

CHAPTER V.

The lower Niagara—Fort Niagara—Fort Mississauga—Niagara Village—Lewiston—Portage around the Falls—The first railroad in the United States—Fort Schlosser—The ambushade at Devil's Hole—La Salle's vessel, the *Griffin*—The Niagara frontier.

FROM the earliest visit of the French missionaries and *voyageurs* to the lake region, the banks of the lower Niagara were to them a favorite locality. Very early they were cleared of the grand forest which covered them, and the genial, fertile, and easily worked soil, enriched by the deep vegetable mold that had been accumulating upon it for centuries, produced in lavish abundance wheat, maize, garden vegetables, and fruits, large and small. "On the 6th day of December, 1678," says Marshall, "La Salle, in his brigantine of ten tons, doubled the point where Fort Niagara now stands, and anchored in the sheltered waters of the river. The prosecution of his bold enterprise at that inclement season, involving the exploration of a vast and unknown country, in vessels built on the way, indicates the indomitable energy and self-reliance of the intrepid discoverer. His crew consisted of sixteen persons, under the immediate command of the Sieur de la Motte. The grateful Franciscans chanted '*Te Deum laudamus*' as they entered the noble river. The strains of that ancient hymn of the Church, as they

rose from the deck of the adventurous bark, and echoed from shore and forest, must have startled the watchful Senecas with the unusual sound, as they gazed upon their strange visitors. Never before had white men, so far as history tells us, ascended the river."

La Salle rested here for a time, but no defensive work was constructed until 1687, when the Marquis De Nonville, returning from his famous expedition against the Senecas, fortified it, after the fashion of the time, with palisades and ditches. The small garrison of one hundred men which he left were obliged to abandon it the following season, after partially destroying it. By consent of the Iroquois it was reconstructed in stone in 1725-6.

Opposite to Fort Niagara, which is on the American side at the mouth of the river, are Fort Missisauga and the village of Niagara, formerly Newark, on the Canadian side. The village was captured by the English in 1759, and occupied for a time by Sir William Johnson, who completed here his treaty with the Indians by which they released to him the land on both sides of the river. The first Provincial Parliament was held here in 1792, under the authority of Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe. In the same year the place was visited by the father of Queen Victoria. The pioneer newspaper of the Province was published here in 1795, and although it ceased soon after to be the seat of government, which was removed to York (now Toronto), still it was a thriving village of about five thousand inhabitants until the completion of the Welland canal, which entirely diverted its trade and commerce, and left it to the uninterrupted quiet of a rural town. Several Americans have

purchased dwellings in the place for summer occupation. A mile above was Fort George, now a ruin.

Seven miles above the mouth of the river, at the head of navigation, nestling at the foot of the so-called mountain, is Lewiston, named in 1805 in honor of Governor Lewis, of New York. Here, in 1678, La Salle "constructed a cabin of palisades to serve as a magazine or storehouse." And this was the commencement of the portage to the river above the Falls, which passed over nearly the same route as the present road from Lewiston, which is still called the Portage Road. Here, too, the first railway in the United States was constructed. True, it was built of wood, and was called a tram-way. But a car was run upon it to transport goods up and down the mountain. The motion of the car was regulated by a windlass, and it was supported on runners instead of wheels. This was a very good arrangement for getting freight down the hill, but not so good for getting it up. But the wages of labor were low in every sense, since many of the Indians, demoralized by the use of those two most pestilent drugs, rum and tobacco, would do a day's work for a pint of the former and a plug of the latter.

The upper terminus of this portage was for many years merely an open landing-place for canoes and boats. In 1750, the French constructed a strong stockade-work on the bank of the river, above their barracks and storehouses. This they called Fort du Portage. It was burnt, in 1759, by Chabert Joncaire, who was in command of it when the British commenced the formidable and fatal campaign of that year against the French. After Fort

Niagara was surrendered to Sir William Johnson, Joncaire retired with his small garrison to the station on Chippewa Creek.

In less than two years the work was rebuilt in a much more substantial manner by Captain Joseph Schlosser, a German who served in the British army in that campaign. It had the outline of a tolerably regular fortification, with rude bastions and connecting curtains, surrounded by a somewhat formidable ditch. The interior plateau was a little elevated and surrounded by an earth embankment piled against the inner side of the palisades, over which its defenders could fire with great effect.

When the writer first saw its remains, the outlines and ditches of the work were distinct. Only some slight inequalities in the surface now indicate its site. Captain Schlosser was afterward promoted to the rank of colonel, and died in the fort. An oak slab, on which his name was cut, was standing at his grave just above the fort as late as the year 1808.

Some sixty rods below is still standing what is believed to be the first civilized chimney built in this part of the country. It is a large and most substantial stone structure, around which the French built their barracks. These were burnt by Joncaire on his retreat. A large dwelling-house was built to it by the English, which afforded shelter for many different occupants until it was burnt in 1813. Its last occupant, before it was destroyed, kept it as a tavern, which became a favorite place for festive and holiday gatherings. What hath been may be again. When the Falls shall have receded two miles, the brides and grooms

of that age will find their Cataract House near the site of old Fort Schlosser.

To the west of this old stone chimney stand the few surviving trees of the first apple orchard set out in this region. As early as 1796, it is described as being a "well-fenced orchard, containing 1200 trees." Not fifty are now standing.

Across the river from Lewiston is Queenston, so named in honor of Queen Charlotte. The battle which bears its name was fought on the 13th of October, 1813, between the American and British armies. The former crossed the river, made the attack, and carried the heights. The commander of the British forces, General Brock, and one of his aids, Colonel McDonald, were killed. The British were reënforced, and the American militia refusing to cross over to aid the Americans, the latter were obliged to return across the river, leaving a number of prisoners in the hands of the enemy. Some years afterward, the Colonial Parliament caused a fine monument to be erected on the heights to the memory of General Brock. It presents a conspicuous and imposing appearance from the terrace below.

Two miles and a quarter above Lewiston is the Devil's Hole, famous as the scene of a short supplementary campaign, made against the English, by the Seneca Indians, in 1763. Though doubtless instigated by French traders, it was a purely Indian enterprise, gotten up among themselves, and commanded by Farmer's Brother, one of the Seneca chiefs, who was a fighter as well as an orator. It was one of the best planned and most successfully exe-



Mouth of the Chasm, and Brock's Monument.

Opposite page 29.

cuted military stratagems ever recorded. It was calculated upon the nicest balancing of facts and probabilities, and executed with unrivaled thoroughness and celerity.

It was known to the Indians that the English were in the habit, almost daily, of sending supply trains, under escort, from Fort Niagara to Fort Schlosser. After unloading at the latter post, they returned to the former. They knew also that there was a smaller supporting force of one or two companies at Lewiston, which could join the escort from Fort Niagara, in case of an extra valuable train, and that the whole force at both places was not large enough to furnish an escort of more than four hundred men; they knew that the narrow pass at the Devil's Hole was the best point to place the ambuscade; also that when the train went up they could see whether its escort was large or small, and so they would know whether they should concentrate their force to attack the larger escort, or divide it and attack the train and small escort first and the relieving force afterward. They conjectured that the train would have a small escort; but if it should have a large one, so much the better, as there would be a larger number in a small space for their balls to riddle. They conjectured also that, if the escort were small, the firing on the first attack would be heard by the soldiers at Lewiston, and that they would hurry to the relief of their comrades, not dreaming of danger before they should reach them.

The fatal result demonstrated the correctness of their reasoning. They made a double ambuscade: one for the train and escort, the other for the relieving force; and they destroyed them both, only three of the first escaping and eight of the latter. This event occurred on the 14th

of September, 1773. John Stedman commanded the supply train. At the first fire of the Indians, seeing the fatal snare, he wheeled his horse at once, and, spurring him through a gauntlet of bullets, reached Schlosser in safety. A wounded soldier concealed himself in the bushes, and the drummer-boy lodged in a tree as he fell down the bank. Eight of the relieving force escaped to Fort Niagara to tell the story of their defeat.

Three miles above Schlosser is Cayuga Creek, near the mouth of which La Salle built the *Griffin*, a vessel of sixty tons burden, the first civilized craft that floated on the upper lakes, and the pioneer of an inland commerce of unrivaled growth and value. She reached Green Bay safely, but on her return voyage foundered with all on board in Lake Huron.

The French also built some small vessels on Navy Island. The reënforcements sent from Venango for the French, during the siege of Fort Niagara by Sir William Johnson, in 1759, were landed on this island. To the east of it there is a large deep basin, formed at the foot of the channel, between Grand and Buckhorn islands. The upper part of this channel being narrow, the basin appears like a bay. In this bay the French burnt and sunk the two vessels, as is supposed, which brought down the Venango reënforcements; hence the name "Burnt Ship Bay." The writer has seen the ribs and timbers of these vessels beneath the water, and caught many fine perch which had their haunts near them. The Niagara frontier was the theater of great activity during the War of 1812.