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NIAGARA RIVER AND FALLS.
FROM LAKE ERIE
TO LAKE ONTARIO.

GUARANTEE.
To Whom it May Concern:
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Mr. J. H. Daniels, Boston, Mass., direct from
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Joseph Wilkins

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CONTINUING our rambling glance at the many points of interest that present themselves to view all along the pleasant banks of our resplendent and wayward River, we find that our reveries are more in harmony with the evidences it affords of present prosperity and industry, and with the sweet and salutary influences of its verdant and luxuriant natural aspect, diversified and enlivened, as we now view it, by a rapid succession of interposed objects, alternating with its more indigenous beauties; mill and hamlet, villa and meadow, creek and forest, river and railroad;—all these prove of more immediate interest to us than the stern and gory events, and ghostly recollections, of its turbulent and peril-haunted past. Deeds of prowess and devotion, and harrowing adventures of trial and triumph, are recalled; it is true, with impressive vividness, at every step of our way; but the beauties and activities of the life that surrounds us on every side, prove to us that Nature has still the strongest hold upon our sympathies, and contributes the most to our present enjoyment. Nature is so varied and complex in her attractions—so overflowing with ever-renewed delights—so abundant in resources—so spontaneous and inventive in surprises—so veracious and genuine—so generous and benignant—so ready and responsive to all demands upon her ingenuity, be it for dew-drop or cataract,—truly, when we consider it, the tiresome caprices and mischances of man and his doings disturb but little the pure and restful inspirations that come to all who yield confidingly to her benign persuasions.
But we are admonished by a peremptory persuasion of another and more practical sort, that other and more prosy considerations await our reluctant attention. The course of our life, like the diversified scenery that here surrounds us, is but an interlacing, if sometimes, alas, it be not rather a confusion, of facts and fancies; and to facts we must return, the most conspicuous one before us this moment being the beautiful Island, with a brief reference to which we closed our last number.

About three miles below Black Rock, the River, greatly reduced in speed, widens out to more than double its width at Buffalo, and divides into two unequal streams, which form and enclose the sandy mound of table land known as Grand Island; the widest of the two streams and the main channel of the River, passing to the Canadian shore, leaving the Island separated only by the narrower branch from the American shore; on which account, chiefly, it was conceded, by the British and American Boundary Commissioners, in 1822, to belong by natural chance as well as by international usage, to the United States; and so the prize fell to the State of New York, and it is now rapidly gaining favor in general estimation, as the most desirable and attractive residence town within the boundaries of Erie County. All circumstances, and innumerable local advantages, indicate unmistakably the already dawning accomplishment of this high and not improbable expectation. The charm of its insular and salubrious position—its beautiful bird-enlivened groves, and green, undulating downs—its aquatic facilities—its proximity to the Falls—its exemption from the
annoyances and disfigurements incidental to the trade and traffic of a business mart, which it never can become—the luxuriance of its vegetation—the space it affords for parks and gardens, and the convenience of local food supplies—the ready access assured to all desired Railroad facilities—and its nearness, for all trading and commercial purposes to the City of Buffalo—all these influences point unerringly to the fulfilment at no distant day, of the destiny assured for it by Nature herself.

This fine Island, which lies opposite Tonawanda with which it is connected by ferries, has an extent in area of about eight miles in length and a breadth averaging from five to six and an elevation, at its highest point, of over 50 feet above the River. It affords many delightfully picturesque views of both shores, and especially lovely ones of the River, which, after passing Buckhorn Island, a copy little affair which lies near its northwestern corner, expands into the appearance of a small lake, whose smooth and quiet waters seem to attain here a breadth of over eight miles; after a gentle flow of about three miles in a northerly direction, they reach the rocky decline of the Grand Rapids, rushing down which, with swiftly accelerated velocity, they presently take their tremendous plunge over the precipitous walls of the Horse-shoe cliffs, on their tumultuous and rolling way to the Atlantic Ocean.

In the early period of the settlement of this part of the State, this Island, then in possession of the Seneca Indians, was densely covered with a forest of valuable timber trees, the cutting and utilization of which by the pioneer settlers on the American margin of the River, occasioned many angry and dangerous contentions with the savage proprietors, which were only terminated by the purchase, by the State of New York, in 1815, of the admitted legal title to the property remaining in the aboriginal owners. Soon after this there were quite extensive clearings made, by enterprising white-oak cutters, in several parts of the Island, which came in the course of a year or two to be occupied by a lawless bandit sort of confederacy of American and Canadian Squatters, employed ostensibly in wood-cutting and shook-shaving, for which they had acquired no license, an industry that required but little capital, and found a ready market in the settlements. This illicit business was really prosecuted with considerable though rather intermittent activity, and with no little profit. The enterprise was winked at for a long time by the State authorities, but becoming more and more troublesome and disorderly, after numerous formal complaints, and several
peaceful and therefore ineffectual movements for the suppression of the factious confederacy, more active measures were determined upon, and in 1819, an armed detachment of State troops, under command of the gallant Col. Benjamin Hodge of Buffalo, crossed the River in canoes and invaded the clearings. After a brief and feeble show of resistance they sacked and broke up the camps and drove the contumacious constituency from the Island, chiefly to the Canadian side of the River. It was three years after this, the stave shaving business having been resumed under more legal auspices, that the Boundary Commission confirmed the possession of the Island to the United States. It has ever since proved an attractive place of resort for huntmen and fishermen as well as for idlers and pleasure-seekers: being a capital place, in the words of Mr. L. F. Allen, one of its earliest and most widely known citizens, for that “listlessness and laziness so congenial to squatter and roving life;” especially during its wilderness period, when its thickets abounded in deer, rabbits, and squirrels, and were not infrequently visited by bears, foxes, and wolves, its sedgy shores swarmed with duck, and all the wild birds of this region, and its encircling waters also yielded an unlimited supply of the finest fresh water fish to be caught in the world. Truly was it a “paradise for sportsmen” and explorers, and a tempting free tramping ground for vagabonds and squatters.

The most curious and unique episode that attaches itself with some significance to the romantic history of the Island, relates to the ambitious but infelicitous undertaking of Mr. Mordecai M. Noah, a learned and upright Jewish citizen of New York, to secure its possession for the establishment, beneath its breezy groves, of a new Hebrew Community, open to the faithful from every corner of the earth. He conceived the possibility of founding on
this secluded spot, by purchase of as much territory as might be needed, and the expected personal co-operation of his fellow Israelites throughout the world, a broad city of residence and refuge, under the control of a central judicial government, of the ancient type; exclusively for the ownership and occupancy, of people of that faith from all lands. Infatuated with this pretentious project, he imagined that the scheme, if once properly authenticated and boldly promulgated, and with the proposed city once fairly planted upon ostensibly consecrated foundations, would attract to its support by thousands, the people for whose benefit and solace its erection was intended. Perhaps, if the main conditions of the undertaking could have been fulfilled, it would have done so. The plan was not wholly unreasonable, nor the hope of its really honest deviser wholly visionary. But the details and preliminaries of the project were incoherent and impracticable, and the measures adopted for its realization premature and ill-judged. He began at the wrong end. He dreamed of a city without a people; he should have collected a people who required a city. The scheme assumed at once that taint of vagueness and visionary speculation, which, however unjustly to the man and to the integrity of his really fraternal purpose, prevented and repulsed at once, the very authenticity and co-operation from within the borders of the Jewish fold, which alone could have assured him that general concurrence which was essential for its success. It failed from inherent arrogance. As the specious sophistry of an eccentric dreamer, an individual speculator, the guise it at once assumed, in the view of those most immediately interested, it was rejected without discussion. Its author had no affiliated co-laborators, no sanction excepting that of a few outsiders, not of his own religious persuasion, who could have had, and really had, no part or lot in the matter. What sincere concern could one whose daily prayer was for the conversion of "Jews and Turks," and all other "infidels," to a religion which they denied and rejected, have in a movement to endow a community whose vital purpose was to be the propagation and perpetuity of the Jewish faith and polity exclusively? Surely none. What Mr. Noah needed, to render possible the stability of the frail fabric of his imagined metropolis, was the patronage and counsel of his own people. But this utterly failed him, and his assumption of the functions of a "Judge in Israel," or even of that of a director, was impugned and derided throughout the world. Personally, Mr. Noah was a man of impressive bearing and cultivated and cordial manners, and was esteemed for his many excellent and generous qualities; he was a man of ability and sound impulses,
kind-hearted, capable and trust-worthy, in all his relations with his fellow-men. He was educated to the law, and served his country creditably in the capacity of Consul at the city of Tunis, and afterwards held the office of Judge in one of the Criminal Courts of the City of New York; in which place he died, in 1851, at the age of sixty, lamented by all who knew him, even by those who, excusably enough, had indulged in many a sly joke and jeer, over the inflated inscription sculptured upon his abandoned and paradoxical “corner-stone,” so ostentatiously and vainly consecrated, as the nucleus of his chimerical “City of Ararat,” now, henceforth, and finally, to rest where it now does, among the curios in the museum of the Buffalo Historical Society. So true is it, as Grand Island will always hereafter remind us, that

The wisest and the best of men
Will fool a little, now and then.

Grand Island,—once threatened with the appellation of White Haven, if the Postmaster General had not, in 1839, refused to establish a Post-office upon it by that name, “because it was so near Tonawanda,”—derives its more appropriate and now assured name, with a slight euphonic change, from that given to it by the Seneca Indians, who simply called it what it was, “the Great Island;” Tonawanda, lying opposite, being in their estimation, the “Little Island.” Half a dozen other small islands lie scattered about in its neighborhood; Navy Island,—which is the English equivalent of its French designation, “Isle de la Marine,” they having utilized it for ship-building purposes, called also by the Senecas, “Big Canoe Island”—belongs to Canada: it lies at the north-western corner of its grander neighbor, and has been discredibly notorious as the sequestered rendezvous and skulking-ground for rebels against the Canadian Government, and their accomplices, such marauding tramps, as were found to be purchasable by copious allowance of whisky, and who could so be made available for almost any casual scrubby job of rascality and plunder. Some lawless Americans being detected in this fancy for taking a hand in promiscuous and disorderly enterprises of this sort, some fifty years ago, that alert and experienced frontiersman, and wary soldier, General Winfield Scott, got his vigilant eye upon them, and he marched down upon them one day, when they soon scattered beyond all chance of rally, or even of discovery. It is quite true, rarely, that the wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the wretched instance referred to demonstrated clearly enough that they fly well when a loyal defender of his country’s honor gets after them. A vigorous cannonading from the Canadian shore swept through the Navy Island woods, and the “incident was closed.” Of the other Islands referred to, Tonawanda, on the American
side, at the mouth of the Creek of the same name, though small, is a place of considerable and rapidly rising business importance; Beaver, a copsy little affair, near the south-western corner of the larger Island, in the Canadian branch of the River, is the pleasant seat of a small private club; Buckhorn and Strawberry are low grassy islets, of interest only as they add variety and delicate touches of prettiness to the gentle and peculiar beauty of the low scenery of this really attractive portion of the River.

Wherever the eye turns it is arrested by some object revealing the locality of some spot of by-gone interest; some fading memorial of vanished times. For we here stand at the chief converging point, the fertile cradle and source, of the romantic though often conjectural annals and traditions of the pioneer explorations and discoveries in the perilous solitudes of our northern frontier. On the bushy borders of these waters, and underneath the lofty forests of majestic oaks and pines that once adorned these circling shores, now covered with a vegetation of more recent growth, dwelt communities of peoples known to have become quite extinct before the appearance in this region of even the predecessors of the Indian tribes who were discovered here by the first European explorers of the American interior. Here, as we glance around, we encounter innumerable mementos of the presence and doings of those unshrinking and audacious adventurers. Here, we are reminded at every turn, what a blending and interweaving of romance and recollection, of mystery and conjecture, as well as of struggle and disappointment, make up for us the glowing but only half told story of the opening and planting of this much coveted region of the Lakes; a story illustrated by many gallant personal exploits, and many chivalrous enterprises, as well as overshadowed by narrations of much personal suffering and many cruel wrongs and misfortunes. For our River was for a long period the principal and best known feature, the one grand geographical landmark, of all this vast northern wilderness, and formed the very outskirt of the rude and experimental civilization, that accompanied the slow and timid advance of the pioneer occupation of this portion of the country. On the western shore of the Lagoon, at the mouth of the Creek from which it derives its name, and a short distance below Navy Island, we note the manufacturing village of Chippewa, where our Gen. Scott won his epaulettes in the memorable struggle between the British and American forces in 1814, as before related. Nearly opposite, on the eastern shore, lies in poetic and dreamy repose, the unambitious little village of La Salle, whose name, of which more will be said in our next, like the fair face of the pretty maid in the story, is its fortune, which is not in riches, but in honor—and also its raison d'être.

Diagonally opposite Navy Island, on the American shore, lies what little there is now to be seen of what was once a place of some service to the early scouts and settlers along the then heavily wooded margin of the River, and known as Schlosser’s store-house and dock, a landing-place for fishermen, and for ferry-boats crossing the River from Grand Island and the Canadian shore. It is a place of slight importance, mentionable now chiefly as the meeting ground for the Fenian bandits, on the occasion of the Navy Island fiasco before alluded to, and a hiding-place for supplies.