

## CHAPTER VI.

NIAGARA STRAIT—BREADTH—DEPTH—RAPIDS—GENERAL APPEARANCE—NAVIGATION—STEAMBOATS—FULTON—ISLANDS—GRAND ISLAND—BOSTON TIMBER-COMPANY—VILLAGE—MILLS—VESSELS DESTROYED—BUCK-HORN ISLAND NAVY ISLAND—MILITARY OCCUPATION.

“The sails of commerce whiten o’er the seas,  
 And wing their way when favoured by the breeze ;  
 But when opposing tides and tempests rise,  
 The yielding barque the unequal contest flies,  
 And fate-ward driven is wrecked upon the shore,  
 Or forced to shun the track she sought before.  
 Not so with thy creations, Lord of steam !  
 They breast the raging storm, ascend the stream —  
 Contending currents and advancing gales,  
 But show thy triumph over seas and sails.”



AVING briefly noticed the principal places on the Niagara frontier, a short account of the river itself, its islands, currents, etc. is further necessary to our purpose of giving the reader the information he must necessarily desire to obtain, of every thing immediately connected with the Falls. Every portion of this strait, from its intimate relation to the wonderful cataract, which yearly attracts such vast numbers of people from even the remote parts of the earth, and which is in itself so immeasurably superior in its

sublimity and grandeur to every natural work of the material universe, of which we have any knowledge, must possess a degree of interest to the traveller which we have no right, if even we had the inclination, to overlook.

The Niagara river or strait, is about two miles wide at its efflux, opposite Buffalo. At Black Rock, it is nearly a mile in breadth, and is here deep and rapid, having a current of six or eight miles an hour. Below this point, its breadth is variable, and it expands and contracts several times before reaching Grand Island, at the head of which it is again two miles wide. It here divides—a branch of from one fourth of a mile to a mile broad, passing round either side of the island. The whole width of the river measuring across the centre of Grand Island, is more than eight miles.

Below Grand Island, and opposite to Schlosser, it is nearly three miles across, and has the appearance of a beautiful glassy lake, such as one might fancy in an Italian landscape. Lower down, it narrows to less than a mile, and soon after spreads again to a mile and a half. At the Falls, it is about three fourth of a mile wide; a short distance below, it is contracted to fifty-six rods, and at the Whirlpool, is but a stone's throw, or one

hundred and fifty yards across. This is the narrowest part of the strait.

Its depth is also very unequal, measuring in some places not over fifteen or twenty, and in others nearly three hundred feet. For this great inequality, it is extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, satisfactorily to account. As may be supposed, from these striking irregularities in the breadth and depth of the stream, the velocity of the current is also very variable, averaging from four to five miles an hour to the commencement of the rapids, where it is greatly increased.

At this point, the bed of the river declines, the channel contracts, numerous large rocks heave up the rolling surges, and dispute the passage of the now raging and foaming floods. The mighty torrent leaping down successive ledges, dashing over opposing elevations, hurled back by ridges, and repelled from shores and islands, plunging, boiling, roaring, seems a mad wilderness of waters, striving against its better fate, and hurried on to destruction by its own blind and reckless impetuosity. Were there no cataract, these rapids would yet make Niagara the wonder of the world.

Most rivers proper, are subject to great changes in the quantity of water which is carried down at different seasons, sometimes overflowing their

banks, and inundating the flat country through which they pass; and at other periods being comparatively low and diminutive. Such is not the case with the Niagara strait. It constantly presents the same uniform appearance, and is at all times a deep, powerful, rapid, majestic stream, pouring its ceaseless floods forever on to the mighty cataract, over which they dash; and scarcely affected by the snows of winter, the heat of summer, the rain, the drought, the calm, or the storm. This peculiarity, is of course owing to the great superficial extent of the lake in which it has its origin, and of the vast seas and rivers above, from which its supplies are drawn. The close observer would however soon perceive, that, operated upon by local causes, it rises and falls occasionally, though not to an extent sufficient to alter its general aspect.

Before the application of steam power to maritime purposes, the navigation of the Niagara river must have been attended with many and almost insuperable difficulties. The velocity of the current, the occasional great depth of the channel, the lake winds, blowing almost constantly down the stream, and the breadth of the strait, making it troublesome to cross, must have rendered the upward progress of batteaux, barges, or other

vessels of any considerable size, whether propelled by setting poles, oars, or warping, a work of immense toil and protracted exertion. But since the introduction of steamboats, so admirably adapted to river-navigation, and able alike to breast the strongest currents, and make head against opposing tempests, the passage of the strait from the lowest practicable point to the lake above, is easily made in from two to three hours; and thus, that which was formerly the labour of days, is reduced to the recreation — for a steam voyage up the Niagara cannot be otherwise than delightful — of a mere play-spell.

The genius of Fulton has chained the elements, taken captive the storm, and subdued the flood. It has joined remote distances, united seas, and made almost impassable rivers the great highways of Nations. It has done more! — The missionary of art, science, and civilization, his wonderful invention has, with a rapidity that sets time and space alike at defiance, carried to far-off places, and almost unapproachable seclusions, a knowledge of the most important truths and sublime discoveries. By the mute teaching of its power, and its complete subservience to the wants, wishes, and caprices of man, it has given birth to a spirit of energy, enterprise, and emulation,

which, far from the least beneficial of its results, has changed the face of nature, and exalted the destiny of the human race.

Immortal Fulton ! how much is the happiness of individuals, the welfare of nations, and even the interests of religion indebted to thy persevering and far-reaching genius. What does not the world owe to a mind that could originate, and a zeal that could conduct—and that too, in spite of prejudices and obstacles that would have tried the patience of a saint, and exhausted the firmness of a martyr—to a successful and triumphant issue, the establishment of such an astonishing and inestimable agency of good ! Greece or Rome would have given to Fulton a place among the Gods, and erected pillars, statues, arches, temples, and altars to his honour. America has done better ! She has called her villages, towns, and counties by his name, and covered her seas, lakes, and rivers with moving monuments to his memory ; while every pharos that lights her busy ports, shines upon the pulsing proofs of his fame and genius.

There are about forty islands in the Niagara strait, above the cataract. Most of them are small, insignificant, and scarcely worthy of enumeration. Of those immediately at the Falls, we

shall have occasion to speak in another place. Saving these, Grand and Navy Islands are the only two to which any peculiar interest is attached.

Grand Island is about twelve miles long and six broad ; its upper extremity is about seven miles from the lake, its lowest point three miles above the Falls. It contains over seventeen thousand acres of excellent land, heavily timbered, and plentifully stocked with game. It is a favourite resort for Indian hunters, and sportsmen from Buffalo and other places. This Island, with most others in the strait, belongs to the United States, the main channel of the river being on the west or Canada side. The vanity and folly of an ambitious Israelite, first gave it notoriety, — it has since attained a celebrity of a different kind.

In 1833, the Boston Timber Company purchased the major part of Grand Island of the State of New-York, and commenced the erection of large mills for the purpose of supplying the eastern market with shipping timber ready fitted for use, the fine forests of towering oaks and firs on the island furnishing abundant material of the best kind, and of easy access. These mills cover an area of one hundred and fifty feet square. They are (or rather were, for their operations are at present suspended) driven by steam, contain

fifteen separate gangs or sets of saws, and cut logs from ten to seventy feet in length. Connected with these mills, there is a large steam flouring-mill, and a small, but pleasant little village, called *White-Haven*, from the name of the principal proprietor. The village is directly opposite *Tonawanda*, on the site of the never-built city of *Arrarat*, and the mills are a short distance below. They are well worth a visit, which is easily made, as the steamboats that ply between *Buffalo* and the *Falls*, usually land there to procure the necessary article of fuel.

In 1759, upon the conquest of the *Canadas* by the *English*, two large *French* vessels were burnt at the lower end of *Grand Island*, to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy. Parts of their charred remains are said to be still visible, and not long since, several tons of iron were recovered from the river, by raking its bed at the point where they were destroyed, which portion of the stream, is, from that circumstance, called *Burnt-Ship Bay*, and is included between *Grand* and the north west extremity of *Buck-horn Islands*. This latter, is long, low, and marshy, and contains one hundred and forty-six acres. It is unimportant in any respect.

*NAVY ISLAND*, belonging to the *British dominions*,

lies near the foot of *Grand Island*, between that and the *Canada shore*: — the principal channel of the strait is between these two islands. It is a mile long, half a mile wide, and contains three hundred and four acres of land. The soil is rich, and covered with a heavy growth of timber. It derives its name from having been a *French* naval depot, where the two vessels mentioned above, and other smaller ones were constructed.

This island has become celebrated in consequence of having been occupied by *McKenzie*, *Van Rensselaer*, *Sutherland*, and others, refugees and 'sublime' patriots, as a military station, during the border excitement of 1837 and '38, an account of which, and of the destruction of the *Caroline* is reserved for a subsequent page.

