

after ascending many leagues among rapids and waterfalls, he would reach a lake one hundred and forty or fifty leagues broad, at the western extremity of which the waters were wholesome and the winters mild; that a river emptied into it from the south, which had its source in the country of the Iroquois; that beyond the lake he would find a cataract and portage, then another lake about equal to the former, which they had never explored."

In 1603, a company of merchants in Rouen obtained the necessary authority for a new expedition to the St. Lawrence, which they placed under the direction of Samuel Champlain, an able, discreet, and resolute commander. On a map published in 1613 he indicated the position of the cataract, calling it merely a water-fall (*saut d'eau*), and describing it as being "so very high that many kinds of fish are stunned in its descent." It does not appear by the record that he ever saw the Falls.

During the sixty years that elapsed between the establishment of the French settlements by Champlain and the expedition of La Salle and Hennepin, there can be little doubt that the great cataract was repeatedly visited by French traders and adventurers. Many of the earlier travelers to the region of the St. Lawrence believed that China could be reached by an overland journey across the northern part of the continent. Father Vimont informs us ("Relations of the Jesuits," 1642-3) that the Jesuit Raymbault "designed to go to China across the American wilderness, but God sent him on the road to heaven." As he died at the Saut Ste.

Marie in 1641, he must have passed to the north of the Falls without seeing them. In 1648, the Jesuit father Ragueneau, in a letter to the Superior of the Mission, at Paris, says: "North of the Erics is a great lake, about two hundred leagues in circumference, called Erie, formed by the discharge of the *mer-douce* or Lake Huron, and which falls into a third lake, called Ontario, over a cataract of frightful height."

In some important manuscripts relating to the earliest expeditions of the French into Canada,—discovered a few years ago, and now in the possession of M. Pierre Margry, of Paris,—occurs a description of the Falls communicated by the Indians to Father Gallinée, one of the two Sulpician priests who accompanied La Salle in his first visit to the Senecas, in 1669. He seems to have been more indifferent to the charms of Nature than Father Raymbault, since he crossed the Niagara River near its mouth, and within hearing of its falling waters, yet did not turn aside to see the cataract. In his journal he says: "We found a river one-eighth of a league broad and extremely rapid, forming the outlet of Lake Erie and emptying into Lake Ontario. The depth of the river is, at this place, extraordinary, for, on sounding close by the shore, we found fifteen or sixteen fathoms of water. This outlet (the Niagara River) is forty leagues long, and has, from ten to twelve leagues above Lake Ontario, one of the finest cataracts in the world; for all the Indians of whom I have inquired about it say that the river falls at that place from a rock higher than the tallest pines—that is, about two hundred feet. In

fact, we heard it from the place where we were, although from ten to twelve leagues distant, but the fall gives such a momentum to the water that its velocity prevented our ascending the current by rowing, except with great difficulty. At a quarter of a league from the outlet, where we were, it grows narrower, and its channel is confined between two very high, steep, rocky banks, inducing the belief that the navigation would be very difficult quite up to the cataract. As to the river above the Falls, the current very often sucks into this gulf, from a great distance above, deer and stags, elk and roebucks, which, in attempting to swim the river, suffer themselves to be drawn so far down-stream that they are compelled to descend the Falls, and are overwhelmed in its frightful abyss.

“Our desire to reach the little village called Ganastoque Sonontona (between the west end of Lake Ontario and Grand River) prevented our going to view that wonder. * * * I will leave you to judge if that must not be a fine cataract, in which all the water of the large river (St. Lawrence) * * * falls from a height of two hundred feet, with a noise that is heard not only at the place where we were,—ten or twelve leagues distant,—but also from the other side of Lake Ontario, opposite its mouth” (Toronto, forty miles distant).

Of the rattlesnakes on the mountain ridges he says: “There are many in this place as large as your arm, and six or seven feet long, and entirely black.”

From Ganastoque Sonontona the party separated, the two priests, with their guides and attendants, designing

to move to the west, along the north shore of Lake Erie, and La Salle apparently to return to Montreal, but in reality, as is supposed, to prosecute by a more southerly route the grand ambition of his life—the discovery of the Mississippi River—a purpose which he executed with even more than the “bigot’s zeal,” and literally, as it proved in the end, with the “martyr’s constancy,” for he was assassinated on the plains of Texas, some few years after, while endeavoring to secure to France the benefits of his great discovery.

After separating from his companions at the Indian village, he probably returned to Lake Ontario and the Niagara River, which he crossed, no doubt, on his way to some of the Iroquois villages, in search of a guide and attendants to assist him in his explorations. It may be assumed that he visited the Falls at this time, but his journal of this expedition has never been found.

The first description of the Falls by an eye-witness is that of Father Hennepin, so well known to those conversant with our early history. He saw it for the first time in the winter of 1678-9, and his exaggerated account of it is accompanied by a sketch which in its principal features is undoubtedly correct, though its perspective and proportions are quite otherwise. He says: “Betwixt the lakes Ontario and Erie there is a vast and prodigious cadence of water, which falls down in a surprising and astonishing manner, insomuch that the universe does not afford its parallel. ’Tis true that Italy and Switzerland boast of some such things, but we may well say they are sorry patterns when compared with this of which we now

speak. * * * It [the river] is so rapid above the descent, that it violently hurries down the wild beasts while endeavoring to pass it, * * * they not being able to withstand the force of its current, which inevitably casts them headlong above six hundred feet high. This wonderful downfall is composed of two great streams of water and two falls, with an isle sloping along the middle of it. The waters which fall from this horrible precipice do foam and boil after the most hideous manner imaginable, making an outrageous noise, more terrible than that of thunder; for, when the wind blows out of the south, their dismal roaring may be heard more than fifteen leagues off.

“The river Niagara having thrown itself down this incredible precipice, continues its impetuous course for two leagues together to the great rock, above mentioned [in another chapter as lying at the foot of the mountain at Lewiston], with inexpressible rapidity. * * * From the great Fall unto this rock, which is to the west of the river, the two brinks of it are so prodigiously high, that it would make one tremble to look steadily upon the water rolling along with a rapidity not to be imagined.”

On his return from the West, in the summer of 1681, the Father informs us that he “spent half a day in considering the wonders of that prodigious cascade.” Referring to the spray, he says: “The rebounding of these waters is so great that a sort of cloud arises from the foam of it, which is seen hanging over this abyss even at noon-day.” Of the river, he says: “From the mouth of Lake Erie to the Falls are reckoned six leagues. * * *

The lands which lie on both sides of it to the east and west are all level from the Lake Erie to the great Fall.” At the end of the six leagues “it meets with a small sloping island, about half a quarter of a league long and near three hundred feet broad, as well as one can guess by the eye. From the end, then, of this island it is that these two great falls of water, as also the third, throw themselves, after a most surprising manner, down into the dreadful gulph, six hundred feet and more in depth.” On the Canadian side, he says: “One may go down as far as the bottom of this terrible gulph. The author of this discovery was down there, the more narrowly to observe the fall of these prodigious cascades. From there we could discover a spot of ground which lay under the fall of water which is to the east [American Fall] big enough for four coaches to drive abreast without being wet; but because the ground . * * * where the first fall empties itself into the gulph is very steep and almost perpendicular, it is impossible for a man to get down on that side, into the place where the four coaches may go abreast, or to make his way through such a quantity of water as falls toward the gulph, so that it is very probable that to this dry place it is that the rattlesnakes retire, by certain passages which they find underground.”

Finding no Indians living at the Falls, he suggests a probable reason therefor: “I have often heard talk of the Cataracts of the Nile, which make people deaf that live near them. I know not if the Iroquois who formerly lived near this fall * * * withdrew themselves

from its neighborhood lest they should likewise become deaf, or out of the continual fear they were in of the rattlesnakes, which are very common in this place. * * * Be it as it will, these dangerous creatures are to be met with as far as the Lake Frontenac [Ontario], on the south side; and it is reasonable to presume that the horrid noise of the Fall and the fear of these poisonous serpents might oblige the savages to seek out a more commodious habitation." In the view of the Falls accompanying his description, a large rock is represented as standing on the edge of the Table Rock. This rock is mentioned by Kalm, a Swedish naturalist, who visited the Falls in 1750, as having disappeared a few years before that date. Father Hennepin's reference to the animals drawn into the current and going over the Falls, and to the rattlesnakes, indicates unmistakably his previous acquaintance with Father Gallinées's narrative.