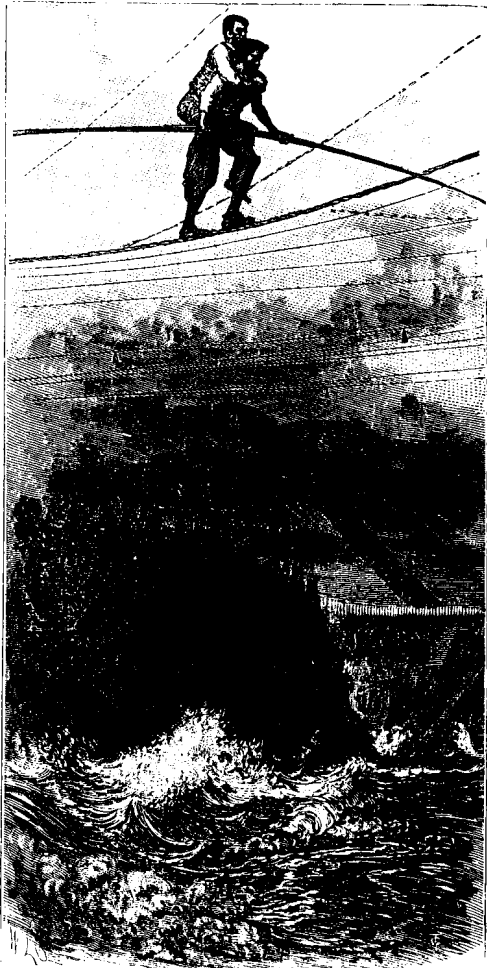


CHAPTER XVII.

Blondin and his "ascensions"—Visit of the Prince of Wales—Grand illumination of the Falls—The steamer *Caroline*—The water-power of Niagara—Lord Dufferin and the plan of an International Park.

IN the year 1858, a short, well-rounded, fair-complexioned, light-haired Frenchman made his appearance at the Falls, and expressed a wish to put a tight-rope across the chasm below them, for the purpose of crossing on the rope and exhibiting athletic feats. He received little encouragement, but, having a Napoleonic faith in his star, he persevered, and finally obtained the necessary authority to place his rope just below the Railway Suspension Bridge. It was a well and evenly twisted rope, about two inches in diameter; and after stretching it as taught as it could be drawn, it hung in a moderate catenary curve. Commencing at the shore ends he secured stays of small rope to the large one, placing them about eight feet apart. These were made fast to the shore in such a manner that all the stays on one side of the main rope were parallel to each other from the center outward to the ends. They were made tight somewhat in the manner that tent-cords are tightened, and when the structure was complete it looked like the opposite sections of a gigantic spider-web.



Blondin Crossing the Niagara.

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At each end was a spacious inclosure, formed by a rough board fence, for the use of spectators. M. Blondin—for this was the name of the new aspirant for acrobatic honors—also made an arrangement with the superintendent of the railway bridge for its occupation during what, with a shade of irony, he called his “ascensions.” Those who went within the inclosures and upon the bridge paid a certain sum. A contribution was asked of all outsiders. He selected Saturday as the day for fortnightly ascensions, and advertised his intentions very liberally. The speculation was successful and gave great satisfaction to the spectators. He exhibited a variety of rope-walking feats, balancing on the cable, hanging from it by his hands and feet, standing on his head, and lowering himself down to the surface of the water. He also carried a man across on his back, trundled over a loaded wheelbarrow, and did divers other things, and also walked over in a sack. He sprinkled in a few extras to heighten the effect, as the knowing ones declared, such as slipping astride the cable, falling across a stay-rope, or dropping something into the water. In 1860, he gave a special ascension in honor of the Prince of Wales. The Prince and his party occupied a sheltered space on the Canadian side, and Blondin walked to it from the opposite side, performing various feats on the way over. The Prince shook hands with him as he stepped into the shed, and commended his courage and nerve.

As illustrating the power of the imagination over the nerves it may be noted that, if the great spider’s-web had been stretched out anywhere on a level surface, and not

more than three feet above the ground, a dozen men in any large community could have been found to walk it as unconcernedly, if not as gracefully, as the famous "ascensionist." After three years of successful labor at Niagara, he sought other air-spaces.

The most notable occurrence, however, which emphasized the visit of the Prince of Wales in that year was the illumination of the Falls late in the evening of a moonless night. On the banks above and all about on the rocks below, on the lower side of the road down the Canadian bank, and along the water's edge, were placed numerous colored and white calcium, volcanic, and torpedo lights. At a signal they were set aflame all at once. At the same time rockets and wheels and flying artillery were set off in great abundance. The shores were crowded with spectators, and the scene was a most remarkable one. The steady, lurid light below and the intermittent flashes and explosions overhead, the seething, hissing volumes of flame and smoke rolling up from the deep abyss, the ghostly appearance of the descending stream, the ghostly swift current of white foam, the weird appearance of the cloud of spray with a faint and fantastic illumination at its base, which faded out in the dim light of the stars as it ascended, the peculiarly deep but muffled and solemn monotone of the falling water, the livid hue imparted to the faces of the quiet but deeply interested spectators, all made the scene memorable and impressive. When the Marquis of Lorne and the Princess Louise visited the Falls in January, 1879, they saw them illuminated by electricity, the light having the illuminating power of 32,000 candles.

In December, 1837, the steamer *Caroline* came down from Buffalo to aid, it was said, the so-called Patriots, then engaged in an insurrection against the Canadian Government. A motley collection of adventurers on Navy Island constituted the disturbing, not to say attacking, force. At Chippewa was stationed a body of Canadian militia, under the command of Colonel—afterward Sir—Allan McNabb, who had the good fortune to win his spurs in a single almost bloodless campaign. By his direction a boat expedition was sent to attack the *Caroline*, as she lay at the old Schlosser dock. In the *mêlée* one American was killed. The steamer was set on fire, and her fastenings must have been burnt away, as also a part of her upper works, since the writer, ten years later, while returning from a fishing expedition, discovered her smoke-pipe lying at the bottom of the river, in a quiet basin not thirty rods below the dock. A cat-fish of moderate dimensions appeared to be keeping house in it, and, with his head barely projecting from one end, was serenely watching the current for whatever game it might bring to his iron parlor. After the new bridges were built connecting the Three Sisters with Goat Island, the guides and drivers, in their desire to enhance the interest of the scene, astonished travelers by informing them that it was the boiler of the *Caroline* which caused the extraordinary elevation of the water which we have before referred to as the Leaping Rock.

Nine miles from the Falls is the Tuscarora Reservation of four thousand acres. On this there are about three hundred and fifty Indians, mostly half-breeds,

engaged in agricultural pursuits, which supply a portion of their necessities. The Indian women who are seen at the Falls in the summer season working and vending different articles of bead-work belong to this community. The Tuscaroras have not been more fortunate than others of their race in bargaining with their white brothers, and their lands are now stripped of the fine oak timber and valuable wood which stood upon it a few years since, and which was sold in large quantities at small prices.

As a compensation for this system of robbery we maintained a Christian missionary among them for a few years, and we boast that they are all Protestants. The resident missionary, a very worthy man, but a rather prosy preacher, always addressed his dusky audience in the English language, his thoughts being conveyed to them by an interpreter. For many years the interpreter was a native Tuscarora, a fine specimen of his race, six feet tall, with a tawny complexion, dark, flashing eyes, and a musical voice. It was interesting to note his manner while acting as interpreter for different clergymen. When interpreting the pious but humdrum utterances of the passionless missionary, he stood at the right side of the preacher, with his left elbow resting on one end of the modest pulpit, and delivered himself with an air that seemed to say, "It does not amount to much, but I give it to you as it is." But the change was magical when, as sometimes happened during the summer season, some eloquent preacher addressed the congregation. The natural courtesy of the interpreter led him, instead of putting his elbow on



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Indian Women Selling Bead-work.

the pulpit, to stand a little to the rear of the strange preacher, respectfully waiting for his words. As the priest warmed into his subject the interpreter caught his spirit, straightened his fine figure to its full height, advanced to a line with the speaker, and as the theme was developed and the orator grew more and more eloquent, the excitement became contagious; the Indian entered fully into its spirit, his face glowed with animation, his eyes shone with a warmer light, his long arms were stretched forth, and with gestures energetic or subdued, but always graceful, and the varied inflections of his voice in harmony with the theme, he followed the discourse to the end. His audience, too, would become thoroughly aroused, and a little more animation would be infused into the plaintive tones of the closing hymn.

One of the future attractions of Niagara, to sportsmen at least, may be the catching of California trout, twenty thousand of the fry having been put into the rapids by the writer in June, 1881.

Concerning the manufactories, shops, rubbish, and litter along the race near the brink of the American Falls, which appear so uncouth and inharmonious, and which are noticed by strangers as being a desecration of the scene, it is only just to remark that the utilization of the water-power here, in the easiest and most economical manner, was one of the imperative necessities of the early settlement of the country. For many years a large territory, lying on both sides of the river, was dependent upon the manufacturing, repairing, and milling facilities of this place. For furnishing these in those days, water-

power was the only agent. And the name—Manchester—given to the place by its early settlers only foreshadowed their hope that it would one day rival its great English namesake.

There are fewer manufactories on the old race-ways now than there were forty years ago, but many new ones have been located on the hydraulic canal that has been excavated at great expense, which leaves the river a mile above the Falls, and empties into the chasm half a mile below. The three years of unusual drought in the northern half of the United States, from 1876 forward, demonstrated how little dependence can be placed during the summer season on the ordinary water-powers of that region, and the attention of manufacturers has been newly drawn to Niagara.

The early dream of growth in population and wealth at Niagara seems likely to be realized. Already extensive milling and manufacturing establishments have been put in operation, and others are in contemplation. When it is considered that engineers estimate the sum-total of all the water-power in the northern portion of the United States at less than 500,000 horse-power, and that, according to data furnished by the United States Lake Survey Bureau, the water-power of Niagara is equal to 1,500,000 horse-power, we can form some idea of the vastness of the force which awaits the enterprise of American manufacturers.

"I understand, Mr. President," said Daniel Webster, in a speech prefacing a toast complimentary to the citizens of Rochester for their generous hospitality at the

New York State Fair in 1844, "that the Genesec River has a fall of 250 feet within the limits of the city of Rochester. Sir, if the Thames had a fall of 250 feet within the limits of the city of London, London would not be a town—it would be a-l-l t-h-e w-o-r-l-d!" and as he deliberately stretched out his great arms, and expanded his broad chest, while slowly pronouncing the last three words, one could almost see London gradually enlarging its ample borders in all directions. When the 1,500,000 horse-power of Niagara is utilized for the economic wants of men, Niagara will not be a town—it will be a large part of all the world.

On the 25th of September, 1878, in an after-luncheon speech before the Ontario Society of Artists at Toronto, Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada, first publicly suggested the idea of creating an International Park from lands to be taken from both sides of the river adjacent to and including the Falls. He stated that he had conferred with Governor Robinson of New York upon the subject, and that the project was cordially approved by him. Governor Robinson, in his annual message the following winter, commended the project to the consideration of the Legislature, by whom a commission of distinguished gentlemen was appointed to investigate the subject and report thereon. After a full examination this commission reported warmly in favor of the plan, and their recommendation was cordially indorsed by a great many prominent citizens residing in different sections of the country. The press, too, was almost unanimously for it. A majority of the members of the Legislature to whom the report was

made would have passed a bill for the further prosecution of the scheme, but, unfortunately, it was ascertained that any bill they might pass for this purpose would be vetoed for economical reasons. It is hoped that better counsels may ultimately prevail, and the plan be perfected. Nothing else can save Niagara from total desecration and disgrace. The fact that there is not a square foot of land in the United States from which an untaxed view of the great cataract can be obtained is a disgrace to the State, the nation, and the civilization of the age.