

Famous Visitors at Niagara falls.

Thomas R. Slicer.

THE earliest description in literature of the Falls of Niagara was made by the Priest and Historian (?) Father Hennepin, the associate of the explorer La Salle, who built in 1679 the Griffin, to which appertains the honor of being the first vessel to sail the Great Lakes.

The reference is entitled "A description of the Fall of the River Niagara which is to be seen betwixt the Lake Ontario and that of Erie."

We give the commonly accepted version :

"Betwixt the Lake Ontario and Erie, there is a vast and prodigious Cadence of Water, which falls down after a surprising and astonishing manner, insomuch that the Universe does not afford its parallel. 'Tis true, Italy and Suedeland boast of some such things; but we may well say they are but sorry patterns, when compared to this of which we now speak. At the foot of this horrible Precipice, we meet with the River Niagara, which is not above a quarter of a league broad, but is wonderfully deep in some places. It is so rapid above this Descent, that it violently hur-

ries down the wild beasts while endeavoring to pass it to feed on the other side, they not being able to withstand the force of its Current, which inevitably casts them headlong above Six Hundred feet high.¹

"This wonderful Downfall is compounded of two cross-streams of Water, and two Falls, with an isle sloping along the middle of it. The waters which fall from this horrible Precipice, do foam and boyl after the most hideous manner imaginable; making an outrageous noise, more terrible than that of Thunder; for when the wind blows out of the South, their dismal roaring may be heard more than Fifteen Leagues off.²

"The River *Niagara* having thrown itself down this incredible Precipice, continues its impetuous course for Two Leagues together, to the great Rock above-mentioned, with inexpressible rapidity. But having passed that, its impetuosity relents, gliding along more gently for the other Two Leagues, till it arrives at the Lake Ontario or Frontenac.

"Any Bark or greater Vessel may pass from the Fort to the foot of this huge Rock above-mentioned. This Rock lies to the Westward, and is cut off from the Land by the River Niagara about Two Leagues further down than the great Fall, for which Two Leagues the people are obliged to transport their goods

1 !!! This is too many "feet high." It was necessary, that it might be seen from the shores of France.

2. !!! It was a long way to France and facts were made to correspond on account of the perspective.

overland; but the way is very good; and the Trees are very few, chiefly Firrs and Oakes.

“From the great Fall unto this Rock, which is to the West of the River, the two brinks of it are so prodigious high, that it would make one tremble to look steadily upon the water, rolling along with a rapidity not to be imagined. Were it not for this vast Cataract, which interrupts Navigation, they might sail with Barks or greater Vessels, more than Four Hundred and Fifty Leagues, crossing the Lake of Hurons, and reaching even to the farther end of the Lake of Illin is, which two Lakes we may easily say are little Seas of fresh Water.”

There are other accounts by Tonti, Hontan and other early voyagers, but they are not especially to the purpose of this recital.

At the beginning of the present century, there limped, with an ankle sprained, to the shores of Lake Erie, from the borders of the forest a young Englishman, whose tastes and conceit were in strong contrast to the primitive simplicity of the scene on which he entered.

Perhaps no greater tribute has ever been paid to the charm of the Falls of Niagara than is suggested by the fact that they reconciled the mind of Tom Moore to the disgusting experiences of travel in America, where to his thinking the promiscuous huddling together of all sorts of people in the stagecoaches

was a symbol of the mixed character of a Republican Government. A man who had been petted by an indulgent family and flattered by a social circle, which sang his songs and laughed at his wit, found the unsettled society of the New World not easy to adjust to his fastidious taste; he had done us the honor to look over our Country, and had done it up in his letters as “an interesting world, which with all the defects and disgusting peculiarities of its natives, gives every promise of no very distant competition with the first powers of the Eastern hemisphere.”

When the Valleys of the Mohawk and the Genesee had been traversed, Moore was so much touched by their natural beauty that he exclaims: “Such scenery as there is around me! it is quite dreadful that any heart, born for sublimities, should be doomed to breathe away its hours amidst the miniature productions of this world, without seeing what shapes nature *can* assume, what wonders God *can* give birth to.”

But he had not yet seen the Falls. He is about to start upon his journey to the Falls of Niagara in a wagon. On July 22d he sends back by the driver of the wagon a letter to be forwarded to his mother, written from upper Chippewa: “Just arrived within a mile and a half of the Falls of Niagara, and their tremendous roar at this moment sounding in my ears.” Two days later he writes: “I have seen the Falls, and am all rapture and amazement. . . . Arrived

at Chippewa within three miles of the Falls to dinner Saturday, July 21st. That evening walked toward the Falls, but got no further than the Rapids, which gave us a prelibation of the grandure we had to expect.¹

"Next day, Sunday, July 22d, went to visit the Falls.² Never shall I forget the impressions I felt at the first glimpse of them which we got as the carriage passed over the hill that overlooks them. We were not near enough to be agitated by the terrific effects of the scene; but saw through the trees this mighty flow of waters descending with calm magnificence, and received enough of its grandure to set imagination on the wing; imagination which even at Niagara can outrun reality.³

'I felt as if approaching the very residence of the Deity; the tears started into my eyes; and I remained for moments after we had lost sight of the scene, in that delicious absorption which pious enthusiasm alone can produce. We arrived at the New Ladder and de-

1. "Prelibations" are no longer to be had in the neighborhood of the Rapids; we mention this to save disappointment to any tourists who may inquire for them.

2. The Falls still fall on Sunday; no mention was included as to the Falls of Niagara in the petition to Congress respecting the Sunday-closing of the Exposition. The Falls ran nearly dry in 1848, but this was not due to any Act of Congress or to sympathy with the French Revolution, but was caused by an ice gorge at the outlet of Lake Erie.

3. This has not been the experience of the greater poets, Lowell, Longfellow and Bryant, none of whom have tried to describe the Falls in poetry; but the remark about imagination was made by Tom Moore in 1804, when imagination was stronger than it is now.

scended to the bottom. Here all its awful sublimities rushed full upon me. But the former exquisite sensation was gone. I now saw all. The string that had been touched by the first impulse, and which fancy would have kept forever in vibration, now rested at Reality. Yet though there was no more to imagine, there was much to feel. My whole heart and soul ascended toward the Divinity in a swell of devout admiration, which I never before experienced. . . . Oh! bring the Atheist here, and he cannot return an Atheist!¹"

The chief value of these attempts at description is not in that they do describe or fail to describe this natural phenomenon, but that they do describe the mind of the beholder; for it is ever a fact that when a great subject is dealt with by the human mind we get a double lesson; if the mind be competent we get a description of the subject, but in any event we get a portrait of the mind. In no instance does this more appear than in the contrasting way in which Niagara claimed the attention of three noted women: Mrs. Jameson, Harriet Martineau and Margaret Fuller. One would suppose that Mrs. Jameson's sense of beauty in

1. This is a miscalculation of human powers of resistance; Col. Robert Ingersoll has been to the Falls recently and expressed disapproval of them; he seemed to think that no really kind Being would turn loose such a quantity of water at once, and shock the human mind so rudely; he then turned his back on the Falls, and meditated on the anniversary of the birth of Lincoln, which he had spoken upon the day before. Those who accompanied the Colonel had some difficulty in fitting Abraham Lincoln into a World of Accidents. But they were only foolish people who believed in God.

Art would have prepared her mind for at least an ecstasy; or was it that her mind already winged for the flights of imagination, and used to dealing with art-forms in the galleries of Europe, did not find it easy to place itself *en rapport* with a canvas so large, as that on which the beauties of Niagara are painted by an unseen hand, in colors which are never two moments alike. Whatever may be the psychological reason, it is necessary to relate that Mrs. Jameson *would rather not have seen Niagara*. It was in 1837 that her visit was made to the Falls in the last part of January of that year. When she had stood face to face with them she exclaims: "Well, I have seen these cataracts of Niagara which have thundered in my mind's ear ever since I can remember—which have been my childhood's thought, my youth's desire, since first my imagination was awakened to wonder and to wish. I have beheld them; and shall I whisper it to you?—but, O tell it not among the Philistines!—I wish I had not! I wish they were still a thing to behold—a thing to be imagined, hoped, and anticipated—something to live for—the reality has displaced from my mind an illusion far more magnificent than itself.¹—I have no words for my disappointment, yet I have not the presumption to suppose that all I have heard and read of Niagara is false or exaggerated²—

1. Later on we will see that in the estimation of magicians, like Hawthorne, it is advisable to go to the Falls after leaving our imaginations at home.

2. Nothing except the first measurements and the early geological guesses and most of the poetry and all of the pictures, except those in this volume.

that every expression of astonishment, enthusiasm, rapture, is affectation or hyperbole. No! it must be my own fault. Terni, and some of the Swiss cataracts leaping from their mountains, have affected me a thousand times more than all the immensity of Niagara. Oh, I could beat myself! and now there is no help!—the first moment, the first impression, is over—is lost; something is gone that cannot be restored. What has come over my soul and senses? I am no longer Anna—I am metamorphosed—I am translated—I am an ass's head, a clod, a wooden spoon, a fat weed growing on Lethe's bank, a stock, a stone, a petrification,—for have I not seen Niagara, the wonder of wonders; and felt—no words can tell *what* disappointment!"

The fact is, Mrs. Jameson had seen her Swiss cataracts to so little purpose that she seemed to be gazing into the sky for the beginning of the Falls of Niagara, and was surprised, when looking out from a high hill, to find that they were below her. She says: "My Imagination had been so impressed by the vast height of the Falls,¹ that I was constantly looking in an upward direction, when, as we came to the brow of the hill, my companion suddenly checked the horses, and exclaimed, 'The Falls!' I was not for an instant aware of their presence; we were yet at a distance looking *down* upon them; and I saw at one

1. Father Hennepin's "600 feet," probably.

glance a flat extensive plain; the sun having withdrawn its beams for a moment, there was neither light nor shade, nor colour. In the midst were seen the two great cataracts, but merely as a feature in the wide landscape.¹ The sound was by no means overpowering.² And the clouds of spray which Fannie Butler called so beautifully the "everlasting incense of the waters," now condensed, 'ere they rose, by the excessive cold, fell round the base of the cataracts in fleecy folds, just concealing that furious embrace of the waters above, and the waters below.³ All the associations which in imagination I had gathered round the scene, its appalling terrors, its soul-subduing beauty, power, and height, and velocity, and immensity, were all diminished in effect, or wholly lost. I was quite silent—my soul sank within me." It would seem from the account of Mrs. Jameson that she had a most practical mind, for she was evidently delighted by the fact that a "little Yankee boy, with a shrewd sharp face, and twinkling black eyes, could not palm off a flock of gulls on her for eagles." The one sense of comfort that visited her arises from the fact that

1. That minimizing word "merely" has not often found place in the Niagara vocabulary.

2. "The roar of Niagara," as it is called, is the mellow chord of the full organ (see article in Scribner's Magazine by Eugene Thayer), and people who have expected to be deafened by a kind of Infinite Factory are surprised to find that they have no trouble in conversing together.

3. We shall see, however, later, that this which seemed an additional disappointment to Mrs. Jameson impressed Anthony Trollope as the most beautiful of all the Niagara phenomena.

though the Falls were not complementary to her mood, the smart boy was complimentary to her smartness, saying, "Well, now you be dreadful smart—smarter than many folks that come here." She tried the Falls from every point and found them from every point of view equally trying, and confesses at last, "The Falls did not make on my mind the impression that I had anticipated, perhaps for that reason, even because I had *anticipated* it; but 'it was sung to me in my cradle,' as the Germans say, that I should live to be disappointed—even in the Falls of Niagara."¹

No two women could have been more unlike than Mrs. Jameson and Margaret Fuller, and yet one is haunted with the feeling that although Mrs. Jameson has so eloquently described "Art, sacred and legendary," Margaret Fuller was no less than Mrs. Jameson a soul sensitive to all influences in Art; but she lifts her eyes to the great Cataract and sees it by the light that fell from the mysterious and sacred center of her own impenetrable soul. She says² "The spectacle is, for once, great enough to fill the whole life, and supersede thought, giving us only its own presence. 'It is good to be here' is the best as it is the simplest expression that occurs to the mind." Was

1. When foreigners cross the Atlantic they ought not to get the idea that Niagara is *the Atlantic set on edge*; and yet advice seems useless, for our aesthetic friend and epigrammatic dramatist, Oscar Wilde, found the Atlantic disappointing. It is difficult to adjust the Atlantic and Niagara to certain types of mind. But as St. Paul remarks, "This is a great mystery."

2. At Home and Abroad, or Things and Thoughts in America and Europe.

it a lingering, half-conscious recollection that that phrase is a part of the story of The Transfiguration,¹ that she immediately adds: "We have been here eight days?" She says, further: "So great a sight soon satisfies, making us content with itself and with what is less than itself. Our desires once realized, haunt us again less readily. Having 'lived one day,' we would depart and become worthy to live another. My nerves too much braced up by such an atmosphere, do not well bear the continual stress of sight and sound. For here there is no escape from the weight of perpetual creation; all other forms and motions come and go, the tide rises and recedes, the wind, at its mightiest, moves in gales and gusts, but there is really an incessant, an indefatigable motion. Awake or asleep, there is no escape; still this rushing round you and through you. It is in this way I have most felt the grandeur—something eternal, if not infinite.

"At times a secondary music arises; the Cataract seems to seize its own rythm and sing it over again so that the ear and soul are roused by a double vibration. This is some effect of the wind, causing echoes to the thundering anthem. It is very sublime, giving the effect of a spiritual repetition through all the spheres."²

1. Luke, ix ; 28.

2. This is that range of the full-organ again, to which Mr. Thayer's suggestive article upon the music of Niagara Falls refers.

Margaret Fuller speaks of Niagara as "the one object in the world that would not disappoint."¹

She says of the Falls: "Daily their proportions widened and towered upon my sight, and I got, at last, a proper foreground for these sublime distances. Before coming away I think I really saw the full wonder of the scene. After a while it so drew me into itself as to inspire an undefined dread, such as I never knew before, such as may be felt when death is about to usher us into a new existence. The perpetual trampling of the waters seized my senses. I felt that no other sound, however near, could be heard, and would start and look behind me for a foe. I realized the identity of that mood of nature in which these waters were poured down with absorbing force, with that in which the Indian was shaped on the same soil."

There is a touch of nature in Margaret Fuller's confession, "The Whirlpool I like very much." She was quite capable of making her friends feel that she could be as "sternly solemn," as impenetrable to the eye, as the Whirlpool itself. The poetic side of her nature was satisfied with the beautiful forest on Goat Island and that wealth of wild flowers of which it was said by Sir Joseph Hooker, that more varieties were to be found on Goat Island than anywhere else in America in the same expanse of wild wood.

1. It was easier for people "to get on" with Mrs. Jameson; but there was something about Niagara that found in Margaret Fuller a congenial expansiveness; and perhaps it required something like Niagara to make her properly expand.

Harriet Martineau's impressions were derived from a point not described by either of the other women before named. It was on her second visit to Niagara that we have from her a description of her sensations in passing *behind the American Fall*.

Miss Martineau says: "From the moment that I perceived that we were actually behind the Cataract, and not in a mere cloud of spray, the enjoyment was intense. I not only saw the watery curtain before me like the tempest-driven snow, but by momentary glances could see the crystal roof of one of the most wonderful of Nature's palaces. The precise point at which the flood quitted the rock was marked by a gush of silvery light, which of course was brighter where the waters were shooting forward, than below where they fell perpendicularly." She then describes quite graphically her successful effort to reach Termination Rock. It would be difficult to imagine Miss Martineau seeing the end of her journey, and *not reaching it*.

We turn now to another English mind, interested in an intense way in human welfare, interested as Miss Martineau was, but how different in the expression of that interest! It is a strange contrast which it exhibits in presence of the great flood.

The mind that created Mr. Pickwick and David Copperfield will have something to say original even about Niagara. But Dickens was at heart a poet. His Fiction was perhaps exaggeration of the facts, but the

facts were forever fixed by it; and brought face to face with Nature in such aspects as make the mighty Cataract we should expect to have called out from his soul that religious response which mystery and majesty never failed to evoke; and we are not disappointed. He says: "Whenever the train halted I listened for the roar, and was constantly straining my eyes in the direction where I knew the Falls must be, from seeing the river rolling on toward them; every moment expecting to behold the spray. Within a few minutes of our stopping, not before, I saw two great white clouds rising up slowly and majestically from the depths of the earth. That was all. At length we alighted and then for the first time I heard the mighty rush of water, and felt the ground tremble under my feet." He climbed down the steep and slippery bank, made insecure to the foot by rain and half-melted ice, to face the Fall, but was not content with this view. A little ferry-boat that then plied from one side to the other carried him and his party across the river below the Fall, while he was more and more astounded by the vastness of the scene. He says: "It was not until I came on Table Rock, and looked, Great Heaven! on what a fall of bright green water—that it came upon me in its full majesty. Then when I felt how near to my Creator I was standing, the first effect, and the enduring one, instant and lasting, of the tremendous spectacle, was peace. Peace of mind, tranquility, calm recollec-

tions of the dead, great thoughts of eternal rest and happiness; nothing of gloom or terror. Niagara was at once stamped upon my heart, an image of beauty, to remain there, changeless and indelible, until its pulses cease to beat, forever. I never stirred in all that time from the Canadian side whither I had gone at first. I never crossed the river again; for I knew there were people on the other shore, and in such a place it is natural to shun strange company.¹ To wander to and fro all day and see the Cataracts from all points of view; to stand upon the edge of the Great Horse Shoe Fall, marking the hurried water gathering strength as it approached the verge, yet seeming, too, to pause before it shot into the gulf below; to gaze from the river's level up at the torrent as it came streaming down; to climb the neighboring heights and watch it through the trees, and see the wreathing water in the rapids, hurrying on to take its fearful plunge; to linger in the shadow of the solemn rocks three miles below, watching the river as, stirred by no visible cause, it heaved and eddied and awoke the echoes, being troubled yet far down beneath the surface, by its giant leap; to have Niagara before me, lighted by the sun and the moon, red in the day's decline, and grey as evening slowly fell upon it; to look upon it every day, and wake up in the night and hear its ceaseless voice,

¹. The contrast in this particular between Dickens and N. P. Willis opens up an interesting chapter in the natural differences in literary temperament, as it deals with human life.

this was enough. I think, in every quiet season now, still do those waters roll and leap and roar and tumble, all day long; still are the rainbows spanning them a hundred feet below. Still when the sun is on them do they shine and glow like molten gold. Still when the day is gloomy, do they fall like snow, or seem to crumble away like the front of a great chalk cliff, or roll down the rock like dense white smoke. But always does this mighty stream appear to die as it comes down, and always from its unfathomable grave arises that tremendous ghost of spray and mist, which is never laid; which has haunted this place with the same dread solemnity since darkness brooded on the Deep, and that first flood before the Deluge—Light—came rushing on Creation at the word of God."

Nothing could be more characteristic of that strange commingling of wonder and reserve in a human nature than the way in which Hawthorne came toward, and yet not quite *to* the Falls again and again. He says: "I had lingered away from it and wandered to other scenes. My treasury of anticipated enjoyments comprising all the wonders of the world had nothing else so magnificent; I was loathe to exchange the pleasures of hope for those of memory so soon." There was nothing of the severe Yankee temperament in Hawthorne's attitude toward this great scene; it was rather that infusion of French self-indulgence which made him dread to count a delight, as a

thing he *had had*. He says: "At length the day came, I walked toward Goat Island and crossed the bridge; above and below me were the rapids, a river of impetuous snow, with here and there a dark rock amid its whiteness, resisting all the physical fury as any cold spirit did the moral influences of the scene."

We may go with Hawthorne along the path if we will. "On reaching Goat Island, which separates the two great segments of the Falls, I chose the right hand path and followed it to the edge of the American Cascade; there, while the falling sheet was yet invisible, I saw the vapor that never vanishes and the eternal rainbow of Niagara. I gained an insulated rock and observed a broad sheet of brilliant and unbroken foam, not shooting in a curved line from the top of the precipice, but falling headlong down from height to depth." When Hawthorne had made the round of the Island and had seen the Falls from every available *coin of vantage*, he stops, as was his custom, to take an account of his mental sensations. "Were my long desires fulfilled, and have I seen Niagara? But would I had never heard of Niagara until I beheld it! Blessed were the wanderers of old, who heard its deep roar sounding through the woods, as a summons to its unknown wonder, and approached its awful brink in all the freshness of native feeling; had its own mysterious voice been the first to warn me of its existence, then indeed, I might have fallen down and worshipped; but

I had come haunted with a vision of foam and fury and dizzy cliffs, and an ocean tumbling down out of the sky—a scene, in short, which nature had too much good taste and calm simplicity to realize. My mind had struggled to adapt these false aspects to the reality, and finding the effort vain, a wretched sense of disappointment weighed me down. I climbed the precipice and threw myself on the earth feeling that I was unworthy to look at the great Falls and careless about observing them again." It would be strange, indeed, if the author of "Twice-Told-Tales" did not find some "wonder" in this repetition to him in other terms of that which he had already imagined. So he says of the night, which succeeded this first day-visit: "As there has been, and may be for ages to come, a rushing sound was heard, as if a great tempest was sweeping through the air. It mingled in my dreams and made them full of storm and whirlwind. Whenever I awoke I heard this dread sound in the air, and the windows rattling as with a mighty blast. I could not rest again until, looking forth, I saw how bright the stars were and that every leaf in the garden was motionless. *Never was summer night more calm to the eye, nor a gale of autumn louder to the ear.* The rushing sound proceeds from the Rapids and the rattling of the casements is but an effect of the vibration of the whole house shaken by the jar of the Cataract. The noise of the Rapids draws the at-

tention from the true voice of Niagara, which is a dull muffled thunder, resounding between the cliffs. I spent a wakeful hour at midnight in distinguishing between its reverberations, and rejoiced to find that my former awe and enthusiasm were reviving.

“ Gradually and after much contemplation, I came to know by my own feelings that Niagara is indeed a wonder of the world; and not the less wonderful because time and thought must be employed in comprehending it.” And here follows the sanest advice to those who have felt at first the sense of disappointment that the cataract is not so great as they had conceived: “ Casting aside all preconceived notions and preparation to be awe-struck or delighted, the beholder must stand beside it in the simplicity of his heart, suffering the mighty scene to work its own impression. Night after night I dreamed of it, and was gladdened every morning by the sensations of growing capacity to enjoy it.”

This description by Hawthorne, from which these brief quotations have been made, contains nothing truer to a fine nature than that in which he states his last impressions of the Falls: “ I sat upon Table Rock; never before had my mind been in such perfect unison with the scene. There were intervals when I was conscious of nothing but the great river rolling calmly into the abyss; rather descending than precipitating itself, and acquiring ten-fold majesty from its unhurried



The Whirlpool Rapids—The Cantilever Bridge Above.

motion. It came like the march of destiny ; it was not taken by surprise, but seemed to have anticipated in all its course through the broad lakes that it must pour their collected waters down this height." The impression made by the water where it falls is noted by Hawthorne and by few besides—the stillness with which it slips away from the stroke of the cataract, seeming scarcely to move in its eddies, which are only the slight surface-struggle of the great depth of waters in the narrow gorge into which it falls. He says of this : " When the observer has stood still and perceived no lull in the storm and stress, that the vapor and the foam are as everlasting as the rock which produces them, all this turmoil assumes a sort of calmness ; it soothes while it awes the mind."

Hawthorne is quite right in feeling that Niagara cannot be seen " in company " or worshipped by platoons ; for one wants to steal to some unobserved retreat from which to look out and feel, as he says, " The enjoyment which becomes rapture, more rapturous because no poet shared it, nor wretch devoid of poetry profaned it ; the spot so famous through the world was all mine." This same feeling was shared by Charles Kingsley. He says : " I long to simply look on in silence whole days at the exquisite beauty of form and color."

To Dean Stanley the first sight of the Falls seemed " an epoch, like the first view of the pyramids, or the

snow-clad range of the Alps." His first view of it was at midnight under a full moon. To him it seemed an "emblem of the devouring activity and ceaseless, restless, beating whirlpool of existence in the United States. But into the moonlight sky there rose a cloud of spray twice as high as the Falls themselves, silent, majestic, immovable. In that silver column, glittering in the moonlight, I saw an image of the future of American destiny, of the pillar of light which should emerge from the distractions of the present—a likeness of the buoyancy and hopefulness which characterises you, both as individuals and as a nation."

Professor Tyndall's mind has not been robbed of its sentiment by the minute contemplation of incident and detail, as Darwin suffered an *atrophy* in the appreciation of poetry as he himself confesses. It is to Professor Tyndall we owe this bit of poetic prose in which he describes the Whirlpool: "The scene presented itself as one of holy seclusion and beauty. I went down to the water's edge where the weird loneliness and loveliness seems to increase. The basin is enclosed by high and almost precipitous banks, covered, when I was there, with russet woods. A kind of mystery attaches to gyrating water, due perhaps to the fact that we are to some extent ignorant of the direction of its force. It is said that at a certain point in the whirlpool pine trees are sucked down to be ejected mysteriously elsewhere. The water is

the brightest emerald green; the gorge through which it escapes is narrow and the motion of the river swift though silent; the surface is steeply inclined but it is perfectly unbroken. There are no lateral waves, no ripples, with their breaking bubbles to raise a murmur, while the depth is here too great to allow the inequality of the bed to ruffle the surface. Nothing can be more beautiful than this sloping, liquid mirror formed by the Niagara in sliding from the Whirlpool."

If one wishes to know the measure of the mind of N. P. Willis, he may gain it from Willis's description of the Falls of Niagara. It does not suit our purpose to quote it here. It is the same mixture of poetry and commonplace, of incident and contact with people, that made Mr. Willis the ideal magazine writer of that time.

It is strange to note how different points seem to be the center of focussed thought to different minds. To Mrs. Trollope it was the centre of the Horse-shoe, which seemed "the most utterly inconceivable." "The famous torrent converges there, as the heavy mass pours in, twisted, rolled and curled together; it gives the idea of irresistible power such as no other object ever conveyed to me. The mighty caldron into which the deluge pours, the hundred silvery torrents congregated around its verge, the smooth and solemn movement with which it rolls its massive volume over the rock, the liquid emerald of its long unbroken waters, the fantastic wreaths which spring to meet it,

and then the shadowy mist that veils the horrors of the crash below, constitute a scene almost too enormous in its features for man to look upon."

To Charles Dudley Warner it is at a different point the mind pauses and feels its most impressive moment. "Nowhere is the river so terrible as where it rushes, as if maddened by its narrow bondage through the cañon; flowing down the precipice and forced into this contracting space, it fumes and tosses and raves with a vindictive fury, driving on in a passion that has almost a human quality in it; and restrained by the walls of stone from being destructive, it seems to rave at its own impotence, and when it reaches the Whirlpool it is like a hungry animal, returning and licking the shore for the prey it has missed."

Professor Richard Proctor is impressed by the terrible force of the Niagara at the same spot. Speaking of the fatal attempt of Captain Webb to swim the Whirlpool Rapids he says: "He maybe did not know what a rough estimate of the enierges at work in Niagara should have shown, that amid that mass of water which descends from the basin below the Falls to the engulfing vortex of the Whirlpool, the body of the biggest and strongest living creature must be as powerless as a drop of water in mid-Atlantic."

When Anthony Trollope assures us in his discussions upon novel-writing that all that a novelist needs is a table and chair with a bit of shoemaker's wax

upon the seat of it, we suspect that he is only excusing his own voluminous production. He does not lack poetic inspiration as the following quotations will show: "But we will go on at once to the glory and thunder and the majesty, and the wrath of that upper hell of waters. We are still on Goat Island. Advancing beyond the path leading down to the lower Fall, we come to that point of the Island at which the waters of the main river begin to descend. Go down to the end of the wooden bridge, seat yourself on the rail, and then sit 'till all the outer world is lost to you. There is no grander spot about Niagara than this. The waters are absolutely around you. Here, seated on the rail of the bridge, you will not see the whole depth of the Fall. In looking at the grandest works of nature and of art too, I fancy it is never well to see all. There should be something left to the imagination, and much should be half concealed in mystery. The greatest charm of a mountain range is that wild feeling, there must be something strange, unknown, desolate in those far-off valleys beyond. And so here, at Niagara, that converging rush of waters may fall down, down at once into a hell of rivers, for what the eye can see. It is glorious to watch them in their first curve over the rocks. They come green as a bank of emeralds; but with a fitful flying color, as though conscious that in one moment more they would be dashed into spray and rise into air pale as driven snow. The

vapor rises high into the air and is gathered there, visible always as a permanent white cloud over the cataract; but the bulk of the spray which fills the lower hollow of that horseshoe is like a tumult of snow.

“This you will not fully see from your seat on the rail. The head of it rises ever and anon out of that caldron below, but the caldron itself will be invisible. It is ever so far down, far as your own imagination can sink it. But your eyes will rest full upon the curve of the waters. The shape you will be looking at is that of a horseshoe, but of a horseshoe miraculously deep from toe to heel; and this depth becomes greater as you sit there. That which at first was only great and beautiful, becomes gigantic and sublime till the mind is at a loss to find an epithet for its own use. To realize Niagara you must sit there 'till you see nothing else than that which you have come to see. You will hear nothing else and think of nothing else. At length you will be at one with the tumbling river before you. You will find yourself among the waters as though you belonged to them. The cool liquid green will run through your veins, and the voice of the cataract will be the expression of your heart. You will fall, as the bright waters fall, rushing down into your new world with no hesitation and with no dismay; and you will rise again as the spray rises, bright, beautiful and pure.

“One of the great charms of Niagara consists in this—that over and above that one great object of wonder

and beauty; there is so much little loveliness; loveliness especially of water, I mean. There are little rivulets running here and there over little falls, with pendent boughs above them, and stones shining under their shallow depths. As the visitor stands and looks through the trees, the Rapids glitter before him, and then hide themselves behind islands. They glitter and sparkle in far distances under the bright foliage till the remembrance is lost and one knows not which way they run.

“Of all the sights in this earth of ours which tourists travel to see—at least of all those which I have seen—I am inclined to give the palm to Niagara. I know no other one thing so beautiful, so glorious, so powerful.”

When we know that Bayard Taylor visited the Falls of Niagara we instantly desire to know what impression was made upon a mind which had contemplated such a wide range and variety as this great traveler had seen and had elsewhere described. He thus brings his poetic imagination to the contemplation: “The picturesque shores of the river, the splendid green of the water, and the lofty line of the upper plateau in front, crowned with Brock’s monument, and divided by the dark yawning gorge of Niagara, form a fitting vestibule to the grand *adytum* beyond. The chasm grows wider, deeper and more precipitous with every mile, until having seen the Suspension Bridge appar-

ently floating in mid-air on your right, you look ahead, and two miles off you catch a glimpse of the emerald crest of Niagara, standing fast and fixed above its shifting chaos of snowy spray.

“ I have seen the Falls in all weathers and at all seasons, but to my mind the winter view is most beautiful. I saw them first in the hard winter of 1854, when a hundred cataracts of ice hung from the cliffs on either side, when the masses of ice brought down from Lake Erie were wedged together at the foot, uniting the shores with a rugged bridge, and when every twig and every tree and bush in Goat Island was overlaid an inch deep with a coating of solid crystal. The air was still and the sun shone in a cloudless sky. The green of the Fall set in a landscape of sparkling silver, was infinitely more brilliant than in the summer, when it is balanced by the trees, and the rainbows were almost too glorious for the eye to bear. I was not impressed by the sublimity of the scene nor even by its terror, but solely by the fascination of its wonderful beauty, a fascination which constantly tempted me to plunge into that sea of fused emerald and lose myself in the dance of the rainbows. With each succeeding visit Niagara has grown in height, in power, in majesty, in solemnity ; but I have seen its climax of beauty.”

Reference has been made in this writing to the remarkable fact that the greater American poets have not attempted to describe Niagara. The fact is easily

discernible in their writings ; but the cause of this apparent neglect of a theme, which has tempted so many smaller singers must be sought in the laws of the human mind as affected by the contact of that which transcends all rhythmic expression. It would seem that the greater the gift of expression for the less overpowering appeal of Nature to the soul, the more impotent in *this presence* the poets have felt. There are not wanting indeed poems about Niagara, one which flows like the river itself, undamed for forty thousand lines ; and in some of these individual lines there are perhaps several lines together which seem to catch the swing of the great Cataract ; though at best they are a shrill piping to its mighty *diapason* ; they are like the song of the wren on its bank. Even Mrs. Sigourney's lines are felt by her to be inadequate :

Ah, who can dare
To lift the insect-trump of earthly hope,
Or love, or sorrow, 'mid the peal sublime
Of thy tremendous hymn? Even Ocean shrinks
Back from thy brotherhood and all his waves
Retire abashed. For he doth sometimes seem
To sleep like a spent laborer and recall
His wearied billows from their vexing play,
And lull them to a cradle calm ; but thou
With everlasting, undecaying tide,
Dost rest not, night or day.”

* * *

“ Thou dost make the soul
A wondering witness of thy majesty,

And as it presses with delirious joy
To pierce thy vestibule, dost chain its step,
And tame its rapture with a humbling view
Of its own nothingness, bidding it stand
In the dread presence of the Invisible,
As if to answer to its God through thee."

These are perhaps the best of the lines written by Mrs. Sigourney; but their inadequacy is felt by any one who compares them with a moment's recollection of his own feelings in the presence they attempt to describe.

The lines of Lord Morpeth are well known, they seem most memorable for the sincere expression of that good will which he hoped might ever subsist between the nations, his own and America:

"Oh! may thy waves which madden in thy deep
There spend their rage nor climb the encircling
steep;
And till the conflict of thy surges cease
The nations on thy banks repose in peace."

There seems to be a wide-spread conviction that the oft-quoted lines of John G. C. Brainard are "the noblest lines inspired by the great Cataract." They are notable as rising in the mind of a New England editor who had never seen the Falls, and are said to have been the work of a few moments—an improvisation:

"The thoughts are strange that crowd into my
brain
While I look upward to thee. It would seem
As if God poured thee from 'His hollow hand'
And hung His bow upon thine awful front,
And spoke in that loud voice which seemed to
him

Who dwelt in Patmos for his Savior's sake
'The sound of many waters,' and had bade
Thy flood to chronicle the ages back,
And notch His cent'ries in the eternal rock.

"Deep calleth unto Deep. And what are we
That hear the question of that voice sublime?
Oh! What are all the notes that ever rung
From war's vain trumpet by thy thundering side!
Yea, what is all the riot man can make
In his short life to thy unceasing roar!
And yet bold babler, what art thou to Him
Who drowned a world and heaped the waters far
Above its loftiest mountains?—a light wave
That breaks and whispers of its Maker's might."

There are many other expressions of those who from all parts of the world have matched the feebleness of speech against the stress of feeling; but we forbear to quote further. The extracts given above will prove sufficient for their purpose if they constitute a pleasure to the receptive mind, susceptible to the influences of the scene they visit, and if they prove a gentle warning to the too eager expression of words which so often hide rather than reveal thought.