

## CHAPTER XIV.

Avery's descent of the Falls — The fatal practical joke — Death of Miss Rugg — Swans — Eagles — Crows — Ducks over the Falls — Why dogs have survived the descent.

ON the morning of the 19th of July, 1853, a man was discovered in the middle of the American rapid, about thirty rods below the bridge. He was clinging to a log, which the previous spring had lodged against a rock. He proved to be a Mr. Avery, who had undertaken to cross the river above the night before, but, getting bewildered in the current, was drawn into the rapids. His boat struck the log, and was overturned, yet, by some extraordinary good fortune, he was able to hold to the timber. A large crowd soon gathered on the shore and bridge. A sign, painted in large letters, "We will save you," was fastened to a building, that the reading of it might cheer and encourage him. Boats and ropes were provided, with willing hands to use them. The first boat lowered into the rapids filled and sank just before reaching Avery. The next, a life-boat, which had been procured from Buffalo, was let down, reached the log, was dashed off by the reacting waters, upset, and sank beside him. Another light, clinker-built boat was launched, and reached him just right. But, in some unaccountable manner, the rope got caught be-

tween the rock and the log. It was impossible to loosen it. Poor Avery tugged and worked at it with almost superhuman energy for hours. The citizens above pulled at the rope until it broke.

By this time a raft had been constructed, with a strong cask fastened to each corner, and ropes attached so that Avery could tie himself to it. It was lowered, and reached him safely. He got on it and seized the ropes. Every heart grew lighter as the rescuers moved across the lower part of Bath Island, drawing in the rope, while the raft swung easily toward Goat Island. But when it reached the head of Chapin's Island, all hopes were dashed again. The rope attached to the raft got caught in the rocks as it was passing below a ledge in a swift chute of water. All efforts to loosen it were ineffectual. Another boat was launched and let downstream. It reached the raft all right, and Avery, in his eagerness to seize it, dropped the ropes he had been holding, stepped to the edge of the raft, with his hands extended to catch the boat, when the raft, under his weight, settled in the water, and, just missing his hold, he was swept into the rapids, went down the north side of Chapin's Island, and, almost in reach of it, in water so shallow that he regained his feet for an instant, threw up his hands in despair, fell backward, and went over the Fall. The tragedy lasted eighteen hours.

The names connected with the next incident are suppressed, out of regard for the feelings of surviving friends. It is given as a warning to future visitors to Niagara not to attempt any mirthful experiments around the Falls.

A party of ladies, gentlemen, and children were on Luna Island, near a small beech tree, since destroyed, called "the Parasol." A young girl of ten was standing near her mother, just on the brink of the water, when a young man of twenty-two stepped up beside her and seized her playfully by the arms, saying, "Now, Nannie, I am going to throw you in," and swung her out over the water. Taken by surprise and frightened, she struggled, twisted herself out of his grasp, and fell into the rapid within twenty feet of the brink of the precipice. Instantly the young man plunged in after her, seized hold of her dress, and swung her around toward her half-distracted mother, who almost reached her as she slipped by and went over the Fall, immediately followed by the young man. The young girl was found some days afterward, lying on her back, on a large rock, holding her open parasol above her head, as though she had lain down to rest. A few weeks afterward the father of the young man was coming up the river, on the *Maid of the Mist*, from the lower landing. A body was discovered floating in the water, and, by the aid of a small boat, was brought on board the steamer. It was that of his son.

On the 23d of August, 1844, Miss Martha K. Rugg was walking to Table Rock with a friend. Seeing a bunch of cedar-berries on a low tree, which grew out from the edge of the bank, she left her companion, reached out to pick it, lost her footing, and fell one hundred and fifteen feet upon the rocks below. She survived about three hours. Pilgrims to Table Rock used to inquire for the spot where this accident happened. The following spring, an enterprising Irishman brought out a table

of suitable dimensions, set it down on the bank of the river, and covered it with different articles, which he offered for sale. In order to enlighten strangers about the spot, he provided a remarkable sign, which he set up near one end of the table. This sign was a monumental obelisk, about five feet high, made of pine boards, and painted white. On the base he painted, in black letters, the following inscription :

"Ladies fair, most beauteous of the race,  
Beware and shun a dangerous place.  
Miss Martha Rugg here lost a life,  
Who might now have been a happy wife."

An envious competitor, one of his own countrymen, brought his own table of wares, and placed it just above the original mourner. Thereupon, the latter, determining that his rival should not have the benefit of his sign, removed it below his own table, having first removed the table itself as far down as circumstances would permit. Then he added his master-stroke of policy. Up to that time the monument had been stationary. Thenceforward, every day on quitting business he put it on a wheelbarrow and took it home, bringing it out again on resuming operations in the morning.

Previous to the War of 1812, the Niagara River abounded in swans, wild geese, and ducks. Since that war none of the swans have been seen here, except two pair which came at different times. One of each pair went over the Falls, and was taken out alive but stunned. Their mates, faithful unto death, were shot while watching and waiting for their return.

Eagles have always been seen in the vicinity, and a few have been captured. A single pair for many years had their aerie in the top of a huge dead sycamore tree, near the head of Burnt Ship Bay. It was interesting to watch the flight of the male bird when he left his brooding mate to go on a foraging expedition. Leaving the topmost limb that served as his home observatory, he would sweep round in a circle, forming the base of a regular spiral curve, in which he rose to any desired height. Then, having apparently determined by scent or sight, or by both, the direction he would take, he sailed grandly off. How grandly, too, on his return, he floated to his lofty perch with a single fold of his great wings, and sat for a few moments, motionless as a statue, before greeting his mate. When the young eaglets had but recently chipped their shells, passing sportsmen were content to view the majestic pair at a respectful distance. A pair of eagles, each carrying ten talons, a hooked beak, a strong pair of wings, and an unerring eye, all backed and propelled by an indomitable will and courage, are not to be recklessly trifled with.

Early in July, 1877, two farmers riding in a buggy from Bergholtz, in the easterly part of the town of Niagara, toward the town of Wilson on Lake Ontario, saw a large gray eagle sitting on a fence by the roadside, and watching with much interest some object in a field beyond. Leaving their buggy, they ascertained that the object of its solicitude was an eaglet sitting on the ground, unable to fly, his wings and feathers having been drenched by a heavy shower. One of the men who first reached the young bird found it rather bellicose, and

while attempting to secure it was surprised by a vigorous thump on the head from the old bird, accompanied with a sensation of sharp claws in his hair which nearly prostrated him. His assailant then rose quickly some forty feet in the air, and, turning again, descended upon the man with such force as to compel him to relinquish his game. His friend joined him, and for nearly half an hour the two were engaged in a fierce fight with the resolute bird, which they estimated would measure eight feet across the extended wings. The eagle would soar quickly upward as at first until it reached the desired range, when it would turn upon them with great fierceness, thumping with its wings and striking with its talons at their very faces. Finally, securing a number of good-sized cobble-stones, they advanced again upon the eaglet, and were at once attacked by the parent. But they used their stone artillery with vigor, and succeeded in getting the eaglet to their buggy, leaving its gallant defender still unconquered and soaring in the air with a slightly injured wing.

Before the War of the Rebellion, Niagara was a favorite resort of that winged scavenger, the crow, and, at times, they were very numerous. But after the first year of the war they entirely disappeared. Snuffing the battle from afar, they turned instinctively to the South, and did not re-appear among us until several years after the war had ended.

Large numbers of ducks formerly went over the Falls, but not for the reason generally assigned, namely, that they cannot rise out of the rapids. It is true that they cannot rise from the water while heading up-stream.

When they wish to do so, they turn down the current, and sail out without difficulty. No sound and living duck ever went over the precipice by daylight. Dark and especially foggy nights are most fatal to them. In the month of September, 1841, four hundred ducks were picked up below the Falls, that had gone over in the fog of the previous night. In two instances, dogs have been sent over the Falls and have survived the plunge. In 1858 a bull-terrier was thrown into the rapids, also near the middle of the bridge. In less than an hour he came up the ferry-stairs, very wet and not at all gay.

The reason why the dogs were not killed may be thus explained. From the top of the Rapids Tower, before its destruction, the spectator could get a perfect view of the Canadian Fall. On a bright day, by looking steadily at the bottom of the Horseshoe, where water falls into water, he could see, as the spray was occasionally removed, a beautiful exhibition of water-cones, apparently ten or twelve feet high. These are formed by the rapid accumulation and condensation of the falling water. It pours down so rapidly and in such quantities that the water below, so to speak, cannot run off fast enough, and it piles up as though it were in a state of violent ebullition. These cones are constantly forming and breaking. If any strong animal should fall upon one of these cones, as upon a soft cushion, it might slide safely into the current below. The dogs were, doubtless, fortunate enough to fall in this way, aided also by the repulsion of the water from the rocks in the swift channel through which they passed.