

CHAPTER II.

ACCIDENTS AT THE FALLS—TRADITIONAL REMINISCENCE—
LOSS OF THE BOAT INDEPENDENCE—OTHER CASUALTIES—
DEATH OF DR. HUNGERFORD—CONCLUDING REMARKS.

"How dreadful must thy summons be, O Death!
To him, who, counting on long years of pleasure,
Is quite unfurnished for the world to come!
In that dread moment, how the frantic soul
Runs to each avenue, and shrieks for help,
But runs and shrieks in vain! the swerveless foe
Pursues her close through every lane of life,
Nor misses once the track, but presses on,
Till forced at last to the tremendous verge,
At once she sinks to everlasting ruin."



ACCIDENTS are by no means of infrequent occurrence at the Falls, and, indeed, hardly a year passes away, without one or more of a fatal character. The great majority of these, however, originate in unseasonable attempts to cross the river above the cataract, from the mere vanity of daring, or while under the influence of partial intoxication. The lawless pursuit of gain, by illicit importation, occasionally furnishes a victim, and carelessness now and then adds another to the number. British soldiers, attempting to desert, have in several instances, lost

their lives, by drowning; and these are the principal cases of casualty within our remembrance.

Tradition tells many a tale of persons going over the Falls; and among others, of an Indian and squaw, in a canoe, who were drawn into the rapids, and hurried down to destruction. It relates, that the Indian, when he found it impossible to escape, coolly laid down his paddle, and, taking up a bottle of whiskey, which it had been the object of his voyage to procure, deliberately applied it to his lips, and kept sucking away, until he was himself sucked in, by the overwhelming flood; and, thus in a spiritual way, introduced himself to the world of spirits. Whether or not, he took a drop too much, it is impossible to say; but of this we are certain, that he was loth to lose a drop. The poor squaw paddled away till the last, and that was the last of both. This incident may or may not be apocryphal, — we half suspect it is, — but it illustrates the ruling passion strong in death. But to matters of fact, —

To enumerate all the accidents that have happened at the Falls, would be neither pleasant or profitable; but as the reader may desire to peruse a record of FATAL DISASTERS, we shall subjoin a brief notice of those, which, having occurred within the last few years, are most readily recalled to mind.

In 1810, the boat Independence, heavily laden with salt, while crossing to Chippewa, filled and sunk, and the Captain, William Valentine, and two of his crew were carried over the Falls. One, by the name of Potter, clung to an oar, and was rescued by a boat from Chippewa, when within a few yards of the rapids. In 1821, two men in a scow, were driven by the wind from the mouth of Chippewa creek, into the river, and swept over the cataract. In 1822, two men from Grand Island, met with a similar fate. In 1825, William Chambers and another person, in venturing too near the rapids, in a canoe, were drawn in, and forced over the Falls. The year 1835, was marked by the sacrifice of another victim, in a similar manner.

In 1839, a sad accident, of an unusual character, occurred. Dr. Hungerford of Troy, while standing near the entrance to the Cave of the Winds, was struck on the head, by a fragment of rock falling from above, and instantly killed. One or two other persons who were with him, were slightly contused. This is the only instance, in which life has been lost by such a casualty, and the only one in which a visiter has ever been seriously injured.

In the summer of 1841, several British soldiers

were drowned, in an attempt to desert by swimming the river. In the fall of the same year, a boat with two men in it, crossing over from Chippewa, capsized and was carried over the Falls. On the thirty-first of January, 1842, a soldier attempted to let himself down the bank near the Museum, intending to cross the river on the ice,—but the rope breaking, he was killed by the fall.

A son of Scotia, flying from a party of infuriate Irishmen, one dark night, in the fall of 1836, ran, by mistake, off the bank, some thirty rods below the Falls, and fell ninety feet, to the bottom of the precipice, where he was found the next day, in a dreadfully mutilated and freezing condition. In that night of suffering, he must have endured more than a hundred deaths; and had his rescue been delayed but a short time longer, would have perished. By careful nursing, he was, however, recovered, and ultimately regained his health. It was a providential escape.

These are the principal accidents that have occurred of late years; and are, we presume, sufficient to satisfy the morbid curiosity of the reader, unless he delights in the records of death. If such be the case, he must seek elsewhere the means of pampering a depraved taste.