PICTORIAL GUIDE
TO
NIAGARA FALLS.

PART II.

THE CATARACT
AND OTHER
OBJECTS OF CURIOSITY.

"Flow on forever in thy glorious robe
Of terror and of beauty. God hath set
His rainbow on thy forehead, and the cloud
Mantles around thy feet!"
PICTORIAL GUIDE

TO

NIAGARA FALLS.

CHAPTER I.


"My brain grows wild, sense wanders as I gaze
Upon the hurrying waters, and my sight
Vainly would follow, as towards the verge
Sweeps the wide torrent. Waves innumerable
Meet there and madden; waves innumerable
Urge on and overtake the waves before,
And disappear in thunder and in foam.
They reach, they leap the barrier: the abyss
Swallows insatiable the sinking waves.
A thousand rainbows arch them, and the woods
Are deafened with the everlasting roar."

ONARCH of floods! how shall I approach thee? — how speak of thy glory? — how extol thy beauty?
Ages have seen thy awful majesty;
earth has paid tribute to thy greatness; the best and wisest among men have bent
the knee at thy footstool, but none have and none can describe thee! Alone thou standest among the wonders of nature, unshaken by the shock of contending elements, flinging back the flash of the lightning, and outroaring the thunder of the tempests' rage! Allied to the everlasting hills, and claiming kindred with the eternal flood, thou art pillared upon the one, and the other supplies thy surge. Primeval rocks environ, clouds cover, and the rainbow crowns thee. A divine sublimity reposes on thy fearless brow; an awful beauty is revealed in thy terrible countenance, and the heavy earth is shaken by thy tremendous voice. Born in the dark past, and alive to the distant future, what to thee are the paltry concerns of man's ambition? — the rise or fall of empires and dynasties, the contests of kings, or the crash of thrones? Thou art unmoved by the fate of nations, and the revolutions of the earth are to thee but the pulses of time. Kings before thee are but men, and man but a type of insignificance!

Such are some of the sensations and thoughts awakened at the sight of Niagara. Such sublimity, such immensity, such power! Overshadowing all earthly considerations by its solemn greatness, and contrasting the feebleness of human strength with a force visibly reaching to the infinite, the cataract impresses almost every one who beholds it for the first time, with the feeling of self-abasement so well expressed by Mrs. Sigourney in the lines —

"Thou dost make the soul
A wondering witness of thy majesty;
And while it rushes with delirious joy
To tread thy vestibule, dost chain its steps,
And check its rapture, with the humbling view
Of its own nothingness;"

and so entirely confounds him by its magnitude, grandeur, and energy, that he is for a time utterly unable to individualize and appreciate the august and ineffable attributes of this wonderful and glorious work of the Omnipotent Architect, who formed and harmonized its amazing and awful proportions.

After having become more familiarized with its general aspect, and examined it more in detail, we find that it is in every part entitled to unbounded admiration. Every time it is looked upon, some new beauty, or some fresh sublimity is perceived, and we begin gradually to realize what a grand combination of separate and distinct objects of interest are blended into one overpowering and perfect whole, the tout ensemble of which leaves nothing to be desired, and can by nothing be
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paralleled. It may tire the eye by its vastness, and
fatigue the ear by its rush, but can never pall upon
the mind, and when the senses are refreshed by
rest, they return to it with delight. The soul
clings to it with a likeness of religious faith, for
awe becomes softened into love, and affection is
elevated to reverence. All things really great or
beautiful grow upon our esteem at each succeed-
ing interview or communion; as on the other hand,
all things insignificant or ugly lessen in our respect
every time they are encountered.

A mighty river pours down a tremendous height,
and falls into a vast abyss:—this is a grand cata-
raft—Niagara is something more. Its sea of
rapids, its clouds of spray, its lake of foam, its
projecting cliffs, its piled-up rocks, its gorgeous
colours, its fine cascades, its lovely islands, its
giant caves, its deafening roar,—these, and a
host of other marvels and beauties, combine to
make up that wonderful thing, Niagara! and each
of these claims especial attention, and is worthy
of particular praise.

The river Niagara, after a course of twenty-
one miles, has a rapid declination, and rushing
down with inconceivable fury, is impeded by rocks
and ledges, dashing around and over which it is
thrown into terrible confusion, and, leaping here,
Fall between the American shore and Prospect Island; the Central or Crescent Fall between Prospect and Iris Islands, and the British or Horse-shoe Fall between Iris Island and the Canada shore—these form the Cataract of Niagara.

The form of the cataract is an irregular indented curve, measuring—Iris and Prospect Islands inclusive—something more than fourteen hundred yards, or above three fourths of a mile—the periphery of the Horse-shoe Fall being about seven hundred yards, of the Central Fall about twenty yards, and of the American Fall three hundred and thirty yards. The perpendicular visible descent, on the American side, is one hundred and sixty-four feet—of the Horse-shoe Fall, one hundred and fifty-eight feet. By far the largest portion of the river, is carried over the Horse-shoe Fall, where the water is so deep as to flow almost smoothly over, and pass down in one vast unbroken sheet.

The spray from this part of the Falls rises in such dense masses, as sometimes to obscure nearly the whole view from below, and hovers in such vast clouds above the cataract as to be visible forty or fifty miles. It is often seen by the distant observer, when the sky is clear and there is no wind, to float up and undulate gently above the

Falls, like an immense milk-white plume, fringed with gold, and tinted with the most delicate and beautiful colours. When the wind is strong down the river, the spray fills the whole chasm with a thick foggy mist, and renders the ferry-crossing not a little uncomfortable, from the drenching showers that fall around. At sunrise on a clear morning, other circumstances being favourable, the rising mists, or spray, present a variety of beautiful and interesting phenomena; now rolling up in huge fantastic and curling volumes, glowing in richest purple, crimson, gold, and a thousand other bright and blended hues; and now sparkling in the light like a shower of precious stones, or as if the prismatick rays were frolicking among the falling drops.

The foot of the Falls is never seen from these dense clouds of mist and spray, that are forever rolling up; and the great body of water in the basin below is violently agitated and tossed, panting and throbbing as if it had an imprisoned earthquake struggling to get free, within its heaving bosom, or was convulsed by the torture of internal fires. The whole surface is covered with a thick white foam, and resembles a tempestuous sea of milk, surging, boiling, whirling, and billowing as it rolls away, and at last, rippling and dissolving in
the distance, or nestling in little patches among the rocks and eddies of the shore. Seen from above, the abyss appears like a vast seething cauldron, bubbling, foaming, and steaming up, without relaxation, and without repose. This confused turbulence, is undoubtedly occasioned by the action and reaction of the prodigious body of water falling from so great a height, and forced to such an immense depth. The buried volumes crowding each other on, and pushing and displacing the superincumbent mass, with an energy and power proportioned to their quantity and impulsion, must of necessity produce a tremendous agitation, and keep the whole accumulating and shifting flood in constant commotion and turmoil.

The quantity of water precipitated over the cataract has been variously estimated by different persons. Dr. Dwight, supposing a current of six miles an hour, computes it at 1,225,125,000 tons per day; 102,093,750 tons per hour; 170,156 tons per minute; and 28,359 tons per second; and this, incredibly great as the quantity must appear, is probably a close approximation to the truth. Of course, it is not always the same. A strong wind down the lake has the effect of raising the river above the Falls one or two feet, and inversely in a less proportion. A rise of eighteen inches

above the cataract, causes the water to rise in the basin beneath, above fifteen feet. This phenomenon is owing to the contraction of the channel below.

The banks of the river at the Falls, average nearly two hundred and fifty feet in height, and present a most imposing appearance. In several places they project over to a considerable distance;—at Table Rock, in particular, this feature is strikingly apparent, and enables the visitor to pass some distance under the great sheet itself, where one of the most grand and impressive scenes is presented to the awe-struck beholder, of which it is possible to conceive. Along the whole end of Iris Island the vast rock of which it is composed, is also impending, and has a dangerous and fearful aspect, which produces upon some nerves, a terrific and quite overpowering effect.

The noise, or roar of the cataract, is not so astounding as the lover of thunder might perhaps desire; but it is in keeping with the scene, and may be heard twenty or thirty miles. Ordinarily, it falls upon the ear with a ceaseless rushing sound, like that of a strong wind through a forest of trees, for which it is sometimes mistaken by persons approaching the Falls. But it is deep,
solemn, and continuous, and though it does not burst upon the tympanum like the startling crash of worlds, is yet inconceivably impressive. Some whose auricular organs are more delicately attuned than those of the many, find it almost insupportable. People in the vicinity of the Falls, from constantly hearing it, become so familiarized with the sound, that it is scarcely perceived—like the air they breathe, it is a part of the world in which they live and move, and hence, too common to be remarked. It has been said, that its effect upon the inhabitants near, is, in time, to make them deaf; but this, if it be so, is a fact yet to be established. In the village, its sweeter and sublimer sounds are hardly perceptible; and even on the islands, or at Table Rock, are, so to speak, nearly drowned in the rush and roar of the tumbling floods; but stop and listen—on the Terrapin Bridge for instance—and above, and as it were breaking through the general roar, you will hear its sonorous tones rolling up like subdued thunder, peal following peal, rising, falling, swelling, and diminishing, in soft and musical cadences, and hymning an eternal anthem of sweet and solemn praise to its Almighty Maker. Not to hear this, is to lose one of the most delectable pleasures of Niagara.

The state of the atmosphere, of course, affects the roar of the Falls; and the distance to which it may be heard is consequently dependent upon the rarity or density of the air. Generally, it may be distinguished four or five leagues off, but has frequently been observed at Buffalo, and once, it is said, even at Toronto, forty-five miles distant. In the region of country near the cataract, the noise affords to the inhabitants barometrical indications of the most unfailing and accurate character. When the sound is uncommonly loud and distinct, however clear the sky, or pleasant the season, it presages a change of weather, and a coming storm. An opposite predication based upon the reverse of this phenomenon, is also infallibly verified by the event. And thus even the hidden decrees of destiny are in part revealed to man, by the prophet-voiced roar of the thunder-tongued cataract.

The solid earth vibrates in unison with the concussions of the cataract, and is affected sensibly by the shock of the contending floods. You do not indeed feel the ground shaking beneath your feet, but in the most substantial buildings, a tremulous motion is at times apparent, which can arise from nothing but the jar of the Falls. In the stillness of night, this sympathy of the shores with
the cataract, is most apparent; the shutters creak, the windows rattle, and strangers sometimes awake in the midst of a fancied tempest, to find the sky serene, the winds hushed, and the bright moon and stars shedding their silver rays upon the beautiful earth and the shining stream.

Almost every imaginable tint in nature may be seen at the Falls, in the gorgeous and shifting rainbows that meet you at almost every turn—now sleeping quietly below, now arching the chasm, anon resting on the brink, and then stretching up from the frothing abyss to the dizzy verge of the cataract, here shooting up from the edge of the precipice, there floating self-poised in the midst of the vapoury exhalations, now belting the sheet as with a zone of beauty, and often circling the spray with a cestus more bewitching than that of the fabled Venus—in the rich and diversified colouring of the rapids, cascades, and basin; and in that of the rocks, trees, and foliage, the mists and spray, that surround, cover, and beautify the most grand, lovely, and august of all earthly manifestations of creative energy.

The sheet as it pours down the precipice is variegated with many exquisite tints, the majority of which are so delicate, as to be indescribable—here wreathed in sparkling diamonds, there robed in purest white, and elsewhere shining in blue, amber, crystal, brown, yellow, grey, and emerald hues, melting and blending together, as if in emulation of the Iris which hovers ever around them. The foam in the broad basin below is generally of a milky white, but is said by Ingram to present sometimes the appearance of a "bed of roses in a field of snow." The usual colour of the stream is a deep green, but it is also tinted with various shades of beauty. The grass, flowers, and foliage on the banks and islands, gemmed and starred with spray, and glistening and flashing in the sunlight, may neither be imagined nor described.

The scenery about the Falls in summer, may be imagined by the lovely reaching to the sublime; and in winter by the sublime stooping to the lovely. At the latter season it is magnificent, in the former, beautiful. In autumn too—how glorious, how varied, how exquisite it is in autumn!

In summer, the earth, the trees, the shores, the islands, and parts of the very rocks, are clothed with a living emerald of luxurious growth. Watered by the spray, the rich earth teems with vegetation, and sends up a thousand forms of life and
loveliness. Shrubs, flowers, and foliage cover and
almost encumber the ground, which, clad in ver-
dure, and breathed upon by the wind, seems a
rippling sea of greenness. Vines and ivy climb
the tall trees, twine their tendril-fingers around
the twigs and branches, and meet and mingle their
leaves together; — beauty embracing strength,—
weakness cherished by vigour. The humble moss
freshens and fattens on the logs, roots, and even
rocks; interlaces and extends its tiny fibres; and
derives health and nourishment from the pure air,
and the sweet spray of Niagara. Bushes, and
even large trees, stoop to look over the banks and
don down upon the stream; and the more lowly plants
creep between them to the verge, and hang over
the abyss, seemingly to enjoy the same splendid
prospect. The trees, and the air too, are populous
with animal and insect life. Birds, squirrels, but-
terflies, bees, grasshoppers, — these, and many
other beautiful but harmless creatures, fill the air
with their glad rejoicings, and wanton among the
leaves and flowers. There is everything to inter-
est, amuse, and delight; but nothing to vex, an-
noy, or alarm; and such is summer at Niagara.

In autumn, the scene is changed indeed, and
addresses itself to the eye and the understanding,
rather than to the heart and the affections. The

scenery is indescribably beautiful, variegated with
every imaginable shade of colouring; and, like
the death-bed of a Christian, seems designed to
banish the fear of dissolution, by showing that
the end of life may be even better than the begin-
ning or the fullness, invested as it is with such a
surpassing glory. The exceeding richness of
forest scenery in a North American autumn, has
been often said and sung; and the effect of that
season upon Niagara bids defiance to the tongue
or pen. Suffice then to say, that new and grand
combinations of beauty are there displayed, which
charm the eye, chain the attention, and fasten
upon the mind; and which will remain fixed in
the memory long after the lapse of years has erased
many and later impressions of other and differ-
ent objects. Niagara in autumn, is a grand sub-
ject for a great painter; but, unfortunately, —
beyond his art!

In winter, how different still, and, O, how mag-
nificent! The grass is turned to pearl, the forest
to coral, and the foliage to chrystal, by the falling
and freezing spray. Rocks of glass, columns of
alabaster, trees of coral, and the rainbows resting
upon the chrystal branches, and nestling among
the diamond twigs and tendrils! A writer upon
the Falls, long a resident there, and familiar with
the scenery at all seasons, well observes, that it is "worth a journey of thousands of miles" to obtain a sight of Niagara in winter. Groves of spar bending beneath a weight of brilliant, in all the blazonry of splendor, allure and dazzle the eye; and, stirred by the wind, rain down upon the alabaster earth showers of emerald, amethyst, topaz, and other precious stones, glistening in the sunlight, and still shining where they fall.

The stream, a sporting sea of silver, springs in bright-sparkling fleecy masses, down a porcelain precipice, and falling upon rocks of translucent chalcedony, carved into strange and curious shapes, covered with ingenious and quaint devices, and fringed around with pointed pendants of chrysal, dashes glittering up, filling the air with starry, lustrous, rainbow-wreaths of beauty. Chrysal stolacites of enormous size and immeasurable length, overlaying and clustering round each other in many a fanciful and fantastic shape, forming colonnades, pilastres, capitals, and cornices, ornamented and enriched by a beautiful fretwork of glassy texture and delicate tracery—hang down the banks and mock the sun with their lustre, making of the chasm and cataract, a glorious and gorgeous temple and altar of the Eternal, from which a snowy incense rolls up in graceful convolutions, cloud-like, to Heaven! It is indeed, a fairy scene:—but like the heartless splendor of courts—chilling! A fairy scene indeed, for it is not real:—a cloud passing over the sun will destroy all its blazonry, and leave only—ice! Still it is inimitably beautiful, and worth a pilgrimage to witness, if only for a moment.

Below the cataract, the spray congealing as it falls, and constantly accreting, forms mountains of ice that nearly overtop the precipice, and seem like vast columns of transparent sun-bright crystal, supporting the silvery sheet, and lending it a thousand hues. The river never freezes over, but large masses of ice are sometimes collected and blocked in, so as to form a natural bridge, extending nearly up to the foot of the Falls, and for two miles down the stream.* Magnificent views of the cataract are then obtained from this frozen platform, and splendors surpassing those of the Polar

* A bridge of this kind was formed below the Falls during the past winter, of uncommon dimensions. The ice was not less than one hundred feet thick, and rose above the water from thirty to forty feet. People crossed on it for some days, from the foot of the Biddle Stair-case to the Canada side. At the ferry the river was thus passable for several months; and a small house was built near the centre for the sale of liquors and other refreshments.
Seas are beheld. Such is Niagara in winter, only the half is not, and could not be told.

One might almost fancy that Niagara was designedly placed by the Creator in the temperate zone, that it might not always wear the same livery of loveliness, but that the peculiar excellencies of each of the three great regions of the earth, might in turn enrich, beautify, and adorn this favoured and glorious work of his power. That in summer it might have the warmth, brilliancy, and luxuriance of the tropics; in autumn the strong contrasts, vivid hues, and varying dyes of the middle region; and in winter the icy splendor, crystalline magnificence, and starry lustre of the frozen zone. All that is rich, all that is striking, all that is gorgeous in nature, thus centres in one holy spot, beautifying sublimity, adorning immensity, and making the awful attractive. Men come from all the ends of the earth to see Niagara, and well they may!

Having thus briefly glanced over the principal features of the cataract, and of the scenery that surrounds it, we come next to perform our office of "guide," and point out the different localities and objects that ought to be visited and observed, and in their proper order of succession.