

CHAPTER XII.

A fisherman and a bear in a canoe—Frightful experience with floating ice—
Early farming on the Niagara—Fruit growing—The original forest
—Testimony of the trees—The first hotel—General Whitney—
Cataract House—Distinguished visitors—Carriage road down the
Canadian bank—Ontario House—Clifton House—The Museum—
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Battle Anecdotes.

SOON after the War of 1812, a fisherman—whose name we will call Fisher—on a certain day went out upon the river, about three miles above the Fall; and while anchored and fishing from his canoe, he saw a bear in the water making, very leisurely, for Navy Island. Not understanding thoroughly the nature and habits of the animal, thinking he would be a capital prize, and having a spear in the canoe, he hoisted anchor and started in pursuit. As the canoe drew near, the bear turned to pay his respects to its occupant. Fisher, with his spear, made a desperate thrust at him. Quicker and more deftly than the most expert fencer could have done it, the quadruped parried the blow, and, disarming his assailant, knocked the spear more than ten feet from the canoe. Fisher then seized a paddle and belabored the bear over his head and on his paws, as he placed the latter on the side of the canoe and drew himself in. The

now frightened fisherman, not knowing how to swim, was in a most uncomfortable predicament. He felt greatly relieved, therefore, when the animal deliberately sat himself down, facing him, in the bow of the canoe. Resolving in his own mind that he would generously resign the whole canoe to the creature as soon as he should reach the land, he raised his paddle and began to pull vigorously shoreward, especially as the rapids lay just below him, and the Falls were roaring most ominously.

Much to his surprise, as soon as he began to paddle Bruin began to growl, and, as he repeated his stroke, the occupant of the bow raised his note of disapproval an octave higher, and at the same time made a motion as if he would attack him. Fisher had no desire to cultivate a closer intimacy, and so stopped paddling.

Bruin serenely contemplated the landscape in the direction of the island. Fisher was also intensely interested in the same scene, and still more intensely impressed with their gradual approach to the rapids. He tried the paddle again. But the tyrant of the quarter-deck again emphatically objected, and as *he* was master of the situation, and fully resolved not to resign the command of the craft until the termination of the voyage, there was no alternative but submission. Still, the rapids were frightfully near and something must be done. He gave a tremendous shout. But Bruin was not in a musical mood, and vetoed that with as much emphasis as he had done the paddling. Then he turned his eyes on Fisher quite interestedly, as if he were calculating the best method of



Fisher and the Bear.

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dissecting him. The situation was fast becoming something more than painful. Man and bear in opposite ends of the canoe floating—not exactly double—but together to inevitable destruction. But every suspense has an end. The single shout, or something else, had called the attention of the neighbors to the canoe. They came to the rescue, and an old settler, with a musket which he had used in the War of 1812, fired a charge of buck-shot into Bruin which induced him to take to the water, after which he was soon taken, captive and dead, to the shore. He weighed over three hundred pounds.

A son of the settler who shot the bear had a frightful experience in the river many years afterward. He was engaged in Canada in the business of buying saw-logs for the American market. Coming from the woods down to Chippewa one cold day in December, at a time when considerable quantities of strong, thin cakes of ice were floating in the river, he took a flat-bottom skiff to row across to his home. This he did without apprehension, as he had been born and brought up on the banks of the Niagara, understood it well, and was also a strong, resolute man.

As he drew near the foot of Navy Island, intending to take the chute between it and Buckhorn Island, two large cakes between which he was sailing suddenly closed together and cut the bottom of his skiff square off. Just above the cake on which his bottomless skiff was then floating there was a second large cake, at a little distance from it, and beyond this a strip of water which washed the shore of Navy Island. In

less time than it has taken to write this, he sprang upon the first piece of ice, ran across it with desperate speed, cleared the first space of water at a single leap, ran across the next cake of ice, jumped with all his might, and landed in the icy water within a rod of the shore, to which he swam. He was soon after warming and drying himself before the rousing fire of the only occupant of the island.

His father had a fine farm on the bank of the river, which he cultivated with much care. But before the drainage of the country was completed the land was decidedly wet. A friend from the East who made him a call found him plowing. The water stood in the bottom of the furrows. But agriculture has been progressive since those days. It is now almost a fine art instead of a mere pursuit. And nowhere north of the equator is there a climate and soil so genial and favorable for the growth of certain kinds of fruit, especially the apple and the peach, as are those of Niagara County. Many persons claim that they can tell from the peculiar consistency of the pulp, and by its flavor and *bouquet*, on which side of the Genesee River an apple is grown.

It is said that the winter apples of Niagara are as well known and as greatly prized above all others of their kind on the docks of Liverpool, as is Sea Island cotton above all other grades of that plant. The delicious little russet known as the *Pomme Gris*, with its fine aromatic flavor when ripe, grows nowhere else to such perfection as along the Niagara River. In 1825, at the grand celebration held to commemorate the completion of the

Eric Canal, the late Judge Porter made the first shipment east of apples raised in Niagara County. It consisted of two barrels, one of which was sent to the corporation of the city of Troy, and the other to that of New York. They were duly received and honored. From this small beginning the fruit trade has grown to the yearly value of more than a million of dollars for Niagara County alone.

With reference to the forest which once covered this country, an erroneous impression prevails as to its age. Poets and romancers have been in the habit of speaking of these "primeval forests" as though they might have been bushes when Nahor and Abraham were infants. But this is a great error. Since the discovery of the country only one tree has been found that was eight hundred years old. This is mentioned by Sir Charles Lyell as having grown out of one of the ancient mounds near Marietta, Ohio. But the great majority of them were not over three hundred years old. The testimony of the trees concerning the past is not quite so abundant as that of the rocks, but that of one tree grown in central New York is of a remarkable character. It was a white oak, which grew in the rich valley of the Clyde River, about one mile west of Lyons' Court House, and was cut down in the year 1837. The body made a stick of timber eighty feet long, which before sawing was about five feet in diameter. It was cut into short logs and sawed up. From the center of the butt-log was sawed a piece about eight by twelve inches. At the butt end of this piece the saw laid bare, without marring them, some old

scars made by an ax or some other sharp instrument. These scars were perfectly distinct and their character equally unmistakable. They were made, apparently, when the young tree was about six inches in diameter. Outside of these scars there were counted four hundred and sixty distinct rings, each ring marking with unerring certainty one year's growth of the tree. It follows that this chopping was done in 1374, or one hundred and eighteen years before the first voyage of Columbus across the Atlantic.

It has been questioned whether the rings shown in a cross-section of a tree can be relied upon to determine truly the number of years it has been growing. A singular confirmation of the correctness of this method of counting was furnished some years since.

In the latter part of the last century the late Judge Porter surveyed a large tract of land lying east of the Genesee River, known as "The Gore." Some thirty-five years afterward it became necessary to resurvey one of its lines, and recourse was had to the original surveys. Most of the forest through which the first line had been run was cleared off, and such trees as had been "blazed" as line-trees had overgrown the scars. One tree was found which was declared to be an original line-tree. On cutting into it carefully the old "blaze" was brought to light, and on counting the rings outside of it, they were found to correspond with the number of years which had elapsed since the first survey.

One of the three small buildings at Niagara which escaped the flames of 1814 was a log-cabin, about thirty

by forty feet in its dimensions, that stood in the center of the front of the International block. In the latter part of 1815 the inhabitants returned, and the late General P. Whitney put a board addition to the log-house, and opened the first hotel. From that has grown up the present International. The immediate predecessor of the International was the Eagle Tavern, which was, for some years, in charge of a genial and popular landlord, the late Mr. Hollis White. It was formed by the addition to the old frame structure of a three-story brick building, of moderate dimensions. Across the front of this addition was a long, wide, old-fashioned stoop. This was well supplied with comfortable arm-chairs, which furnished easy rests for guests or neighbors, and were well patronized by both, and especially during the summer season by the genial humorists of the place. On the opposite side of the street was a small house, a story and a half high, belonging to Judge Porter, and to which he built an addition. Then, as now, there were occasionally more visitors than the hotel could accommodate, and the neighbors assisted in entertaining them. Judge Porter did this frequently, and among his guests were President Monroe, Marshal Grouchy, General La Fayette, General Brown, General Scott, Judge Spencer, and other distinguished strangers.

The first building erected on the ground where the Cataract House now stands was of a later date—1824—a frame house about fifty feet square. It was purchased by General Whitney in 1826, and formed the nucleus of the great pile which constitutes the present Cataract House.

In 1829, the carriage road down the bank to the ferry on the Canadian side was made. For several years previous the principal hotel at the Falls was also on that side. It was called the Pavilion, and stood on the high bank just above the Horseshoe Fall. It commanded a grand view of the river above, and almost a bird's-eye view of the Falls and the head of the chasm below. The principal stage-route from Buffalo was likewise on that side, and the register of the Pavilion contained the names of most of the noted visitors of the period. But the erection of the Cataract House and the establishing of stage-routes on the American side drew away much of its patronage, and finally, on the completion of the first half of the Clifton House, in 1833, it was quite abandoned. A few years later the Ontario House was built, about half-way between the Clifton and the Horseshoe Fall, toward which it fronted. There was not sufficient business to support it, and after standing unoccupied for several years, it took fire and was burned to the ground.

The Clifton was greatly enlarged and improved by Mr. S. Zimmerman in 1865. The Amusement Hall and several cottages were built and gas-works erected. The grounds were handsomely graded and adorned.

Near the site of Table Rock is the Museum, its valuable collection being the result of several years' labor by its proprietor, Mr. Thomas Barnett. It contains several thousand specimens from the animal and mineral kingdoms, and the galleries are arranged to represent a forest scene.

Just above the Museum the visitor steps upon what

remains of the famous Table Rock. It was once a bare rock pavement, about fifteen rods long and about five rods wide, about fifty feet of its width projecting beyond its base at the bottom of the limestone stratum nearly one hundred feet below. Remembering this fact, we can more readily credit the probable truth of the statement made by Father Hennepin—which we have before noticed—that the projection on the American side in 1682, when he returned from his first tour to the West, was so great that four coaches could drive abreast under it. On top of the *débris* below the bank lies the path by which Termination Rock, under the western end of the Horseshoe, is reached. It is a path which few neglect to follow.

The Table itself has always been, and must continue to be, a favorite resort for visitors. The combined view of the Falls and the chasm below, as well as the rapids above, is finer, more extensive, here than from any other point. Moreover, the nearness to the great cataract is more sensibly felt, the communion with it is deeper and more intimate than it can be anywhere else. The view from this point can be most pleasantly and satisfactorily taken in the afternoon, when the spectator has the sun behind him, and can look at his leisure and with unvexed eyes at the brilliant scene before him. However long he may tarry he will find new pleasure in each return to it.

Two miles above, following round the bend of the Oxbow toward Chippewa, and down near the water's edge, is the Burning Spring. The water is impregnated with sulphureted hydrogen gas, and is in a constant state

of mild ebullition. The gas is perpetually rising to the surface of the water, and when a lighted match is applied it burns with an intermittent flame. If, however, a tub with an iron tube in the center of its bottom is placed over the spring, a constant stream of gas passes through it. On being lighted it burns constantly, with a pale blue, wavering flame, which possesses but little illuminating or heating power. The drive is a pleasant one, affording a fine view of the Oxbow Rapids and islands and the noble river above.

A mile and a quarter west of Table Rock is the Lundy's Lane battle-ground. On the crown of the hill, where the severest struggle occurred, are two rival pagodas challenging the tourist's attention. From the top of each he has a rare outlook over a broad level plain, relieved on its northern horizon by the top of Brock's Monument, and to the south-east by the city of Buffalo and Lake Erie.

The obliging custodian of either tower will enlighten his hearers with dextrous volubility, and, according as he is certain of the nationality of his listeners, will the Stars and Stripes wave in triumph, or the Cross of Saint George float in glory, over the bloody and hard-fought field. If he cannot feel sure of his listeners' habitat, like Justice, he will hold an even balance and be blind withal.

It was the writer's privilege to go over the field on a pleasant June day with Generals Scott and Porter, and to learn from them its stirring incidents. General Scott pointed out the location of the famous battery on the

British left which made such havoc with his brave brigade, and in taking which the gallant Miller converted his modest "I'll try, sir," into a triumphant "It is done." The General also found the tree under which, faint from his bleeding wound, he sat down to rest, placing its protecting boll between his back and the British bullets, as he leaned against it. Plucking a small wild flower growing near it, he presented it to one of the ladies of the party, telling her that "it grew in soil once nourished by his blood."

General Porter showed us where, with his volunteers and Indians, he broke through the woods on the British right, just as Miller had captured the troublesome battery, thus aiding to win the most obstinate and bloody fight of the war. Its hard-won trophies, however, were too easily lost, as, by some misunderstanding or neglect of orders, the proper guard around the field was not maintained, and, in the darkness proverbially intense just before day, the British returned to the field and quietly removed most of the guns. So our English friends claim it was a drawn battle.

Nearly half a century later a dinner was given at Queenston by our Canadian friends, to signalize the completion of the Lewiston Suspension Bridge. On this occasion a British-Canadian officer, the late Major Woodruff, of St. David's, who served with his regiment during the war, was called upon by the chairman, the late Sir Allan McNabb, to follow, in response to a toast, the late Colonel Porter, only son of General Porter. In a mirthful reference to the stirring events of the war he alluded

to the British retreat after the battle of Chippewa, and condensing the opposing forces into two personal pronouns, one representing General Porter and the other himself, he turned to Colonel Porter and said: "Yes, sir, I remember well the *moving* events of that day, and how sharp he was after me. But, sir, he was balked in his purpose, for although he won the *victory* I won the *race*, and so we were even."