CHAPTER IV.

PANTHETIC OR CelATION OF NAYI ISLAND—EMPLOY OF THE CAROLINE—MISREPRESENTATION AND RESOLVE—CAROLINE ATTACKED—DURFEE MURDERED—VESSEL FIRED AND SENT OVER THE FALLS—EVACUATION OF THE ISLAND.

"Night and silence came down on the beautiful earth;  
Peace hovered on valley and hill;  
Hushed became every sound of lamenting or mirth;  
And all but the cataract still,  
Hark! shrieks pierce the air!  
Soo! shines the red glare!  
God! can thy creatures thus ruthlessly dare,  
Stain the bright earth with a scene of despair?  
Fools! they forget that earth is not hell,  
And rebel."

URING the Canada insurrection, in the winter of 1837, after the failure of the attempt on Toronto, and the escape of McKenzie to the United States, that individual, with one Sutherland, and some five or six and twenty others, principally refugees from Canada, at the suggestion of Dr. Cyrenus Chapin, of Buffalo, made a lodgement on Navy Island, in the British dominion, and set up the standard of opposition to the Queen's Colonial Government. The natural sympathy of the American people, with the patriot cause, as it was termed, of McKenzie and his confederates, soon displayed itself in the arrival of large numbers of volunteers, to reinforce his little band, bringing with them supplies of arms, ammunition, and provisions.

The distance of the island from the American shore, the velocity of the current, and the want of proper boats, rendered the transportation of these volunteers and supplies, to the place of their destination, a work of great labour and difficulty. This circumstance, and the number of persons, from motives of business or curiosity, constantly desirous of passing and re-passing, from the main land to the patriot camp, suggested to Mr. Wells, the owner of a small steam-boat, lying at Buffalo,
boat, between the American shore and the Island, for his pecuniary emolument. Acting upon this suggestion, the Caroline, on Friday, the twenty-ninth of December, left Buffalo for Schlosser; after her arrival, made several trips to and from the island, on account of the owner, and at night was securely moored to the wharf at Schlosser.

Some person, or persons, residents of Canada, then at Buffalo, conveyed intelligence to Colonel McNab, then commanding her Majesty's forces, about three thousand strong, at Chippewa, of the departure of the Caroline, and her destination; probably, mis-stating the object of her owner, and representing her as in the service of the patriots; chartered for their use, and intended to act offensively, against the constituted authorities of the Provincial Government. Under this erroneous impression, that officer resolved to effect her destruction, and made arrangements for putting his design into immediate execution. The force for this expedition, was detailed, and placed under the command of Captain Drew, a retired-on-half-pay Commander of the Royal Navy. At midnight, the men were mustered under the personal superintendence of Colonel McNab; Captain Drew received his final directions, and they embarked in eight boats for the scene of operation.

On the American side, all was still, and no one even dreamed of danger. The fated vessel was full of people, most of whom, unable to obtain accommodations at the tavern, the only dwelling near, had solicited a night's lodging on the Caroline; thinking no ill, and anticipating no alarm. The boat was moored at an American wharf, in American waters; the stars and stripes — the flag of their country — floated above them, and they went to sleep in peace, and, as they thought, in safety. There were no arms or munitions on board; and no precautions were taken against surprise, for none were thought necessary. The customary watch was set, the evening waned, and night and slumber shed their sweet influences over all.

The young sailor on watch, was thinking, per chance of home, gazing at the camp-fires on the opposite shore, at Chippewa, or listening, it may be, to the deep roar of the cataract, and fancying there were bars of music in its sweet, solemn tones — when suddenly, he hears something moving on the water — oars! boats! — "Who goes there?" "Friends," — another moment, and armed men are crowding the peaceful deck of the Caroline. — "Cut them down! give no quarters!" There is a fearful rush, — the clashing of weapons, — reports of fire-arms, — forms half-naked,
and faces pale with fear, are springing to the shore, through blows and thrusts that rain above and around them. A moment's pause — another unarmed man appears, gazes wildly round — throws up his hands to ward off the blows aimed at his life, and leaps upon the dock. — A shout — the crack of a pistol — the flying man falls heavily to the earth — blood and brains flow from a new-made wound — a shiver — stillness — an immortal spirit has gone to its great account — Durfee is dead — and the very soil of American Freedom has been outraged by the unprovoked slaughter of one of her sons!

The Caroline is silently receding from the shore, — a spark — a blaze — flames! — Heavens, they have fired her! Quickly the flames spread — onward passes the doomed vessel — the rapids gather about her — and her blazing timbers fling a lurid and fearful glare upon the mad sea of waters — the dark scenery of shores and islands — and the black heaven above.

A bright beacon flares up, and lights the far-off shore, — a shout comes booming over the waters — and a yell of hatred and defiance rolls back from McKenzie's host.

But the Caroline! — on, still on! — Hark! was that a shriek? — it may be fancy; — is that a

human form? — God only knows! — On dashes the flame-wrapt vessel — the waters rage more impetuously beneath her — she reels — plunges — the forked flames play like demons around her red-hot pipes and bars, and over her glowing deck — the surges beneath her hiss, and sparkle, and flash — on she drives with a tempest-speed through the torture of fire and flood — she nears the precipice — gains the brink — a fiery plunge — the secrets of the deep were revealed in an instant's flash — the jaws of the abyss opened and shut — then — all was dark, and the Caroline was gone forever!

The destruction of the Caroline, and the murder of Durfee excited the American people along the frontier to a degree almost incredible. In the first fervor of indignation, had any daring mind proposed such a step, and headed the movement, a force might have been poured into Canada, compared to which, the army of McNab would have been a mere cypher. But, although every-body was in motion, although execration was on every

*It is believed, that there were several persons on board the Caroline, when she went over the Falls, who had concealed themselves in terror below, at the time of the attack. Certain it is, that five or six individuals were missing from that night, of whose fate no other supposition is probable.
lip, and arms in every hand, no one thought of crossing the river, and taking vengeance for the deed. The reason was this. They thought the outrage so great, so unparalleled in its atrocity, that the government must take the matter at once in hand; and that, unless the perpetrators were instantly given up, Canada would be immediately invaded with fire and sword. The people waited for the government, and so a war, a bloody and sanguinary war, was averted.

The force on Navy Island was now about six hundred strong. Compliments at the cannon’s mouth had been exchanged with the forces at Chippewa, and one man on the Island had been killed. Preparations were making to cross into Canada, when, by the prompt interposition of General Scott, the Island was evacuated, and the Patriot army dispersed.

Such is a faithful history of the rise, progress, and termination of the Navy Island War, in which one man was killed, and nobody wounded! And such, also, a concise account of the capture and destruction of the Caroline, and the death of Durfee, according to the best of American knowledge and belief.

CHAPTER V.
HERMIT OF THE FALLS—HIS ARRIVAL AT NIAGARA—EFFECT OF THE SCENERY—HIS HABITS, MANNERS, AND ENDOWMENTS—RESIDENCE AND DEATH—OTHER PARTICULARS.

“But soon he knew himself the most unfit
Of men, to lose with Man; with whom he held
Little in common; untaught to submit
His thoughts to others, though his soul was quelled
In youth, by his own thoughts; still, uncompelled,
He would not yield dominion of his mind
To spirits against whom his own rebelled;
Proud, though in desolation; which could find
A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.”

RANCIS ABBOTT—the Hermit of the Falls, whose unsocial life, and untimely fate, have made a deep impression upon the public mind, may justly claim the courtesy of a notice, far more lengthy than our limits will permit—we must be brief. There is a charm in every mystery that attracts observation, and excites curiosity. His character is a sealed volume—his life scarcely less so—both are inexplicable. The written pages of his heart and mind are open to the All-Seeing alone.

In humble guise, he came to Niagara in 1829, to remain, perhaps, for a week. He grew