



VIEW OF NEW YORK, looking South-west from Green Point.

CHAPTER IV.

NEW YORK AS IT IS.

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE ISLAND.



NEW YORK Island is situated in the upper New York bay, eighteen miles from the Atlantic Ocean, at the mouth of the Hudson river, which forms its western boundary, is separated from Long Island by the East river, and from the rest of New York State by the Harlem river and Spuyten Duyvel creek. The island is thirteen and one-half miles long, two and one-half wide at its extreme point, contains fourteen thousand acres, and is by survey divided into 141,486 lots, twenty-five by one hundred feet each. Its original surface was diversified by broken rocky hills, marshes, and ponds of water, and by arable and sandy plains. The rocks, which consisted principally of gneiss, hornblende, slate, mica, limestone, and granite, have been, for the most part, too coarse and brittle for building purposes, but have been employed to advantage in grading and docking. A bold rocky ridge, starting on the southern portion, extended northward, branching off into several spurs, which again united, forming Washington Heights, the greatest elevation anywhere attained (two hundred and thirty-eight feet above tide), and ending in a sharp precipitous promontory at the northern extremity of the island.

A body of fresh water known as "Collect Pond," nearly two miles in circumference, and fifty feet deep, covered the territory of the present Five Points, and the site of the

Tombs, and was connected with the Hudson by a deep outlet on the line of Canal street, from which the street takes its name. This lake was encircled with a dense forest, and was the resort of skating parties in winter, while in summer Stevens and Fitch experimented in steam navigation on its waters ten years before Fulton's vessel skimmed the Hudson. Deep rivulets supplied by springs and marshes cut the surface in many directions. Up Maiden lane flowed a deep inroad from the bay. In the vicinity of Peck Slip ran a low water-course, which in the wet season united with the Collect, thus cutting off about eight hundred acres on the lower point, into a separate island. A deep stream flowed down Broad street, up which boatmen came for many years in their canoes to sell their oysters. The sources that supplied these lakes and streams still exist, and these waters are carried off through numerous immense sewers, covered deep in the earth, over which thousands tread daily, unconscious of their existence. The lower part of the island has been greatly widened by art; the whole territory covered by Front and Water streets on the east side, and by West, Greenwich, and Washington, on the west, including the whole site of Washington Market, was once swept by the billows of the bay. The chills and fever, with which hundreds of families are afflicted at this writing, result doubtless from these numerous covered but malarious marshes.

Civilization introduced gardening and farming. At the surrender of the Dutch dynasty the city occupied only the extreme southern portion of the island, a high wall, with ditch, having been thrown across it on the line of Wall street, for defence. All above this was for several years common pasture ground, but was afterwards divided into farms. The Governor's garden lay along what is now Whitehall street; the site of St. Paul's (Episcopal) Church was a rich wheat-field; the site of the old New York Hospital was once a fine orchard; the Bible House and Cooper Institute cover what at a later period was devoted to luxurious gardens. The central

portion of the island was during the English colonial period mapped out into rich productive farms, where men of means settled, became rich, and left their names in the streets that were afterwards constructed.

The city proper now extends from the Battery northward, and is compactly built for six miles, and irregularly to the Harlem river. The few vacant lots below Fifty-ninth street are being rapidly improved, and a vast amount of building is going on much farther up. Gardening is still conducted on a splendid scale on the upper portions of the island, though these green plots are being constantly encroached upon by the advance of the mason and the joiner. On the west side, through Bloomingdale, Manhattanville, and Washington Heights, may be found still some of the old country mansions and yards of the good *lang syne*, and many modern palatial residences glittering with costly splendor.

II. POPULATION AT DIFFERENT PERIODS.



THE growth of the city has been rapid, as a few statistics will show. In 1656 the population amounted to 1,000, in 1664 to 1,500, in 1700 to 5,000, in 1750 to 13,500, in 1774 to 22,750, in 1800 to 60,489, in 1820 to 123,706, in 1830 to 202,589, in 1840 to 312,932, in 1850 to 515,547, and in 1860 to 813,669. In consequence of the high prices occasioned by the war, and the disorganized condition of the various industrial pursuits, the census of 1865 showed a decrease in the population, which amounted to 726,386. The census returns of 1870 place the population of the island at 942,252. It is probable that the population of the island will eventually reach a million and a half, and perhaps even more. Many portions

of the city have long since been deserted by the better classes of society, but their departure has been speedily followed by a much denser packing of the localities thus deserted. In 1800 the fashionable part of the city was in Wall and Pine streets, and between Broadway and Pearl. It has gradually moved northward, lingering in our day long around Union Square, which has at last been deserted, and it is difficult deciding where the matter will end. When the plan for the erection of the City Hall was made, about seventy years ago, it was urged that the city would never extend above Chambers street; hence the rear wall of the edifice was made of sandstone, and not of marble like the rest, because it was said it would never be seen. To fill the entire island and suburbs, would produce an immensely smaller change than has already occurred since that time. There are now about sixty-five thousand buildings on the island, many of which cover several lots, and not a few twenty or thirty each; and as fully one thousand acres are covered by the parks and reservoirs, there is not as much vacant land remaining as many writers have supposed. The vicinity of Central Park is now considered the most eligible part of the city; but who can tell but even this may yet become a grand commercial theatre, as many places already have which were once held sacred by a generation long since departed? Some sections in the lower wards are now packed with a population amounting to the appalling figure of two hundred and ninety-thousand to the square mile. If this should become general, the island would contain over six millions. Hundreds of residences are annually rising on the upper parts of the island, but an equally large number farther down are being converted into places of business; and this, we opine, will continue until the entire island is one vast centre of commerce, manufacture, and storage. Thirty years will probably entirely drive the *élite* from the island. The bridges and tunnels now in immediate prospect will hasten this result, make the surrounding country for miles the real sub-

urbs of the metropolis, and fill it with wealth and palatial splendor. Already many thousands doing business here daily, reside in other places, not a few thirty, and some fifty miles up the Hudson. It has been estimated that two hundred thousand persons daily cross the East river, while not many less cross on the other side to New Jersey, Staten Island, or depart on the railroads running north. The construction of a railroad on the west side of the Hudson, and a bridge across the East river, at Blackwell's Island, will open eligible sections for suburban residences hitherto inaccessible to the business public of Manhattan. These enterprises cannot long be delayed.

III. STREETS AND AVENUES OF NEW YORK.

THE PLAN, THE PAVEMENTS, AND THE MODES OF TRAVEL—WALL STREET—BROAD STREET—BROADWAY—FIFTH AVENUE—BOULEVARD.



THE early settlers of Manhattan had no conception of the proportions the town was ultimately to assume, and, hence, formed no comprehensive plan for its outlay. In 1656 they resolved to lay out the streets of the city, which was done in a most grotesque manner. Washington Irving ludicrously describes the occurrence thus: "The sage council not being able to determine upon any plan for the building of their city, the cows, in a laudable fit of patriotism, took it under their peculiar charge, and as they went to and from pasture, established paths through the bushes, on each side of which the