

CHAPTER VII.

NIAGARA RIVER — COURSE AND VELOCITY — LOVELINESS — DIVISIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS — HEIGHT OF BANKS — DEPTH — BREADTH — DESCENT OF THE STREAM — RETROCESSION OF THE FALLS — CONCLUDING REMARKS.

“Majestic stream! what river rivals thee,
Thou child of many lakes and sire of one —
Lakes that claim kindred with the all-circling sea —
Large at thy birth as when thy race is run!
Against what great obstructions hast thou won
Thine august way — the rock-formed mountain-plain
Has opened at thy bidding, and the steep
Bars not thy passage, for the ledge in vain
Stretches across the channel, — thou dost leap
Sublimely down the height, and urge again
Thy rock-embattled course on to the distant main.”



NIAGARA river is, in its whole course, quite in keeping with the stupendous cataract from which its principal interest is derived. There is nothing insignificant, nothing paltry, nothing common-place about it, from the lake in which its vast floods have birth, to that which they supply. It is every where grand, mighty, and majestic. When spread to the dimensions of a little sea, it has no resemblance to a shoal; and when contracted to the breadth of a creek, it seems to possess the power of an ocean. The

very interruptions it meets with in its way, seem placed there only to exhibit the immensity of its force. The basin which receives its prodigious far-falling volume, resembles an abyss without bounds to its capacity; and the compressed channel through which it then flows, seems to have opened its rock-bound banks to an imprisoned sea, that would have burst a passage, had escape been denied.

Making a sharp angle at the Falls, it rolls on through beautiful curves, in an almost straight direction for about two miles; then winds gracefully off to the left, and passing through a succession of noble bends, rushes, wild, impetuous and uncontrollable, into the Whirlpool, where, like a baffled Titan struggling with his bonds, it rages and plunges round the impenetrable barriers that hem it in; and at last, having gathered anew its mighty energies, rushes headlong on in a fresh direction, and bounds away, free, fearless, and triumphant.

Continuing in its new course — having turned less than a right-angle — but a short distance, it rolls away gradually to the west, and having regained its former direction, hurries on, inclining now to the right, and again bending to the left, here maddened by restraint, and there soothed

by expansion, to the end of the mountain-plain, from the gaping jaws of which it rushes angrily forth, but soon recovering the serenity of its native seas, and no longer chafed or enraged, it flows quietly and smoothly on, through gentle curves and wooing banks, to the sweet lake whose soft embrace it has come so far, and encountered so much, to meet, and in whose peaceful bosom it finally sinks to repose.

From the foot of the mountain ridge to lake Ontario, nothing can be more lovely than this river. It is a rapture to look upon its bright and tranquil course. It glides along so silently and almost imperceptibly, its surface is so calm and glassy, its breadth so uniform and expansive, its waters so clear and deep, its banks so smooth and regular, its curvatures so gradual and alternate, its whole aspect so pleasing and harmonious, that a delicious languor steals over the mind, the spirit yields itself unconsciously to a sweet oblivion of turbulence and strife, and its contemplations are of sunny skies, shining streams, and shady groves. The eye lingers with delight upon the blended hues, the graceful turns, and emerald shores of the no longer agitated, but now beautiful Niagara; and the soul, at peace with itself, with nature, and with all things, indulges in a dreamy delirium

of joy, unshadowed by care, untinged with gloom, and unbroken by tumult.

Each of the four great divisions of the strait has its peculiar and distinguishing characteristics. Those are from Lake Erie to the rapids, majesty, extent, variety; from the rapids to the ferry, immensity, energy, sublimity; from the ferry to Lewiston, restraint, activity, vigour; from Lewiston to Lake Ontario, placidity, beauty, repose. The banks of the river partake of the different features of the stream. Above the Falls they are of variable height, shape, and consistency, now low, grassy, and lawn-like, and now high, dark, and frowning; at the Falls they are bold, grand, impending; from the ferry to Lewiston, they are lofty, rugged, uneven; and from thence to the lake, they are smooth, sloping and regular. From the efflux of the river, to the cataract, they are from five to one hundred feet high; from the Falls to the end of the mountain ridge, they are from one hundred and seventy, to three hundred and seventy feet perpendicular height; at Lewiston they are one hundred feet high, and from thence to the lake, they have a gradual and unbroken descent. At Schlosser the banks are thirteen feet higher than the level of Lake Erie; at the Falls they are one hundred and nine feet, and

at the heights near Lewiston, thirty-eight feet above the same level.

The river below the Falls and near the ferry, is two hundred and fifty feet deep, as ascertained by actual measurement, — in other places, no bottom has ever been found. Its width at the ferry, is about seventy-six rods; a short distance below, it is contracted to fifty-six rods; from thence to Lewiston, it varies from twenty-five to one hundred rods, and from Lewiston to the lake, from one half to three fourths of a mile in breadth. The narrowest point is at the Whirlpool, where it is but twenty-five rods across.

The descent of the river from its efflux, to Black Rock is six feet; from thence to the rapids, ten feet; from the head of the rapids to the cataract, fifty-eight feet; the cataract itself, one hundred and fifty-four feet; from the Falls to Lewiston, one hundred and four feet; and from Lewiston to Lake Ontario, about two feet. The whole declivity of the strait from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, is therefore three hundred and thirty-four feet!

It has been a subject of much dispute, whether or not the Falls have receded from the heights at Lewiston to their present place, and the question yet remains undecided. The author's opinion

may be of small importance, but it is proper that it should be expressed. From a careful observation of all their phenomena, and of the whole extent of the chasm, he is satisfied that they have, but that their retrocession has been extremely slow. The nature of the rocks, the appearance of the channel, the known history of the cataract, all seem to confirm the supposition.

If it be true that they have so far receded, to what august speculations does it not give rise? What a time must have elapsed, what a prodigious power must have been exerted, ere the floods of this mighty river could have rent a passage three hundred feet deep, through the living rocks, for a distance of seven miles! When did this great work commence? What progress, and what pauses were made? How long was its course delayed in hollowing out that vast basin the Whirlpool? When was the first crag torn from the rugged brow of Iris Island? How long has the cataract been digging at the dread abyss upon whose verge it labours? Imagination recoils in terror from the task of tracing this stupendous movement. Untold ages must have watched with awe the "sublime march of Niagara to the music of its own deep thunders!"

Having thus sketched with a rapid but timorous

hand, the main features of the strait in which the Falls resound, and given a brief, but accurate account of the several towns, villages, and other places on its borders, we come now to the great cataract itself, and the many remarkable scenes in its vicinity ; and if we fail to describe that which is far too grand for description, we shall at least endeavour to direct the attention of the reader to all the different points and views which he ought to visit and examine, relate so much of them as may be told, and thus guide him to a right observation and a proper judgment of this most sublime and magnificent object of wonder and curiosity in the known material universe.

