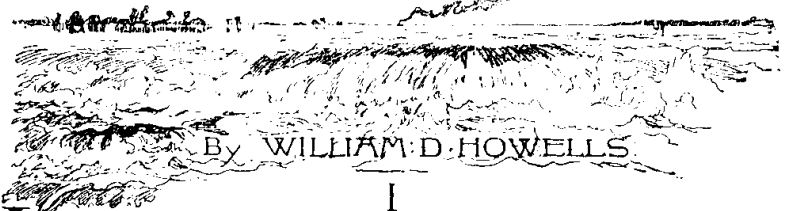


NIAGARA: FIRST & LAST



I

IN the spring of 1860 I wrote a life of Lincoln. It was what is called a campaign life, and in its poor way it was a part of the electioneering enginery of a canvass destined to be, if not the most memorable in our history, at least of the farthest effect. To be quite honest, I must own that my book, as I now look back on the facts, probably served the mysterious uses, and performed the vague offices of a fifth wheel to a coach, in forwarding the fortunes of the man whose life it celebrated before he was so famous as to need no blare of trumpets, not to say willow whistles, evermore. What seems strange is that the great renown of Lincoln has not reacted upon one of his earliest biographies; that this has dropped as wholly in oblivion as if it was the story of nobody; the coach indeed arrived in glory, and was found to be the car of victory, the fiery chariot of freedom; but the fifth wheel seems to have stopped somewhere on the way.

My book was published in Columbus, Ohio, and I did not wait for its assured success before setting forth upon some travels which had long invited me. The publisher had so much faith in it as to be willing to supply me in advance with a certain sum of money, say fifty dollars in Ohio money, and a letter of credit, addressed to several publishers in Boston and New York, to the amount of some hundred and ninety dollars more. I meant to explore those distant capitals, and to take in the wonders and delights of the St. Lawrence route to Quebec, and to acquaint myself with the manners and customs of strange peoples, so far as they were to be studied in Canada. For this journey, a great deal of money was needed, and I took all I had. I do not know why I should have thought it well to spend my whole substance upon this venture, but I seem to have done so; and I had no compunctions, so far as I can remember, in spending so much of this vast sum in Ohio money, which I then believed the best money in the world. I found later that it was worth only eighty-five or ninety cents on the dollar in Boston; one was liable to these surprises in the days of State banking; but as yet I was troubled with no misgivings when I left Columbus, and took my way to Buffalo, where I thought I might fitly rest a day or two, and recruit my strength for the impression of Niagara which I was eager to receive. I spent most of this stay in my room at the hotel, writing letters for a

Cincinnati paper, which had agreed to take them from me. The passion for summer correspondence has not yet died out of journalism, but even then I found its impulses uncertain, and many of the letters I wrote on that journey were never printed. I am not sure that this was a loss to literature; but it certainly was a loss to me in that Ohio money which was the best in the world. When I was not writing, I was wandering about the streets of Buffalo, and viewing its monuments from the platform of a horse car, or from its pavements, not so much crowded then as now. I forget what the monuments were in that day; I even forget who were the editors of the papers, whom I visited after the simple journalistic usage of the time, and conversed with, in their offices. But they probably had their revenge, and forgot who I was much sooner. I recall, however, that it was all very stirring and interesting, and that I tried to view the novelties I found everywhere in the manner of my favorite authors, and to describe them in their style. The chief of these authors was then Heinrich Heine, and I did my best to give such an account of Buffalo as he would have written in English if he had been there in my place. As soon as I had completed the history of my observations, which was more considerable than the observations themselves, I pushed on to Niagara Falls.

II.

One always experiences a vivid emotion from the sight of the Rapids, no matter how often one sees them, but I am safe in saying that one sees them for the first time but once. After that one has the feeling of a habitu  towards them, a sort of friendly and familiar appreciation of their terrific beauty, but certainly not the thrill of the pristine awe. It is even hard to recall that: the picture remains, but not the sense of their mighty march, or of their gigantic leaps and lunges, when they break ranks, and their procession becomes a mere onward tumult without form or order. I had schooled myself for great impressions, and I did not mean to lose one of them; they were all going into that correspondence which I was so proud to be writing, and finally, I hoped, they were going into literature: poems, sketches, studies, and I do not know what all. But I had not counted upon the Rapids taking me by the throat, as it were, and making my heart stop. I still think that above and below the Falls, the Rapids are the most striking features of the spectacle. At least you may say something about them, compare them to something; when you come to the cataract itself, you can say nothing; it is incomparable. My sense of it first, and my sense of it last, was not a sense of the stupendous, but a sense of beauty, of serenity, of repose. I have always had to take myself in hand, to shake myself up, to look twice, and recur to what I have heard and read

of other people's impressions, before I am overpowered by it. Otherwise I am simply charmed.

I hurried out to look at it as soon as they gave me a room in the good old Cataract House, and I spent the afternoon in taking a careful account of my impressions, and trying to fit phrases to my emotions for that blessed correspondence. Then I went back to my room and began to put them down on paper while they were still warm.

That pleasant room in the Cataract House is very vivid in my memory yet. It had a green lattice-door opening into the corridor, and when I left the inner door ajar, a delicious current of summer breeze and afternoon sunshine drew through it from the window looking out on a sweep of those Rapids. It was what they call a single room, but it seemed very spacious at that time, and it had a little table in it, where I wrote my letters to the Cincinnati paper. I lived two weeks in that room, and I made a vast deal of copy, including some poems, I believe, which never got printed, any more than most of my letters, though I did not confine the test of their merit to one editor alone.

III.

Apart from these literary enterprises of mine there was not a great deal to occupy me in the hotel. I suppose there are moments when the hotels at Niagara are full, but I never happened there at those moments, and

the Cataract House at the time of my first visit was far from crowded, though it was in the days before the war when Southerners were reputed to visit the Falls in great numbers. We dined at mid-day to the music of a brass band, which must have been more than usually brazen, to have affected my nerves the way it did, for at twenty-three the nerves are not sensitive. Very likely there were a variety of brides and grooms there, but I did not know them from the rest: so little is one condition of life able to distinguish another. There was a period when these young couples were visible to me, afterwards; and then, when I was very much older, they vanished again, and were no more to be found by the eye of earlier age than by the eye of earlier youth. I believe I saw numbers of pretty young girls, who then appeared to me stately and mature women, of great splendor and beauty, and of varying measures of haughty inapproachability. I made the acquaintance of no one in the hotel, but by a sort of affiniton, which I should now be at a loss to account for, I fell in with two artists who were painting the Falls and the Rapids, and the scenery generally, and I used to go about with them, and watch them at their work. They were brothers, and very friendly fellows, not much older than I, and because I liked them, and was reaching out in every direction for the materials of greater and greater consciousness, I tried to see Niagara as actively and pervasively

iridescent as they did. They invited me to criticise their pictures in the presence of the facts, and I did once intimate that I failed to find all those rainbows, of different sizes and shapes which they had represented on the surface of the water everywhere. Then they pointed the rainbows out with their forefingers and asked, Didn't I see them there, and there, and there? I looked very hard, and as I was not going to be outdone in the perception of beauty, I said that I did see them, and I tried to believe that I saw them, but Heaven knows I never did. I hope this fraud will not be finally accounted against me. Those were charming fellows, and other pictures of theirs I have found so faithful that I am still a little shaken about the rainbows. My artists were from Ohio, and though I was too ignorant then to affirm that Ohio art was the best art in the world, just as Ohio money was the best, still I was very proud of it, and I suppose I renowned those invisible iridescences in my letter to the Cincinnati paper.

We walked all about the Falls, and over Goat Island, and to and from the Whirlpool, and it was a great advantage to me to be in the artists' company, for they knew all the loveliest places, and could show me the best points of view. I drove nowhere, because I had a fear, bred of much newspaper rumor and humor, that my accumulated treasures would not hold out against the rapacity of a single Niagara hackman. A

dollar was a dollar in those days, especially if it were a dollar of Ohio money, or at least it was so till you got to Boston; and I was not willing to waste any of mine in carriage fares. But to be honest about those poor fellows, I always found the Niagara hackmen, when I visited their domain in after years, not only civil but reasonable, and I have never regretted the money I spent upon them; it was no longer Ohio money, to be sure.

Some places I could not walk to on that first visit, and as there was no suspension bridge then near the Falls, I took a boat when I wished to cross to the Canada side, and a man rowed me over the eddies of the river where they reeled away from the plunge of the cataract. I do not think I crossed more than once, or had any wish to do so, after I had visited the battle field of Lundy's Lane, where a veteran of the fight, so well preserved in alcohol that I should not be surprised if he were there yet, gave me an account of it from the top of a tower in which he seemed to be fortified. That poor little carnage has shrunk into so small a horror since the battles of the great war, then impending, that I feel somewhat like excusing the mention of it now; but when I visited the scene in 1860, I was aware of several emotions which, if not of prime importance on the spot, were very capable of being worked up into something worth while in my letter to the Cincinnati paper. I tried to give them a

Heinesque cast, and I made a good deal of the tipsy veteran. In the course of a literary life one is obliged to practice these economies, and I advise the beginner in our art against throwing away anything whatever. But what is the need of advising him? He would not be able to do so if he wished. He belongs to what he has seen, as much as it belongs to him, and he owes it a debt of expression which will weigh upon him till he complies with its just demand. The trouble is with what he has not seen, and decidedly he had better not be advised against throwing that away. The more of that he throws away the better; and the reader can have very little notion how much he is profiting by my profusion in this respect.

IV.

Really, however, I did see a great many things at Niagara on that first visit, and I am sorry to say that I saw them chiefly on the Canada side. My patriotism has always felt the hurt of the fact that our great national cataract is best viewed from a foreign shore. There can be no denying, at least in a confidence like the present, that the Canadian Fall, if not more majestic is certainly more massive, than the American. I used to watch its mighty wall of waters with a jealousy almost as green as themselves, and then try to believe that the knotted tumble of our Fall was finer. I could only make out that it had more apparent movement.

But at times, and if one looked steadily at any part of the cataract, the descending floods seemed to hang in arrest above the gulfs below. Those liquid steeps, those precipices of molten emerald, all broken and fissured with opal and crystal, seemed like heights of sure and firmset earth, and the mists that climbed them half-way were as still to the eye in their subtler sort. This effect of immobility is what gives its supreme beauty to Niagara, its repose. If there is agony there, it is the agony of Niobe, of the Laocoon. It moves the beholder, but itself it does not move.

I spent a great deal of time trying to say this or something like it, which now and always seemed to me true of Niagara, though I do not insist that it shall seem so to others. I could not see those iridescences that everywhere illumined the waters to my artist friends, and very likely the reader, if he is a person of feeble fancy, small sympathy and indifferent morals, will find nothing of this Repose that I speak of in Niagara. I imagine him taking my page out into the presence of the fact, and demanding, Now where is the Repose?

Well, all that I can say is that it has always been there on the occasion of my visits. On the occasion of my first visit there was even a shelf of the Table Rock still there, and I went out and stood upon it, for the sake of saying that I had done so in my letter to the Cincinnati paper, though I might very well have said

it without having done so, and I am almost sorry that I did not, when I remember how few of those letters that paper printed. There was no great pleasure in the experience. You were supposed to get a particularly fine view of the Horseshoe Falls, but I got no view at all, on account of a whim of the mist. Weeks earlier a large piece of the rock had fallen just a few moments after a carriage full of people had driven off it, and I did not know but another piece might fall just a few moments before I walked off it. I was not in a carriage, and my portion of Table Rock did not fall till some three months later; that was quite soon enough for me; I should have preferred three years.

I do not know whether it was my satisfaction in this hair-breadth escape or not, but I had sufficient spirits immediately after to join a group of people near by who were taking peeps over a precipice at something below. I did not know what it was, but I thought it might be something I could work up in my letters to that Cincinnati paper, and I waited my turn among those who were lying successively on their stomachs and craning their necks over the edge; and then I saw that it was a man who was lying face upwards on the rocks below, and had perhaps been lying there some time. He was a very green and yellow melancholy of a man, as to his face, and in his workman's blue overalls he had a trick of swimming upwards to the eye of the æsthetic spectator, so that one

had to push back with a hard clutch on the turf to keep from plunging over to meet him. I made a note of this morbid impulse for primary use in my letters to that Cincinnati paper, and secondary use in a poem, or sketch, or tale; and then I crawled back and went away, and was faint in secret for a while. It was strange how fully sufficing one little glimpse of that poor man was. No one knew who he was or how he had fallen over there, but after the first glance at him (I believe I did not give a second) I felt that we did not part strangers. Now I meet people at dinner and pass whole evenings with them, and cannot remember their faces so as to place them the next week. But I think I could have placed that poor man years afterwards. To be sure the circumstances are different, and I am no longer twenty-three.

V.

Do they still, I wonder, take people to see a place not far above the Canadian Fall, where a vein of natural gas vents itself amid the trouble of the waters, and the custodian sets fire to it with a piece of lighted newspaper? They used to do that, if you paid them a quarter, in a little pavilion built over the place to shut out the unpaying public. By comparison with the great gas wells which I saw in combustion long after at Findlay, this was a very feeble rush light conflagration indeed, but it had the merit of being

much more mysterious. I, for instance, did not know it was natural gas, or what it was, and the custodian sagely would not say; the mystery was probably part of his stock in trade. There were many mysteries, maintained at a profit, about Niagara then, and not the least of them was the Terrapin Tower, which stood at the brink of the American Fall, and was reached by a series of stepping stones and bridges amidst the rapids. The mystery of this was that any human being should wish to go up it, at the risk of his life, but everybody did. I myself found a bridal couple (of the third espousals) in it when I ventured a vast deal of potential literature in its frail keeping; no terrapin, I fancy, was ever so rash as to ascend it, from the day it was built to the day it was taken away. What is so amusing now to think of, though not so amusing then, is that all the while I was clambering about those heights and brinks, I was suffering from an inveterate vertigo, which made plain ground rather difficult for me at times. At odd moments it became necessary for me to lay hold of something and stay the reeling world; and the recurrence of these exigences finally decided me against venturing into the Cave of the Winds. Upon the whole I am glad I did not penetrate it, for now I can think it what I like, and if I had seen it I probably could not do that. I compromised by descending the Biddle Stairs, which had a rail to hold on by, and which, I have no doubt, amount to much the same thing as the

Cave of the Winds. At any rate, when I got to the bottom of them, I wondered why in the world I had come down.

I do not know whether under the present socialistic regime, or state control, of the Falls, there are so many marvels shown as under the old system of private enterprise. But I am sure that their number could have been greatly reduced, with advantage to the visitor. If you find a marvel advertised, and you learn that you cannot see it without paying a quarter, every coin upon your person begins to burn in an intense sympathy with your curiosity, and you cannot be content till you have seen that marvel. This was the principle of human nature upon which private capital had counted, and it did not matter that the Falls themselves were enough to glut the utmost greed of wonder. Their prodigious character was eked out by every factitious device to which the penalty of twenty-five cents could be attached. I remember that at the entrance of Prospect Park, if not within the sacred grove, a hardy adventurer had pitched his tent and announced the presence of a five-legged calf within its canvas walls, in active competition with the great cataract. I paid my quarter (my Ohio money was all paper, or I might have thought twice about it,) in order to make sure that this calf was in no wise comparable to Niagara. I do not say that the picture of the calf on the outside of the tent was not as good

as some pictures of Niagara that I have seen. It was at least as much like.

I hope that all this is not decrying the attractions of any worthy adjunct of the cataract, such as the Whirlpool. There is of course no other such, and I was proud and glad to believe that the Whirlpool was chiefly on the American side, or the first part of it, or was at first nearly if not solely accessible from our territory; and I did not find out till long after that I was wrong. The Whirlpool, seen from the heights around it, has that effect of sculpturesque repose which I have always found the finest thing in the Cataract itself. Like that it is impassioned, while the Rapids are passionate. From the top the circling lines of the Whirlpool seemed graven in a level of chalcedony; the illusion of arrest was so perfect that I was almost sorry ever to have lost it, though I do not know what I could have done with it if I had kept it. I duly studied my phrases about it for my letters to that Cincinnati paper, and it is probably from some of them, printed or unprinted, that I speak now. These things linger long in the mind; and it is not always from frugality that the observer of the picturesque uses the same terms again and again. Happily, I am not obliged to describe the Whirlpool to the reader, as I was then, and I have no impression to impart except this sense of its worthy unity with the Cataract in what I may call its highest æsthetic quality, its repose.

VI.

If he does not believe in this, he may go and look ; but there is one fact of this first visit of mine to Niagara which he must helplessly take my word for. That fact is Blondin, who is closely allied in my mind with the Whirlpool, because I saw him cross the river above the frantic Rapids not far from it. If this association is too mechanical, too material, then I will go farther, and say that when Blondin had got such a distance into the danger, he, too, became an illusion of Repose ; and I defy the most skeptical reader, who was not then present, to gainsay me.

Why those rapids just below the large Suspension Bridge were chosen to stretch Blondin's cable over, I do not know, unless it was because the river narrows to a gorge there, and because those rapids are more horrid, in the eighteenth-century sense, than any other feature of Niagara. They have been a great deal exploited since Blondin's time by adventurers who have attempted to swim them, and to navigate them in barrels and buoys and India-rubber balls, or if not quite India-rubber balls, I do not know why. But at that time no craft but the Maid-of-the-Mist, the little steamboat which used to run up to the foot of the cataract, had ever dared them. She, indeed, flying from the perennial pun involved in her name, not to mention the Sheriff's officer who had an attachment for her, weathered the rapids and passed in and out of the



A bit of American Falls from below the Cave of the Winds—Summer.

Whirlpool, and escaped into the quiet of Canadian waters, with the pilot and her engineer on board. Afterwards I saw her at Quebec where she had changed her name, as other American refugees in Canada have done, and had now become the Maid-of-Orleans, in recognition of her peaceful employ of carrying people to and from the Isle of Orleans. But her adventurous voyage was still fresh on the lips of guides and hackmen when I was first at Niagara, and I looked at the Rapids and the Whirlpool with an interest peculiarly fearful because of it.

As usual, I walked to the scene of the exploit I was about to witness, but there were a good many people walking, and they debated on the way whether Blondin would cross that day or not. It had been raining over night, and some said his cable was not in condition; others, that the guys which stayed it on either side were too slack, or too taut from the wet. Nevertheless, we found a great crowd on the Canada shore, which seemed to command the best view of Blondin as well as Niagara, and the American shore was dense with spectators, too. As the hour drew near for Blondin to do his feat, we were lost in greater and greater doubt whether he would do it or not, and perhaps if a vote had been taken the skeptics would have carried the day, when he suddenly danced out upon the cable before our unbelieving eyes.

The dizzy path was of the bigness of a ship's cable,

at the shore, but it seemed to dwindle to a thread where it sank over the centre of the gulf, down toward those tusked and frothing breakers. They seemed to jump at it, like a pack of maddened wolves, and to pull one another back, and then to tumble and flow away, forever different, forever the same. The strong guys starting from the rocks of the precipice and the level of the rapids could stay it, after all, only a little part of its length, and beneath them and up through them, the black cedars thrust their speary tops, with that slant toward the middle of the gorge, which must be from the pull of the strong draft between its walls. They made a fine contrast of color with the floods breaking snowy white from their bulks of glassy green; and for the rest there was the perfect blue of the summer heaven over all.

There was no testing of the guys, whether they were slack or taut, or of the cable, whether it was in condition, and in fact no one thought of either, such was the surprise of seeing that pink figure of a man spring out into space from some source which I, at least, had not observed. He was in the conventional silk fleshings of the rope-dancer, and he carried a very long balancing pole. At first there was some reality in the apparition. One felt he was a fellow-man about to dare death for our amusement, but as he began to run down the slope of the cable toward the centre, one rapidly lost this sense, and beheld him as a mere feature of the

general prospect. Perhaps he was aware of this effect and chose to startle us back to our consciousness of his humanity, or perhaps it was a wonted trick, intended to heighten the interest of the spectacle. At any rate, in the very middle of the river, he seemed suddenly to falter, and he swayed from side to side as if he were going to fall. A sort of groan went through the crowd, and several women fainted. Then Blondin made believe to recover himself, and began to climb the slope of his cable to the further shore. I do not know just how far this was, but I think it may have been well on to half a mile; as to the height above the rapids where the cable hung it looked like a hundred and fifty feet. I made some vague note of these matters after Blondin vanished into the crowd beyond, but there was not much time for conjecture. He came into sight again almost at once, a little puppet, running down the farther slope of the cable, and growing a little and a little larger as he drew near. Presently one noticed that he had left his balancing pole behind, and was tripping forward with outstretched arms.

I stood where I could see him well, on his return, and I looked at him with something of the interest one might feel in a man who had come back from the dead and had put on his earthly personality again. I do not remember his face, which was no doubt as good or as bad a face as any mountebank's or monarch's, but his feet seemed to me the very most intelligent feet in

the world, pliable, sinuous, clinging, educated in every fibre, and full of spiritual sentience. They had the air of knowing that the whole man was trusted to them, and, such as he was, that he was in their power and keeping alone. They rose and fell upon the cable with an exquisite accuracy, and a delicate confidence which had nothing foolhardy in it. Blondin's head might take risks, but it was clear that Blondin's feet took none; whatever they did they did wittingly, and with a full forecast of the chances and consequences. They were imaginably such feet as Isaac Taylor conjectures we may have in another life, where the intellect shall not be seated in the brain alone, but shall be issued to every part of the body, and present in every joint and limb.

They were an immense consolation to me, those feet, and when Blondin went tripping gayly out upon them over his rope again, I breathed much more freely than I had before; they had, as it were, personally reassured me, and given me their honor that nothing should happen to him; those feet and I had a sort of common understanding about him, and I do not think they respected him any more than I did for risking his life in that manner. He went down the rope and up the rope, dwindling from a pink man to a pink puppet as before, and going to nothing in the crowd. Then he came to something once more, and began to grow from a puppet into a man again, but with something odd

about him. He had resumed his balancing pole, and he had something strange on his feet, those wise feet, and, as he drew nearer, we could see that he had wooden buckets on them, of about the bigness of butter firkins; I tell it, not expecting much to be believed, for I did not believe it when I saw it. But till he arrived, I could say to myself that there were no bottoms in those buckets, and that his sagacious feet, though somewhat impeded, had still no doubt a good chance to save him, if he lost his head, and would be equal to any common emergency. That was the opinion of everyone about me, and though I knew how vexed with him the feet must be, I did not wholly lose patience till I was told by one who saw the buckets after Blondin stepped out of them, that they had wooden bottoms like any other butter firkins. Then I was glad that I did not see his feet again, for I could imagine the look of cold disgust, the look of haughty injury they must wear at having been made privy to such a mere brutal audacity.

The man himself looked cool and fresh enough, but I, who was not used to such violent fatigues as he must have undergone in these three transits, was bathed in a cold perspiration, and so weak and worn with making them in sympathy that I could scarcely walk away.

Long afterwards I was telling about this experience of mine—it was really more mine than Blondin's—in the neat shop of a Venetian pharmacist, to a select

circle of the physicians who wait in such places in Venice for the call of their patients. One of these civilized men, for all comment, asked: "Where was the government?" and I answered in my barbarous pride of our individualism, "The government had nothing to do with it. In America the government has nothing to do with such things."

But now I think that this Venetian was right, and that such a show as I have tried to describe, ought no more to have been permitted than the fight of a man with a wild beast. It was an offence to morality, and it thinned the frail barrier which the aspiration of centuries has slowly erected between humanity and savagery. But for the time being I made no such reflections. I got back to my hotel and hastened to send off a whole letter about Blondin to that Cincinnati paper; and to this day I do not know whether they ever printed it or not. I try to make fun of it now, but it was not funny then. All the way round on that tour, my view of the wonders of nature and the monuments of man was obscured by my anxiety concerning the letters I wrote to that Cincinnati paper; and at all the hotels where I stopped I hurried to examine the files of the reading-room and see whether it had kept faith with me or not. Across many years, across graves not a few, I can reach and recall the hurt vanity, the just resentment, and the baffled hope, that were bound up in that early experience of editorial frailty.

VII.

My first visit to Niagara was paid in the midsummer of the year, and the midsummer of my life. All nature was rich and beautifully alive amid scenes which I think are of her noblest. There were places where the fresh scent of the waters was mixed with the fragrance of wild flowers; the birds which sang inaudibly in the immediate roar of the cataract, made themselves sweetly heard in the heart of Goat Island. Everywhere there were pretty young girls, in the hats which they were then beginning to wear after a long regime of bonnets, and their hats had black plumes in them that drooped down as near to the cheeks of the pretty young girls as they could get.

I can scarcely help heaving a sigh for the wrinkles in those cheeks which the plumes, if they still drooped instead of sticking militantly up on the front and back of the hats, would not be so eager to caress now; but I will not insist a great deal upon a sort of sigh which has been often known in print already. I think it much more profitable to note that all the *entourage* of Niagara was then private property, and was put to those money-making uses at the expense of the public which form one of the holiest attributes of that sacred thing. I never greatly objected to the paper-mills on Goat Island; they were impertinent to the scenery, of course, but they were picturesque, with their low-lying, weather-worn masses in the shelter of the forest

trees, beside the brawling waters. But nearly every other assertion of private rights in the landscape was an outrage to it. I will not even try to recall the stupid and squalid contrivances which defaced it at every point, and extorted a coin from the insulted traveler at every turn. They are all gone now, and in the keeping of the State the whole redeemed and disenthralled vicinity of Niagara is an object-lesson in what public ownership, whenever it comes, does for beauty.

I had the eagerness of a true believer to see this result, and even before I went to look at the cataract on my last visit a winter ago, I drove about and made sure from the liberated landscape that the people were in possession of their own. It was wonderful, even in mid-winter, the difference in dignity and prosperity that not so much appeared as seemed to reappear, and to find in the beholder's consciousness a sense of what that divine prospect must have been when the eye of the white man first gazed upon it. The landscape had got back something of its youth, and in my joy in it, I got back something of mine.

I do not say that I got much. At fifty, one is at least not twice as young as at twenty-five. But I was very fairly young again when I came to Niagara in the mid-winter of my mid-winter year, and I was certainly as impatient as I could have been quarter of a century earlier to see the ice-bridge below the Falls and the ice-cone that their breath had formed; in fact,

I had waited a good deal longer to see them. Shall I own that at first sight these were a disappointment? At first sight the Falls themselves are a disappointment, for we come to them with something other than the image of their grand and simple adequacy in our minds, and seek to match them with that distempered invention of the ignorant fancy. I had supposed the ice-cone was a sharp peak, jutting up in front of the cataract, not reflecting that it must be what it always is, a rounded knoll, built up finely, finely, slowly, slowly, out of the spectral shapes of mist, seized by the frost and flung down upon the frozen river. When you remember that this ice-cone is formed of the innumerable falls of these ghosts, I think one ought to be content with the Romanesque dome-shape of the mound, however Gothic one's expectation may have been. I do not deny that I should still prefer the pinnacle, but that is because I prefer Gothic architecture; and I advise the reader not to hope for it. If he has a pleasure in delicate decoration, the closely stippled slopes of the ice-cone will give it to him; it is like that fine jeweler's work on the grain of dead gold where the whole surface is fretted with infinitesimal points. When these catch the sun of such a blue mid-winter sky as lifted its speckless arch above the ice-cone on the day I saw it, the effect is all that one has a right to ask of mere nature. I am trying to hint that I would have built the ice-cone somewhat differently, if it had been left to me, but that I am not

hypercritical. If it seems a little low, a little lumpish in the retrospect; still it had its great qualities, which I should be the last in refusing to recognize.

The name ice-bridge had deceived me, but the ice-bridge did not finally disappoint me. It is not a bridge at all. It is the channel of the river blocked as far as the eye can see down the gorge with huge squares and oblongs of ice, or of frozen snow, as they seem, and giving a realizing effect to all the remembered pictures of arctic scenery. This was curiously heightened by some people with sleds among the crowds, making their way through the ice pack from shore to shore; there wanted only the fierce dash of some Esquimaux dog-team and the impression would have been perfect. It was best to look down upon it all from the cliffs, when at times the effect was more than arctic, when it was lunar: you could fancy yourself gazing upon the face of a dead world, or rather a plaster mask of it, with these small black figures of people crawling over it like flies. It was perfectly still that day, and in spite of the diapason of the Falls, an inner silence possessed the air. From the cliffs along the river the cedars thrust outward, armored in plates of ice, like the immemorial effigies of old-time warriors, and every cascade that had flung its bannerol of mist to the summer air, was now furled to the face of the rock and frozen fast. Again a sense of the repose, which is the secret of Niagara's charm, filled me.

There was repose even in the peculiar traffic of

Niagara when we penetrated to a shop devoted to the sale of its bric-a-brac for some photographs of the winter scenery, and we fancied a weird surprise and a certain statuesque reluctance in the dealer. But this may have been merely our fancy. I would insist only upon the mute immobility of the birds on the feather fans behind the glazed shelves, and a mystical remoteness in the Japanese objects mingled with the fabrics of our own Indians and the imported feldspar cups and vases.

Our train went back to Buffalo through the early winter sunset, crimson and crimsoner over the rapids, and then purple over the ice where the river began to be frozen again. This color was so intense that the particles of ice along the brink were like a wilding growth of violets—those candied violets you see at the confectioner's.