NIAGARA RIVER
FROM LAKE TO LAKE.

Original Etchings
By Amos W. Sangster.

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J. A. Doughty, Esq.

NIAGARA RIVER AND FALLS.
FROM LAKE ERIE

TO LAKE ONTARIO.

GUARANTEE.
To Whom it May Concern:
The Engravings of this work are printed by
Mr. J. H. Daniels, Boston, Mass., direct from
the copper plates.
Etched by Amos W. Sangster from his own
drawings.

THE PERMISER.

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Extravagance in statement cannot properly be charged to all who have from time to time undertaken in moments of exhuberant fancy to record their impressions and recollections; but exact data are not at every traveller’s call, and appearances, where the attention is absorbed and bewildered by so many overpowering influences, as has been often proven, may be very misleading. The Abbé Picquet, who visited the Falls in 1751, found little more to say of them,—after describing the whole Cascade as “prodigious by reason of its height and the quantity of water which falls there, and on account of the variety of its falls,” which he recons to the number of “six principal ones divided by a small island,”—found little to say of them, farther, than that “they produce a singular symmetry and wonderful effect.” Peter Kalm, the Swedish naturalist, who the year before Picquet’s visit had spent part of a day at the place, determined, wisely, to see the affair “with his own eyes,” because he had “found by experience that very few observe Nature’s works with accuracy, or report the truth precisely.” So he “thought he had better try to get a pretty good idea of it” for himself. He saw only two falls, one on each side of an island, and exclaims at the sight—especially, of the western one, which is “in greater abundance and seems,” before it reaches its ledge, “to almost out-fly an arrow in swiftness”—“when you see this, the hair will rise and stand upright on your head! Words cannot express how amazing this is; you cannot see, without being terrified, so vast a quantity of water falling from so imposing a height! And when the water is come down to the bottom of the rock, it jumps back to a very great height in the air, and is as white as milk or snow, and all in motion like a boiling caldron.”

This is graphically said, but his engraved sketch of it is only a slightly changed copy of Father Hennepin’s picture, with the “third Cascade,” over Table Rock, across the front of the Horse-shoe, left out; the scene really representing the Cataract as a very poor and second-rate affair. But Kalm declined “to be esteemed a false wonder-maker,” and had his cautions in regard to all curiosities of this sort; he was disposed, rather, to be precise and critical. “I have seldom,” he says, “been so happy as to find the wonderful things related by others,” and he had discovered, even, “that it was the way of travellers to magnify everything, as Hennepin had done, with regard to Niagara.” He had found “that since Hennepin’s day, this Fall, in all accounts that have been given of it, has grown less and less;” for himself he preferred to see things just as they are,” and would trust only “his own eyes.” But not always, it would seem; for he tells us he got “the King’s Engineer to give him under his hand, measured with mathematical instruments,” the true perpendicular height of the fall of water; which was found to be “precisely one hundred and thirty-seven feet.” The linear
breadth of the Horse-shoe, "where it runs in a semi-circle, he reconos to be about six arpents," an arpent being, as he also informs us, one hundred and twenty feet. A statement that does not sustain the claim he makes that "you may depend upon the truth of what I write." He naively adds, "you must excuse me if you find in my account no extravagant wonders; I cannot make Nature otherwise than I find it."

Making many allowances due to later and more accurate knowledge, Kalm's account, as merely a traveller's note, is not without a venerable interest.

The first appearance of the Niagara Cataract in history, excepting a mere allusion to it in 1536, by J. Cartier, the French explorer, who only knew of its existence from information derived from the Natives,—is in the letters of Samuel de Champlain, written in 1603. Champlain merely says of the Cascade, which he never saw himself, that "it is somewhat elevated, and there is some little water there, laquelle descend;" which was really all that he knew, at that time, about it.

We find, however, upon his map of New France, which was printed in 1623, that the Falls have a very conspicuous position, and are supplied with a brief note, which relates that "they are at the extremity of Lake St. Louis, (Ontario,) and are very high and where many fish are brought down." This fish story, sometimes enlivened with ducks and other smaller birds, has an air of probability, and has had many repetitions since this early note.

Few can have looked on this marvel of Nature, says an old writer, "with so cold an eye as not to have wished to make some record of the emotions it occasioned." Liancourt de Rochefoucauld seems to have indulged in no such enthusiastic desire. He mentions his visit, in the year 1795, to the Falls, but with as few words as possible, and in singularly cool and formal phrases. "The water," he writes, "tumbles"—is this rural word a prompting from the earlier writers, or is it a usual and customary suggestion—"tumbles perpendicularly on the rocks. Its color, at times a dark green, and then a foaming white, everywhere displays a thousand variegations as it is struck by the rays of the sun, according to the state of the atmosphere, the time of day, and the force of the wind. It is impossible to describe the impressions which this Cataract made upon our minds; fancy had presented pictures of it which seemed to be exaggerated, yet were much inferior to the reality. To attempt a description of the enthusiasm which seized the soul at the view of this magnificent spectacle, would exceed my powers." Or any one else's, he might have added; for, as in the fine apostrophe of Mrs. Sigourney—

To tint thy glorious features with our pencil's point,
Or woo thee with the tablet of a song, were prodigation.
Jonathan Carver, a New England explorer of some note, traversed the northern territory of British America in 1767, and included in his reports a few brief notes respecting the Niagara, of which he observes, with commendable accuracy, that “the waters, by which the Falls are supplied, take their rise nearly 2000 miles to the north-west, and passing through the Lakes, at length rush down a stupendous precipice one hundred and forty feet perpendicular, and in a strong and rapid flood, that extends eight or nine miles below, fall nearly as much more, and soon after, the River empties into Lake Ontario. The noise of the Falls may be heard an amazing way. I could plainly distinguish them more than 20 miles, others have said that at times, when the wind sits fair, the sound reaches fifteen leagues.” In these noisy times, we are rather disposed to think that “others” must have been mistaken; but in the primeval quiet of a still hour in Carver’s day, with a gentle wind flowing down the canyon, the heavy subterranean rumble may have been heard at distances quite as great as any that we find recorded in the discredited annals of the olden time. Many really excellent and well characterized pictorial representations of the Falls have from time to time been produced, of which, perhaps, none are more interesting or artistically effective, than several that date back to the last century; and notably, should be first named of these, the fine and vigorous drawing of the entire front view of the Cataract, made by Lieut. Pierie, of the British Royal Artillery, in 1768. This picture though its point of view is not quite clear, nor its perspective strictly verifiable, is nevertheless a very good thing. It was reproduced in oil, a few years later, upon a canvass six feet by five, painted by Richard Wilson, an English artist of contemporary celebrity. Of this picture there was published in London, in 1774, a very superior steel engraving, executed by the skillful hand of Wm. Byrne, who was justly classed among the most eminent English engravers of that period. The following note, from the artist was appended to the print; “This stupendous Cataract is nearly a mile wide, and falls over a perpendicular rock 170 feet high, which interrupts
the passage of the River Niagara for some miles.” Assuming the general fidelity of this picture, it is evident that many and great changes in the verge line of the Falls have taken place since it was drawn by Lieut. Pierie.

Isaac Weld, an English landscape painter, of some note in his day, travelled through this portion of the United States in the summer of 1796, and in the published account of his journey has presented us with four very artistically executed and fairly accurate views of the Cataract, sketched from as many different points of view. These pictures, judging from the engravings of them in the artist’s book, are quite pleasing, and represent, generally, the natural characteristics of the place, though they fail to indicate correctly either the true height of the two sheets of water, or the impressive wildness and magnitude of the adjacent scenery. He gives also a good ground plot of the Falls, but errs as many another has done, in his measurements; giving six hundred feet as the breadth of each of the two divisions. But he appreciated the grandeur of the display, exclaiming with enthusiasm and truth, “the astonishment excited in the mind of the spectator by the vastness of the objects he here contemplates, is great indeed; and few persons, coming here for the first time, can for some moments collect themselves sufficiently to be able to form any tolerable conception of the stupendous scene before them.” In an entertaining chapter he gives a very agreeable narration of his rambles about the cliffs and spray-sprinkled groves of the locality: and notes the fact, “that since the Falls were first discovered, they have receded very considerably;” and he adds, that “the more the River’s course is studied, the more reason is there to suppose that the conjecture that the Falls were once situated at Queenston is well founded.” Standing at the foot of the Cataract, “your senses,” he well says, “are appalled by the sight of the immense body of water that comes pouring down so close to you, and by the thundering sounds of the billows dashing against the rocky sides of the caverns below.” Weld makes mention of a tradition which he picked up in his rambles in the vicinity of the Falls, that the portion of it known at that time, as now, and even more suggestively then than at present, as the Horse-shoe, once “projected in its centre.” There is good reason for admitting the correctness of the tradition; since it is evident that the crest line of the Cataract’s wall, connected with the American shore at the high bluff of Goat Island, probably once reached the Canada side of the gorge somewhere about where the Prospect House now stands.
Capt. Jonathan Carver, an English officer and traveller, who in 1767, paused in his long journey of seven thousand miles "amongst fierce and untutored savages" to view "those remarkable Falls which are esteemed one of the most extraordinary productions of nature at present known;" but recalling that they had, even then, "been very frequently described," was content to "observe only," that "the waters by which they are supplied, taking their rise nearly two thousand miles to the northwest, and passing through the Great Lakes, during which they have received constant accumulations, at length rush down a stupendous precipice, one hundred and forty feet perpendicular;" he adds, "through a strong rapid, that extends a distance of eight or nine miles below, they fall nearly as much more, and the River soon after empties into Lake Ontario." This is concise, and as a traveller's statement fairly correct, the height of the Falls, in this instance, being a little understated. Carver affords another testimony as to the distance the "roar" may be heard, which he considered "an amazing way;" affirming that he could plainly distinguish the noise, in a calm morning, more than twenty miles. He repeats, on the questionable and occult authority of "others," that at particular times, when the wind is right, "the sound reaches fifteen leagues." The frequency of the repetition of this last affirmation is curious, and indicates an early belief in its possibility.

In Feanning and Collyer's Geography, published in 1765, we find a correct appreciation of the Falls, the River running, we are told, "with great violence towards its perpendicular fall, which is an hundred and fifty feet; no words can express the consternation of the traveller at the sight of so great a body of water violently thrown from such a height upon the rocks below, from which it rebounds, all converted into foam, as white as snow. The noise of this Cataract is frequently heard a distance of fifteen miles, and at times much farther." John Payne, in his System of Geography, published in 1791, refers to "these stupendous Cataracts, which are not equalled by any other falls of water on the globe," with "their cloud or pillar of vapor, resembling smoke," and says, in reference to the sound, that "the noise produced by the Falls, may in calm weather, be distinctly heard a distance of twenty miles, some asserting that it has reached as far as fifteen leagues." Robert Sutcliffe, an intelligent and observing English gentleman connected with the Society of Friends, travelled through the northern portion of America in 1805 and 6, and wrote an unusually entertaining and instructive account of his journey, which was not published, however, until some years after his death. The pages of his journal that relate to the River Niagara, and the then little known territory through which it flows, are very interesting, and afford us another instance, in this case careful and circumstantial, of recorded personal impressions of first views of the world-renowned wonder. From him, also, we get another and at last local and more precise evidence concerning the distance that "the noise of the Falls could at times be heard; "I thought," he states, "I could very distinctly hear it while riding along a few miles from Buffalo Creek, or about twenty-four miles from the Cataract;" and he relates, also, the following incident: "I met," he says, "a reputable looking farmer, driving a team of four fine oxen, who told me that he sometimes, (when the wind was
favorable and the air calm and serene,) heard the Falls very plainly at his residence, which was forty miles from them."

"I came," he further states, "to Crow's tavern, in Buffalo Town, on Buffalo Creek, just at its outlet into Lake Erie, and Crow, the keeper of the inn, told me, that in cold weather, when the wind suited, the noise of the Falls was generally heard in Buffalo." The "cold weather" specification shows correct natural observation. Sutcliff, after the manner of all previous, and later, indeed all visitors, was curious in the matter of measurements, and notes, on this point—really rendering unnecessary any newly worded description,—"immediately below the Cataract the River is confined between two steep banks, that form a deep winding valley, through which the waters flow in their course to Lake Ontario; this valley is terminated by a perpendicular rock, fifty-three yards in height, which, running across, forms an angle pointing up the River, over which this vast body of water precipitates itself, with a noise so tremendous that it can be scarcely described. At the top of the rock is a small island which divides the Cataract into two parts; the greater part of the water pours over the rocks at the extreme head of the valley, and the rest on one side of it;" (that is, as few seem to have observed, on "one side" of the valley.) "I was informed," he continues, "by Joseph Ellicot and his brother, at whose house I lodged, that they had twice measured the Falls, and found them to be one hundred and fifty-eight feet in height, and about eighteen hundred yards in width between the opposite banks of the River." The figures given by different writers to express these measurements are quite variable, but Ellicot's have been long considered to be fairly accurate. Later estimates give 164 feet, as the perpendicular descent of the water on the American ledge, and 150 as that of the Horse-shoe; while for the extreme length of the entire crest, from shore to shore, we have now to assume about 4750 feet.

Another equally trustworthy but more distinguished explorer of our attractive frontier, who visited the Falls about the same period as the genial philanthropist just quoted, was Timothy Bigelow, of Massachusetts; a man of mark, and of great and diversified learning, and justly esteemed one of the most active and brilliant thinkers of his day; "the man," as one of his biographers, in reference to his great success as a lawyer, styles him, "of fifteen thousand causes." He made his visit to the Falls in the summer of 1805; and his bright and entertaining "Journal of a Tour to Niagara Falls," which was given to the world by his grandson, Abbott Lawrence, only a few years ago, is replete with pleasant reminiscences and anecdotes relating to persons and events of that early period of our history. A few lines from this discerning and inquisitive observer's notes will help us to see this natural wonder, as others before us have seen it, long ago. "One of our company," he writes, "mentioned
the remark of a celebrated traveller, that on approaching the city of Rome, he felt an
involuntary inclination to run, lest the object of his curiosity should disappear before it
could be gratified;" and he adds, "we realized a similar eagerness in approaching the Cataract
of Niagara." His observations on the Great Rapids are concise and appreciative; "the River
is near two miles wide, till it comes within a mile and a half of the perpendicular fall; it
then begins to contract and to increase in rapidity. The Rapids between the Great Island
and the main shore are about a mile in extent; and considered either across or lengthways
of the current, the whole extent is a scene of tumult and uproar. The water is broken into
milk-white foam, which is tossed in spray by the conflicting billows many feet into the
air. * * The grandeur of this scene is only exceeded by that of the ocean in some of its
wildest moods; and were there nothing else in the vicinity worthy of attention, this alone
would be resorted to from great distances, by the curious, as a just subject of wonder and
astonishment." The descending inclination of these Rapids, from their assumed commence­
ment, a little below Chippewa village, he computes to be fifty feet; which estimation, in
comparison with more correct and recent measurements, is short only two or three feet.
Speaking of the perpendicular depth of the Falls—"this descent," he says, referring to the
Horse-shoe, "has been variously estimated; it was fashionable a century ago greatly to exaggerate
it, and the affected precision of some modern travellers, who state it at one hundred and
thirty-seven feet, some even giving a fraction of a foot, is quite as absurd. The calculation
does not admit of accuracy, owing, not so much to the agitation of the waters, as to the
thick cloud of vapor and sprays which conceal not only the place of concussion but a con­
siderable part of the falling column. We were satisfied, from our own observations, that one
hundred and forty feet could not be far from the truth; and perhaps there are as many who
would exceed as there are who would fall short of that estimate. The water in the Fort
Schlosser Fall, so called, (the American cascade,) is of a snowy whiteness, more so than at
the Horse-shoe, and its depth is twenty feet greater, and it is more perpendicular, because the
water descends less from the Rapids." Ten years after the publication of Mr. Sutcliff's lucid
description, Christian Schultze, a young American traveller, tarried a few days at the Falls,
and in the journal of his tour through the State, gives a very readable presentation of their
most notable features, making especial mention of "the volume of clouds you will always
observe hanging over the Falls, even while yet at a great distance from them," nor, he well
says, is there any exception to this, even in the brightest days; the only perceivable difference
being in their height and color. In a clear day they appear high and white, while in heavy
cloudy weather they sink low and have a smoky appearance."