

"Sweet Ashland, loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheer the laboring swain."

Messrs. EDITORS: As the political drama is not fairly opened, and the rehearsal now going on in the Senate and House has lost somewhat of interest, I have bid adieu for the present to dust and politics, and, with my family, sought a retreat at this truly charming place. A sail of three hours down the picturesque and beautiful Potomac and a ride for the same length of time over one of the best conducted railroads in America brings you to Ashland. The first object which meets the eye, as you approach the "Cottage," (as the spacious and beautiful hotel is familiarly called,) is a large sign, with the likeness of Henry Clay, who has made the name of Ashland as famous as Andrew Jackson has the Hermitage; and I am sure that there is nothing *mal a propos* in placing the names of the two "mighty chiefs" in this connexion, for

"Beneath their banners, proud to stand,
Looked up the noblest of the land."

Inscribed in large letters appears those memorable words, "I would rather be right than be President." On the reverse is the likeness of the American Demosthenes, with the words, "Give me liberty or give me death." As you enter the hall you are greeted by the host, Mr. Thompson, of whom it is but just to say that he is eminently qualified for his position, and is one of the kindest and most accommodating gentlemen I have ever met with. I am informed by those who have known him long that he wears well, and is always the same. Mrs. T, the worthy better-half, is untiring in her efforts to render her guests comfortable and happy; and their interesting and accomplished daughter adds another charm to the place. Ashland is situated on an elevated plain, and is unsurpassed for its health. Persons who reside here both winter and summer testify to this fact. There is an enclosure of forty acres round the hotel, dotted with beautiful cottages, the architecture of which is in every variety of style, Italian, Swiss, and Gothic; some of them like feudal castles, with their towers and buttresses, surmounted with frowning cannon. Even the gas-house, (for be it known that the luxury of gas is enjoyed at Ashland,) which stands in the centre of the lawn, resembles some Oriental villa. Beautifully gravelled walks lead through a sea of verdure, and, to cap the climax, a beautiful variety of flowers (or, as Mrs. Sigourney calls them, "stars of the earth") are now in full bloom, and shed their delightful odors around. The shade trees, too, are so arranged as to combine health with comfort; for, while they are sufficiently umbrageous to afford ample protection from the sun, they are not close enough either to prevent a free circulation of air or to create dampness. And now from the *dulce* to the *utile*. The culinary arrangements of the hotel are perfect and the fare is delicious. I have been at all the first-class hotels in the United States, and I have never tasted better cooked meats and vegetables or a better variety; while the waiters are colored Chesterfields, and are devoted in their attentions. To sum it up, every luxury that the Norfolk and Richmond market or the neighboring country affords, of fruit, fish, or fowl, is on the table, not forgetting the many cows and the superabundance of milk which they furnish. Bath-houses, with hot and cold water, are ready at all times. There are bowling saloons and an immense ball-room. On last Friday two schools, numbering one hundred and fifty of Virginia's fairest daughters, attended a picnic at the invitation of Col. Edwin Robinson, the President of the Railroad Company. They passed the day most agreeably, rolling ninepins, dancing, &c., and eat down to a dinner that Lucullus might have envied. Their post-prandial pleasures continued until near seven o'clock, and we all regretted to see them leave. A gentleman from Richmond with an interesting family (two full-blown roses and two buds) are occupants of the hotel, and have been there for a month. We caught a glimpse of several other pretty ladies, but as they occupy cottages and only come to their meals, we have not seen much of them. Ashland has really risen as from the wand of an enchanter. One can scarcely realize the fact that but five years since the spot which I am describing was a primeval forest. It (to borrow a fashionable political phrase) had no "territorial pupilage," no chrysalis state, but, like Minerva from the head of Jove, has sprung into existence a full grown town, yea, a city in the country, and all this accomplished through the indomitable energy and enterprise of one man, Col. Edwin Robinson, President of the Richmond and Potomac Railroad Company. Success to him and all such spirits, say we. On both sides of the road the same spirit of improvement is manifest; every thing seems to be new and flourishing; nothing effete or worn. In fact progress seems to be written on every door-post. Ashland is a happy illustration of what Macaulay says about Lord Bacon's philosophy. "What was its goal to-day is its starting post to-morrow." *Apropos* of "starting post," that brings me to the race-course. This, by-the-by, is another creation of the energetic Col. R., and, although but a few years old, is one of the finest tracks in America. The star-spangled banner is waving from several beautiful buildings, the club houses, &c.—an evidence that the spring term is at hand. It commences on Tuesday, the 23d, and continues the whole of the week. We saw the horses practice—Lowet, who has just returned the victor from the Fairfield races, and who, by his proud and gallant step, seems to be conscious of the laurels that he won; Dely Walker, Frank Walker, Muddy Cow, &c., whose ancestors are illustrious on both sides in turf annals. Great sport is anticipated, and the best Virginia society of both sexes will grace the scene. Near the race-course, and as if to point the moral that, while thinking of time, we should not be heedless of eternity, stands the Baptist church, a beautiful edifice. There is also a Methodist church. The private residences on the road are furnished in city style, and the rich lace curtains at the windows show that their occupants are persons who have been successful in life. We must not omit to mention that a gentleman from Richmond, of historic name, an author and a man of fine literary taste, teaches a flourishing male school, and there is also a fine female academy. In conclusion, we would say to all who wish to enjoy pure country air, with all the comforts and luxuries of a city, at a moderate price, come to Ashland.

In verification of what I have said touching the sanitary condition of fair Ashland, I may mention that the health of my family has been so much improved since their temporary sojourn here as to induce a lengthy tarry at a place so desirable.

A. M.