

## AS IT RUSHES BY.



BY E. S. MARTIN

THE great North-west has two ways of reaching tide-water. It filters down the Mississippi, losing impetus as it goes southward, until, too much enervated to dig itself a channel, it rolls sluggishly on between artificial levees and slips unobtrusively into the Gulf by a dozen different passages. The farther south it goes the more irresponsible it becomes and the more need it has of assistance. To get it safely emptied is a constant care, calling for perpetual labor and congressional appropriations. At the least neglect it slops lazily over, and settles down on the surrounding country.

How differently it comes East, navigating the great western lakes one after another, and finally crowding impetuously into the Niagara River and over its precipice with a roar and a jarring crash, and then out through Ontario and the swift St. Lawrence to the Ocean! Journeying southward it blends imperceptibly with the region it traverses, so that it is hard to say where the west leaves off and the south begins. But it drops down upon the East with an enormous plunge

that leaves no doubt of the whereabouts of the line of demarcation. Beyond Niagara is the West. Here the East begins, equal to the West in energy and vim, but different. The West never merges with the East as it does with the South. It comes to Niagara in overwhelming force and thunders at its gates, and then rolls off North-easterly and out through the British provinces. It asks nothing of man except to be let alone. It has dug its own channel with its own tools, and formed itself a basin of ample size to hold it. It is responsible, self-reliant, fully able to take care of itself, and ever ready to do any odd jobs that offer as it surges along. It seems to gather energy from the invigorating influences that meet it in its progress.

Colonel Ingersoll came to Niagara one day and looked at the tribute of the great Northwest as it surged by, and said: "Niagara Falls is a dangerous place."

There was disparagement in the Colonel's tone, and disparagement is something to which Niagara is not much used. Whatever native it was that heard him stared and asked: "Do you mean the hackmen?"

"No!" said the eminent orator. "I mean those great rushing waters. There is nothing attractive to me in them. They are really dangerous. There is so much noise, so much tumult. It is simply a mighty force of nature, one of those tremendous powers which is to be feared for its danger."

The native's eyebrows went up at that. It is true enough that the Niagara River is not one that a cautious person would care to navigate, particularly above the Falls, but the Colonel, though not anchored to anything, was at least on firm land. The reflection suggested itself, that he had imperfectly diagnosed his own sensations, and that his dissatisfaction, which was obviously genuine, really sprung from the traditional disagreement of two of a trade. How could an orator be edified by a tone besides which his own best utterance was but a squeak? To make impressions is the orator's business, not to receive them. But at Niagara, Nature does the talking and has her say out, and man's part is to listen and to digest. It was a high compliment that the great talker paid to the river by his instinctive disapproval, and perfectly consistent with his point of view were his continuing remarks:

"What I like in Nature is a cultivated field where men can work in the free, open air; where there is quiet and repose, not turmoil, strife, tumult, fearful roar, or struggle for mastery. I do not like the crowded, stuffy workshop where life is a slavery and drudgery, where men are slaves. Give me the calm, cultivated land of waving grain, of flowers, of happiness."

So spoke the man of super-abundant energy, not unnaturally preferring scenes that seem to require some stirring up to those where all the requisite agitation comes ready furnished to hand. It is true that to

the professional regulator, Niagara bristles with discouragement. There is comparatively little left there for man to do. To keep his hands off and let Nature take her course is the chief boon that is asked of him. But it is about the last place in the world to be compared to a stuffy workshop where men are slaves. Indeed the very pith of its contrast to the "cultivated land of waving grain" lies in the absence here of conspicuous signs of human labor. Work was traditionally imposed upon man for his sins. Even if the natural man is not rightfully lazy, he is at least entitled to love leisure, and prefer the minimum of toil. Surely Niagara is fit to refresh his jaded spirit. If he sighs at the foot of the pyramids to think of the vast industry that was the cost of their construction, he is conversely entitled to exult at the resistless might of the Niagara River emptying its floods into its self-chiseled gorge. Only the planets wandering in their courses, harnessed to the sun, are so fit to stir an exultation of repose. Laborious man sits on our river's brink and meditates on the great spectacle of labor saved. The Falls just go themselves. Within the memory of man it has never been found needful even in the driest times to operate them by artificial means. In sight or out of sight there is no apparatus for pumping water back into Lake Erie to keep the cataract going. Neither has it ever been found necessary to dam the lake to keep the water from running out, or to bail it out to keep it

from running over. Nature has done everything. The lake is always full, the river never ceases to drain it. The precipice that the torrent goes over is not absolutely permanent or changeless, but like the rest of the apparatus it takes care of itself, asking nothing of man but to stand from under when its features shift.

The great lesson of Niagara is to maintain a respectful attitude towards Nature. She is irresistible; not to be thwarted, not to be turned aside. It is our affair to study her courses, to get out of her way when she wants the whole road, and to make her do our work by the simple expedient of making our desires consistent with her methods.

In this feature of the Falls lie their special adaptation to be gazed upon by young persons who have just entered the married state and assumed the more serious burdens of life. It is not accident that brings the newly married to Niagara. It is instinct. It is good for them to be here, and some subtle influence has taught them to know it. Seeking for entertainment not to be laboriously won, but of a sort that stimulates the faculties while it promotes reflection, they find it here. The river entertains them. It speaks to them in continuous discourse without exacting any reply. It distracts their attention gently from one another, which is a kindness, and when they speak together it prevents alien ears from overhearing what they say. It is uniformly kind to them—so long as

they hug the bank—and then it gives them so many useful points for the shaping of their future destinies! It teaches them to let things slide when opposition will do no good. It stands to them for the resistless stream of life which sweeps us all over its falls first or last, so that it pays us to float tranquilly while we may and not mar so brief a passage with altercation. The individuality of so impetuous a flood can hardly fail to make its impression on them, suggesting that every individuality, even that of a married woman, has a right to its own development, and comes swifter and safer to a tranquil haven if left reasonably free to follow out its natural course.

But only dense men bully their wives anyway, and possibly such men are too impervious to instruction to gather the wisdom of Niagara as it rushes by. But its wisdom is always there for those who can seize it, and for all coming time its banks promise to be trod by men and women who have need at least to try.