; so does, Weld and Parkinson and Janson and Moore. Mr. Janson asserts he is without prejudice and then writes:

John Bull laughs at the recital of his own follies; while the slightest sarcasm rouses a spirit of resentment in the bosom of the sullen Yankees.

Mr. Parkinson says:

I take up my pen, therefore, to write the following pages, free from all unfounded prejudices against America,

and then writes two volumes of abuse.

Mr. Parkinson further says:

General Washington having in a most friendly manner given me his opinion of the whole country, so that I might know how to situate myself, he had told me Baltimore was and would be the risingest town in America, except the federal city.

Mr. Parkinson having computed an insufficiency of consumers for a brewery in the federal city, procured a farm near Baltimore and his husbandry having been unsuccessful he like Mr. Janson repaired to England and promulgated a warning:

If a man wants wits, he may go to America; but if he wants money and comfort, he should stay at home.

Mr. Parkinson advised of his unfitness acknowledges it:

I was the most unfit man for their country he had ever met with, as I meant to pay every one, and they would not act in the same manner to me.

The poet's animosity was through wounded pride having been received by President Jefferson at his levee in the "homely costume, comprising slippers and Connemara stockings" and so he writes:

The President's house, a very noble structure, is by no means suited to the philosophical humility of its present possessor, who inhabits but a corner of the mansion himself, and abandons the rest to a state of uncleanly desolation, which those who are not philosophers cannot look at without regret.*

*Finally (about 1814 we should say), Moore's Irish Melodies appeared in the United States. Our informant in all these particulars, with some curiosity, put the book into her grandfather's hands. "Why," said he "this is the little man who satirized me so!" He read along. He had always sympathized keenly with the Irish patriots. The delightful rhythm fell like music on a susceptible ear. He presently exclaimed: "Why, he is a poet after all."—The Life of Thomas Jefferson by Henry S. Randall, LL.D.

Mr. Parkinson and Mr. Faux and other English travellers investigated agricultural utility. They found a young and undeveloped country; they reported it sterile and hopeless. The desert has blossomed as the rose.

In the apologetic address which precedes Mr. Weld's work appears:

If it shall appear to any one, that he has spoken with too much asperity of American men and American manners, the Author begs that such language may not be ascribed to hasty prejudice, and a blind partiality for everything that is European. He crossed the Atlantic strongly prepossessed in favour of the people and the country, which he was about to visit; and if he returned with sentiments of a different tendency, they resulted from a cool and dispassionate observation of what chance presented to his view when abroad.

Mr. Fearon* in 1818 arrived in the city where Mr. Law resides which he describes as "the depot for office-holders, place-hunters, and boarding-house keepers" without appearance of "possession of too much of this world's goods." He says that a storekeeper to remedy his want of change with scissors promptly divided a note in two; that he found demi-notes a common circulating medium; and that, he had been "previously familiarised with Spanish dollars cut into every variety of size."

Mr. Fearon deprecates the destruction of public buildings. He characterizes the site an injudicious selection upon which to raise the capital of a great nation; his charge of "folly" is soundly taken for nothing less than a brick, two stories high, twelve hundred feet area or twenty five feet by forty eight, was originally contemplated.

There are a number of two and three story buildings, none of which are uninhabited; and also some small wooden houses, though according to the original plan, none were to be built less than three stories high, and all to have marble steps. But the childish folly of this scheme was soon subverted by the natural course of events; and though the existence of "*lower orders*," even in the capital of the republic, may not accord with the vanity of its legislators, they ought to be told, that neither prosperity nor population can be possessed by any nation, without a due admixture of the *natural classes* of society.

Mr. Fearon from his analytical investigation of the American character because of his optimistic view was enabled to catch a gleam of hope.

* Sketches in America.—Henry Bradshaw Fearon.

I have thus endeavored to lay before you a true representation of the American character, with the sources from which it may have been formed, and the causes which have conduced to its production. Although I believe it must improve, yet I am by no means sanguine in my anticipations that improvement will be immediate, or even rapid in its progress. Many of the causes, external and internal, which have already operated, will continue to exist; and, as I have before said, there would appear to be placed in the very stamina of the character of this people a coldness, a selfishness, and a spirit of conceit, which form strong barriers against improvement. Let us, however, still hope for the best.

Mr. J. Kent, the English translator of Marquis Chastellux's work was within the borders of the new nation yet under the Articles of Confederation and he observed youth in another respect, it is a country "where morals are in their infancy."

I must accept these Britons' estimate of American morals or adopt the suspicion they congregated with the questionable.

Mr. Davis, the pedagogue, has some fame in his fictitious incident of Mr. Jefferson's inauguration:

His dress was of plain cloth, and he rode on horseback to the Capitol without a single guard, or even servant in his train, dismounted without assistance, and hitched the bridle of his horse to the palisades.

Mr. Davis says of the "Imperial city" after a congressional adjournment:

Washington, on my second journey to it, wore a very dreary aspect. The multitude had gone to their homes, and the inhabitants of the place were few. There were no objects to catch the eye, but a forlorn pilgrim forcing his way through the grass that overruns the streets; or a cow ruminating on a bank, from whose neck depended a bell, that the animal might be found the more readily in the woods.

Mr. Davis adverts in his preface to that which constrained him to add his testimony; he appreciates his own worth and contrasts it with the literary poverty of the other English travellers:

When the accidental perusal of those Travellers, determined me to become a publisher. A family likeness prevails through the whole. Their humour bears no proportion to their morbid drowsiness. We are seldom relieved from the languor of indifference, or the satiety of disgust; but in toiling through volumes of diffusive mediocrity, the reader commonly terminates his career by falling asleep with the writer. In comparing this Volume with the volumes of my predecessors, the reader will find himself exempt from various persecutions.*

* Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America; During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802.—*John Davis*.

Commercial Advertiser. From its correspondent. Washington, September 1, 1824.*

On a knowl south of Capitol Hill stands an object of peculiar dreariness ; it is a row of twenty brick buildings ; which without having ever been inhabited, have fallen into dilapidation and ruin. They were put up when speculation was at its height—the ground on which they stood became the subject of a suit ; they were locked up, broken into, and at length suffered to be pulled down peacemeal, and the doors and floors used for fuel. There they stand, with roofs sunk in and grass growing in the windows, looking as if they had been bombarded by the British. One of them has a family in it, but the inmates look like Arabs among the ruins of Balbec.

Twenty-building hill! The buildings have disappeared and no one can detect anything of the hill although its burnt clay is in pavement and wall everywhere.

*In the *Commercial Advertiser*, September 8, 1824, the contemporary customs and manners of this city are racily described. File in New York Historical Society.

