



## **Picturesque America; or, the land we live in**

a delineation by pen and pencil of the mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, water-falls, shores, cañons, valleys, cities, and other picturesque features of our country ; with illustrations on steel and wood, by eminent American artists

**Bryant, William Cullen**

**New York, 1872**

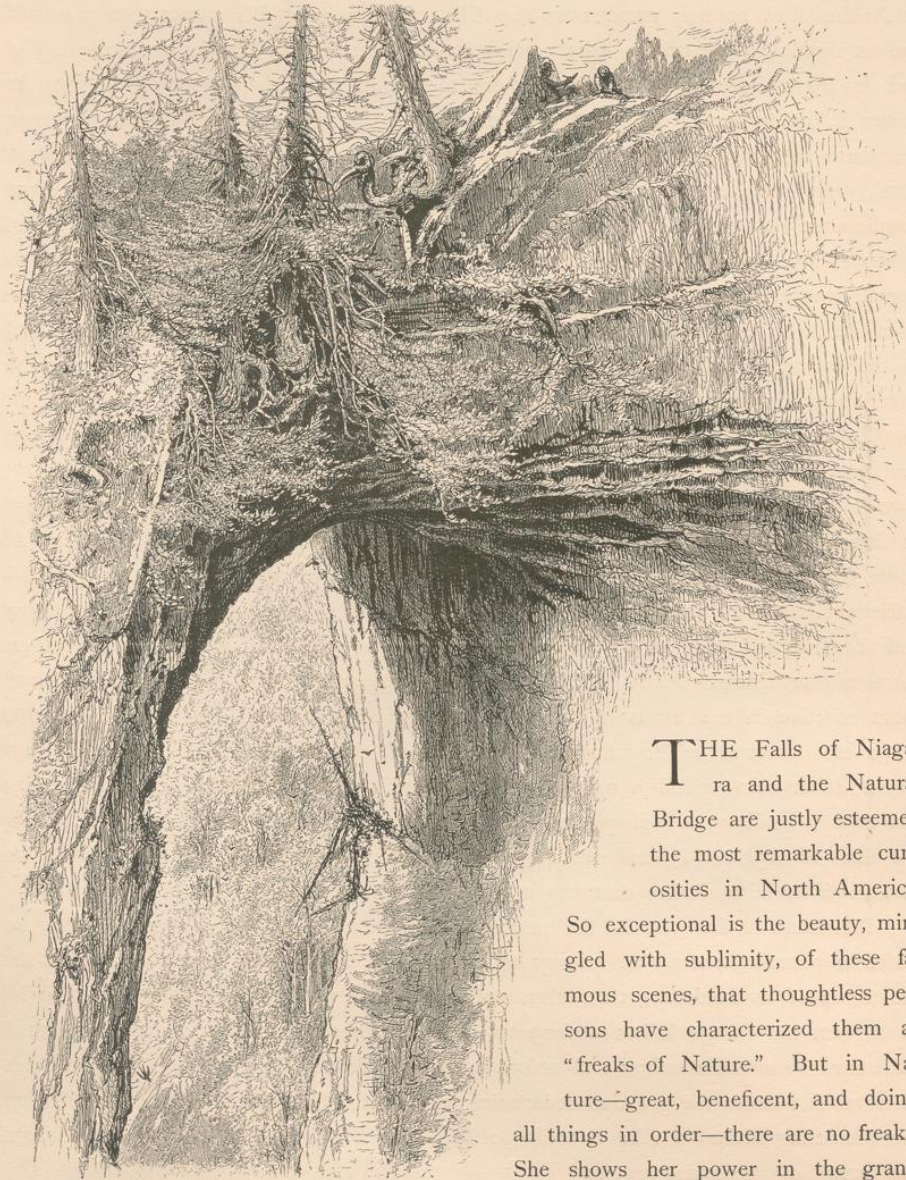
Natural Bridge, Virginia.

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## THE NATURAL BRIDGE, VIRGINIA.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY FENN.



THE Falls of Niagara and the Natural Bridge are justly esteemed the most remarkable curiosities in North America.

So exceptional is the beauty, mingled with sublimity, of these famous scenes, that thoughtless persons have characterized them as "freaks of Nature." But in Nature—great, beneficent, and doing all things in order—there are no freaks. She shows her power in the grand

cataract, spanned with its rainbow, and in the dizzy arch of the Natural Bridge, as in the daisy and the violet she shows her grace and beauty.

The Natural Bridge, the character and formation of whose upper portion are displayed in the first of the accompanying sketches, has been, from about the middle of the eighteenth century, an object of curiosity and admiration in Europe as well as in America. Whatever traveller came to the Western World, to compare its natural grandeur with the grandeur of art and architecture in the countries he had left, went first, in the North, to the Falls of Niagara, and, in the South, to the world-famous bridge. Among these may be mentioned the courtly and distinguished Marquis de Chastellux, major-general in the French Army and member of the Institute, who in 1781 visited the place, and from whose rare volumes we present a few paragraphs which may interest the reader.

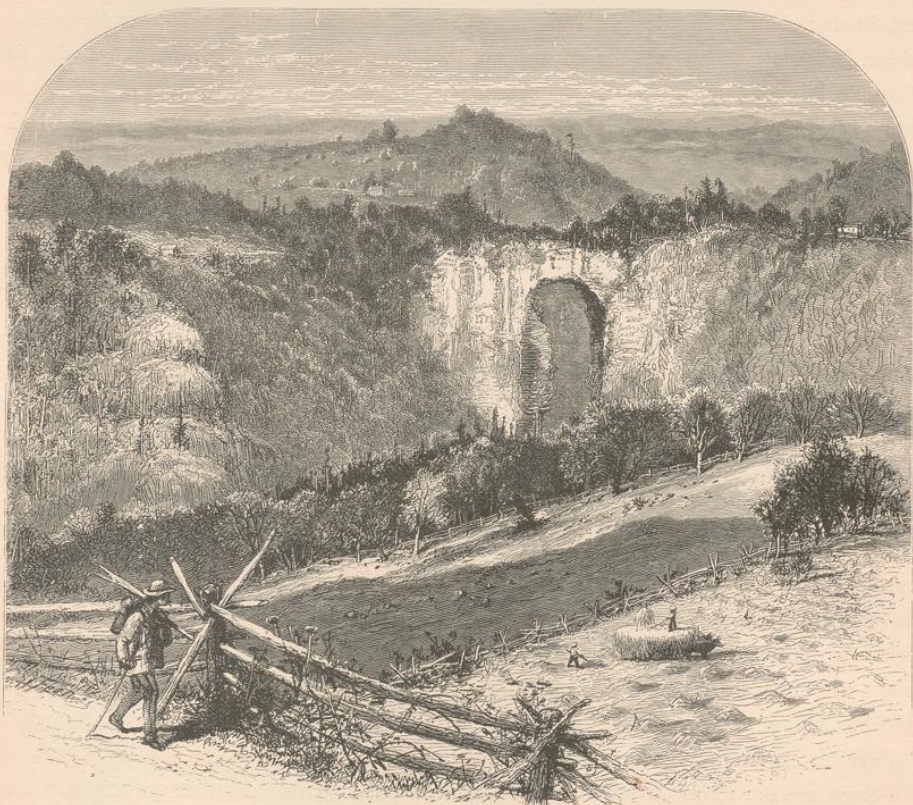
"Having thus travelled for two hours," writes the marquis, "we at last descended a steep declivity, and then mounted another. . . . At last my guide said to me: 'You desire to see the Natural Bridge—don't you, sir? You are now upon it; alight and go twenty steps either to the right or left, and you will see this prodigy.' I had perceived that there was on each side a considerable deep hollow, but the trees had prevented me from forming any judgment or paying much attention to it. Approaching the precipice, I saw, at first, two great masses or chains of rocks, which formed the bottom of a ravine, or, rather, of an immense abyss. But, placing myself, not without precaution, upon the brink of the precipice, I saw that these two buttresses were joined under my feet, forming a vault of which I could yet form no idea but of its height. After enjoying this magnificently-tremendous spectacle, which many persons could not bear to look at, I went to the western side, the aspect of which was not less imposing, but more picturesque. This Thebais, these ancient pines, these enormous masses of rocks, so much the more astonishing as they appear to possess a wild symmetry, and rudely to concur, as it were, in forming a certain design—all this apparatus of rude and shapeless Nature, which art attempts in vain, attacks at once the senses and the thoughts, and excites a gloomy and melancholy admiration."

Such are the terms in which the gallant marquis describes his first sensations, when, as yet, the view from the summit was all he had seen. He goes on to say:

"But it is at the foot of these rocks, on the edge of a little stream which flows under this immense arch, that we must judge of its astonishing structure. There we discover its immense spurs, its back-bendings, and those profiles which architecture might have given it. The arch is not complete; the eastern part of it not being so large as the western, because the mountain is more elevated on this than on the opposite side. It is very extraordinary that at the bottom of the stream there appear no considerable ruins, no trace of any violent laceration which could have destroyed the kernel of the rock and have left the upper part alone subsisting; for that is the only hypothesis that

can account for such a prodigy. We can have no possible recourse either to a volcano or a deluge, no trace of a sudden conflagration or of a slow and tedious undermining by the water."

The point here touched upon is one of the most interesting, in a scientific view, connected with this famous curiosity. The marquis, it will be seen, declares his conviction that the "prodigy" was neither caused by a volcanic upheaval, a conflagration burn-



The Natural Bridge and its Surroundings.

ing in the heart of the rock-ribbed mountain, nor by the attrition of water slowly wearing away the stubborn limestone. These views are supported by men of science, as the following paragraphs will show. They are taken from the memoir of the Baron de Turpin, an engineer of ability, sent by the Comte de Rochambeau to measure the great structure :

"The mass of rock and stone which loads this arch," says the baron, "is forty-nine feet solid on the key of the great centre, and thirty-seven on that of the small

one; and, as we find about the same difference in taking the level of the hill, it may be supposed that the roof is on a level the whole length of the key. It is proper to observe that the live rock continues also the whole thickness of the arch, and that on the opposite side it is only twenty-five feet wide in its greatest breadth, and becomes gradually narrower. The whole arch seems to be formed of one and the same stone; for the joints which one remarks are the effect of lightning, which struck this part in 1779. The other head has not the smallest vein, and the intrados is so smooth that the martins, which fly around it in great numbers, cannot fasten on it. The abutments, which have a gentle slope, are entire, and, without being absolute planes, have all the polish which a current of water would give to unhewn stone in a certain time. The four rocks adjacent to the abutments seem to be perfectly homogeneous, and to have a very trifling slope. The two rocks on the right bank of the rivulet are two hundred feet high above the surface of the water, the intrados of the arch a hundred and fifty, and the two rocks on the left bank a hundred and eighty."

The baron then proceeds, as though weary of his "great centres," "intrados," and other technicalities, to burst forth with:

"If we consider this bridge simply as a picturesque object, we are struck with the majesty with which it towers in the valley. The white-oaks which grow upon it seem to rear their lofty summits to the clouds, while the same trees which border on the rivulet appear like shrubs."

This exhibition of sentiment, however, appears to exhaust the baron's stock, and he returns to his better-loved science, adding:

"We see that these rocks, being of a calcareous nature, exclude every idea of a volcano, which, besides, cannot be reconciled with the form of the bridge and its adjacent parts. If it be supposed that this astonishing arch is the effect of a current of water, we must suppose, likewise, that this current has had the force to break down and carry to a great distance a mass of five thousand cubic fathoms, for there remains not the slightest trace of such an operation."

What, then, was the mystery of the origin of this celebrated structure? Science is powerless in face of the wonder, and perhaps, after all, the conclusion of De Chastellux is the only one attainable—that "it is to the labor only of the Creator that we owe the magnificent construction of the Natural Bridge"—to which he adds: "The opinion of the Comte de Buffon, whom I have since consulted, has left me no doubt upon the subject."

From this strictly scientific, but, we think, suggestive and interesting, view of the great curiosity, we pass to details and circumstances connected with it, calculated, perhaps, to interest in a larger degree the general reader.

Mr. Fenn's second drawing furnishes a distant view of the bridge, the surrounding country, and objects in its vicinity. It will recall, doubtless, to many persons, agreeable recollections of the landscape which saluted their eyes as they first drew near the place

—and the names of such are legion, for the spot has been, for more than half a century, the resort of parties led by a desire to explore the beauties of the romantic scene. Of the daring of some of these visitors, in climbing, or venturing to the brink of the precipice, we shall give one or two instances, kept alive by tradition. Among these traditions, the most thrilling is that of the unshrinking nerve displayed by Miss Randolph, a young *Virginienne*, a great belle of her time, which was the early portion of the present century. The young lady had ridden, with a gay party of youthful maidens and gallant cavaliers, to the bridge, and reached it on a beautiful evening of summer. Miss Randolph is said, by those who knew and remember her, to have been a young lady of surpassing loveliness—tall, slender, with sparkling eyes, cheeks all roses, and noted for her gayety and mirthful *abandon*. Reaching the summit of the bridge, the party dismounted, cautiously approached the brink, fringed with trees growing among the rocks, and gazed into the gulf beneath. Of the terrifying character of the spectacle, President Jefferson's words will give some idea :

“Though the sides of the bridge are provided, in some parts, with a parapet of rocks,” he says, “yet few men have resolution to walk to them and look over into the abyss. You involuntarily fall on your hands and feet, creep to the parapet, and look over it. Looking down from this height about a minute gave me a violent headache; the view is painful and intolerable.”

Reaching this dizzy brink, the party of young ladies and gentlemen gazed below, when one of the gallants, pointing to the broken stump of a huge cedar which had once towered aloft upon a jagged abutment, separated by an intervening cleft from the main structure, expressed his conviction that no human being lived sufficiently daring to stand erect upon it. A gay laugh echoed the words, a silken scarf brushed by him, and the whole party uttered a cry of terror—Miss Randolph, at one bound, had reached and now stood erect upon the dizzy pinnacle. Tradition relates that her companions looked at her, white and speechless, as so many corpses. Her death seemed certain. A wild spirit of bravado had given her courage for this terrible proceeding; but, perched thus on her slight footing above the frightful abyss, she must lose her nerve, grow dizzy, and be hurled upon the rocks beneath—the beautiful being of a moment since—a mass of mangled and unrecognizable flesh and bones. For an instant, the daring young lady stood erect, riding-whip in hand, her scarf floating, her eyes sparkling with triumph; then, at a single bound, she regained her former position, and, with a gay laugh, asked if any gentleman could do as much. Tradition declares that, despite their gallantry, the youthful cavaliers exhibited their good judgment by declining.

The most striking view of the Natural Bridge is that from below, and no better hour could be selected than that fixed upon by Mr. Fenn. As the sun rises and flashes its splendors through the gigantic arch, the scene becomes one of extraordinary beauty and sublimity—beauty from the exquisite flush which spreads itself over rocky mass and

stately fir, over pendent shrub, and the fringe of evergreen; and sublimity from the well-nigh overpowering sentiment which impresses the mind in presence of the mighty arch of rock, towering far above, and thrown as by the hand of some Titan of old days across the blue sky, appearing both above and beneath. It has been well said that no one who has witnessed this extraordinary spectacle has ever forgotten it.

With the brilliant drawing of Mr. Fenn before his eyes, the reader would only be wearied by any description of the exquisite scene which it represents. The grandeur and serene loveliness of the spectacle are sufficiently indicated—the gentle stream which passes with a murmur from its hiding-place in the bosom of the hills—the lengthening vistas, cool and soft, and bathed in dawn—the silent mountains—and, in the midst of all this exquisite beauty, the great soaring arch, with its jutting buttresses and fringes of the evergreen pine, the shaggy eyebrows of the giant. They dwindle these heavy-headed evergreens into little fringes only—even that picturesque monarch, represented in the second drawing of Mr. Fenn, on the summit of the bridge, shows scarce so large as the spray of ferns and cedar held in the hand of a girl! There is excellent reason, indeed, why the loftiest forest-trees, proudly raising their heads to heaven, and affording a resting-place for the eagle, should thus shrink in dimensions. From the summit to the surface of the stream below is two hundred and fifteen feet; and thus the Natural Bridge is fifty-five feet higher than Niagara.

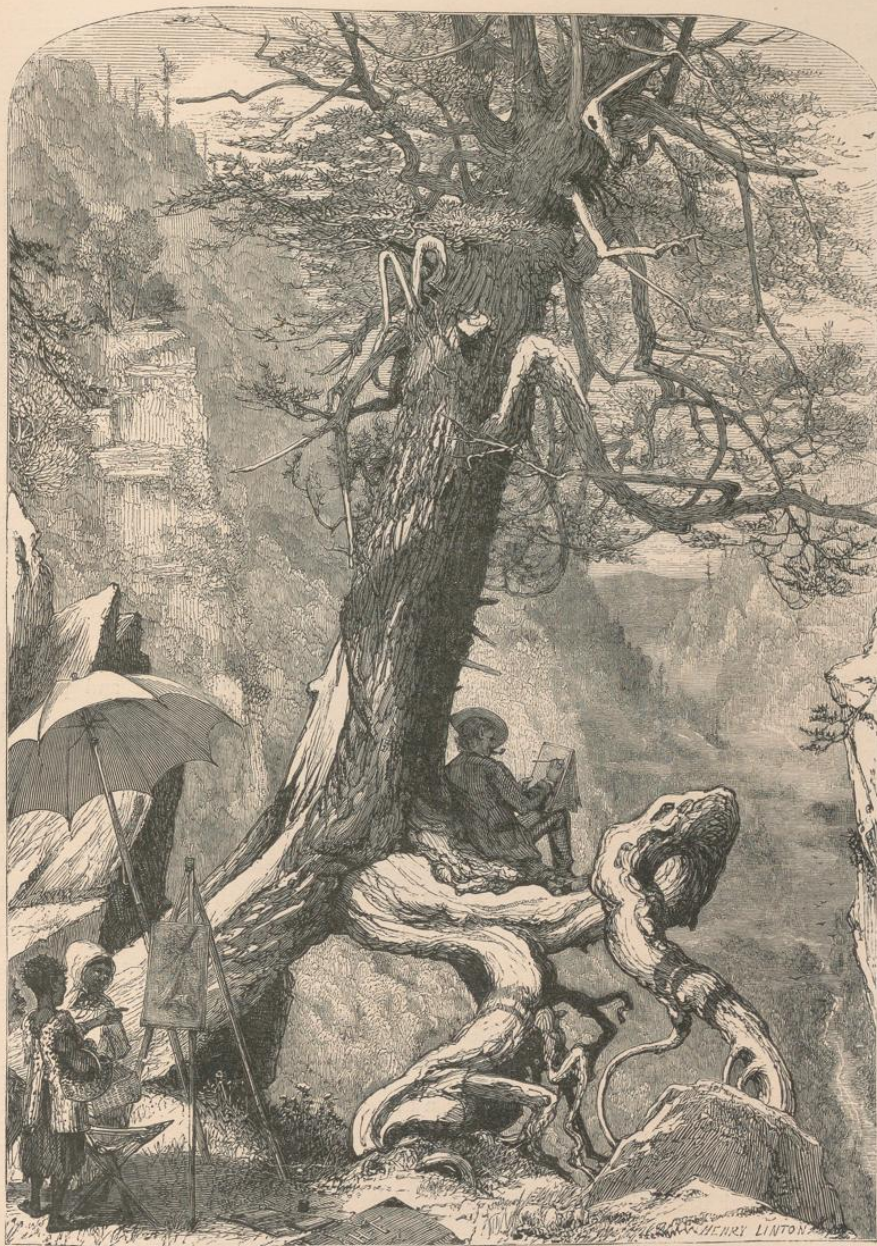
It remains only, before terminating our brief sketch of this celebrated curiosity, to speak of the hazardous attempts, made by more than one person, to climb the rocky sides of the great arch and reach the summit. This has never yet been done, but a considerable distance has been attained by venturesome climbers, who have recorded their prowess by cutting their names on the surface, at the highest point reached by them. High up among these, it is commonly reported, may be found the name of no less a personage than George Washington, who, strong, adventurous, and fond of manly sports, was seized, like many others before and after him, with the ambition to ascend the precipice and inscribe his name upon the face of the rock.

The highest point ever reached by any one of these adventurous explorers is said to have been attained by Mr. James Piper, at the time a student of Washington College, and subsequently a State senator. It was about the year 1818, when, with some of his fellow-students, Mr. Piper visited the bridge, descended to the foot of the precipice, and determined to ascertain to what height it was possible for a human being to ascend by means of inequalities on the surface, the assistance of shrubs, or otherwise. He accordingly commenced climbing the precipice, and, taking advantage of every ledge, cleft, and protuberance, finally reached a point which, to his companions far beneath, seemed directly under the great arch. He was far above the names cut on the stone—fully fifty feet above that of Washington—and, standing upon a ledge, which appeared to his terrified fellow-students but a few inches in width, shouted aloud, waving one hand in triumph,



UNDER THE NATURAL BRIDGE,





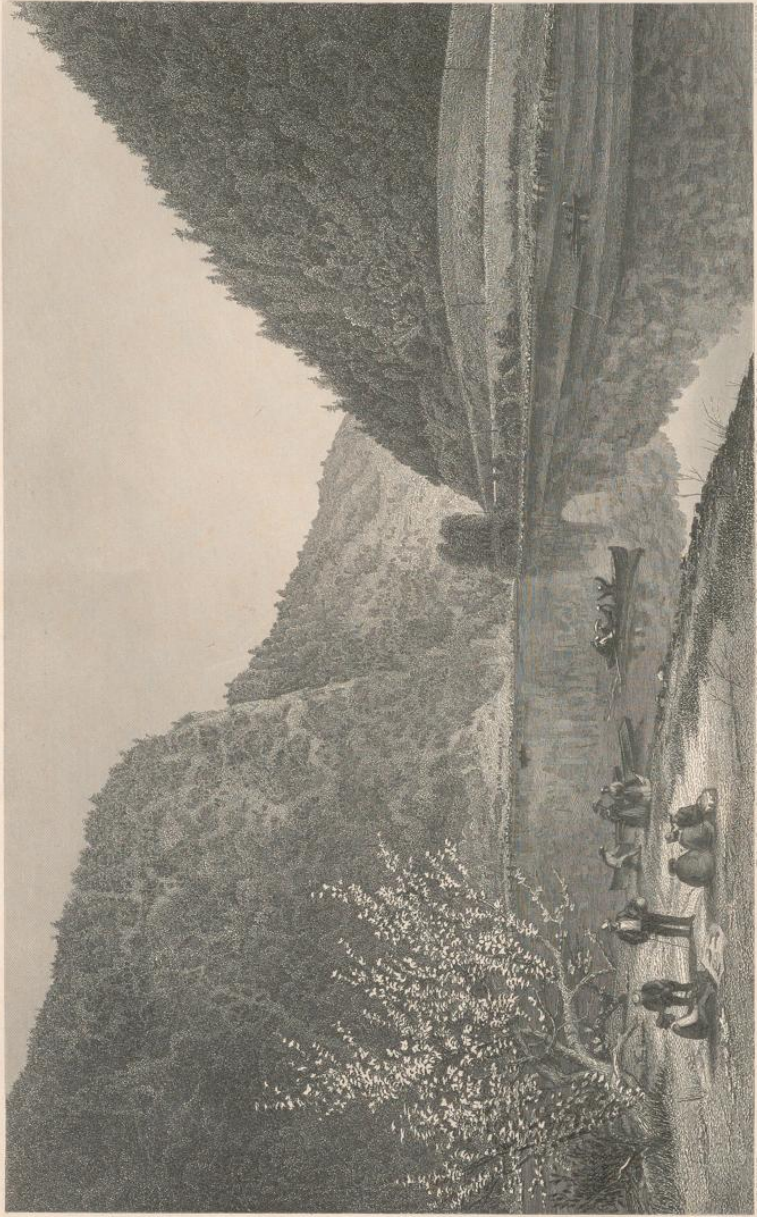
ABOVE THE NATURAL BRIDGE.

while with the other he clung to the face of the precipice. They shouted back to him, begging him for God's sake to descend, but he only replied by laughter. They then saw him continue the ascent, clinging to every object at hand, until he reached a cleft almost directly beneath the cedar-stump which we have mentioned as the scene of Miss Randolph's perilous adventure. His ambition was not yet satisfied, however. He had not ascended the rock to inscribe his name upon it, but with the daring design of immortalizing himself by mounting from the bottom to the top of the Natural Bridge. He accordingly continued his way, working his toilsome and dangerous passage through clefts in the huge mass of rock. These were just sufficient, in many places, to permit his body to pass; and huge roots from the trees above, protruding through splits in the mass, curled to and fro, and half obstructed the openings. With unfaltering resolution, and not daring to look into the hideous gulf beneath him, the young man fought his way on, piercing by main force the dark clefts, crawling along narrow ledges, springing from abutment to abutment, until finally he stopped at an elevation of *one hundred and seventy feet* from the earth below. Here he was seen to look upward, but he did not move. His heart had failed him. Instead of designing any further ascent, his only ambition now was plainly to descend in safety, if possible, from his frightful perch. To look beneath would have been certain death. His head would have turned at the first glance, and, losing his footing on the narrow ledge, which he just clung to, his body would have been dashed to pieces on the rocks.

Under these circumstances the young gentleman acted with a nerve and presence of mind highly honorable to the force of his character. He slowly and cautiously divested himself first of one of his shoes, and then the other, next drew off his coat, and these articles he threw from him into the gulf beneath, without daring to look in the direction in which they fell. Then, clinging close to the face of the precipice, and balancing his body carefully as he placed each foot down, and raised each one up, he tottered along inch by inch, hanging between life and death until he reached a friendly cleft. Here pausing for a moment to brace his nerves, he continued his way in the same cautious manner, followed by the eyes of his pale and terrified friends; when, disappearing in a cleft, he reappeared no more. A cry rose from beneath; he was lost, it seemed—must have fallen into one of the huge fissures and been dashed to pieces. His friends had given him up, and agony had succeeded the long suspense, when suddenly, from behind a clump of evergreens, extending like a screen across the narrow opening between two towering rocks, appeared the young student—safe, sound, and smiling, after his perilous feat, during which he had stood face to face with the most terrible of deaths.

The Natural Bridge is in the southeastern corner of Rockbridge County, in the midst of the wild scenery of the Blue-Ridge region, and almost under its shadow upon its western side. It is reached from Lexington, fourteen miles distant, by stage, and from Lynchburg, by canal-boat, thirty-six miles.

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*Delaware Water Gap*

New York, D. Appleton & Co.

# THE DELAWARE WATERWAY



The waterway will be a great boon to the State, and its completion will be a source of pride to all our citizens. It will give us a direct line of communication with the world, and will enable us to compete with the most favored nations. The waterway will be a great benefit to our commerce, and will give us a new outlet for our products. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources. The waterway will be a great boon to our agriculture, and will give us a new outlet for our crops. It will also give us a new source of water, and will enable us to irrigate our lands. The waterway will be a great benefit to our industry, and will give us a new outlet for our goods. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources. The waterway will be a great boon to our transportation, and will give us a new outlet for our passengers. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources. The waterway will be a great benefit to our education, and will give us a new outlet for our students. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources. The waterway will be a great boon to our health, and will give us a new outlet for our patients. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources. The waterway will be a great benefit to our recreation, and will give us a new outlet for our leisure. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources. The waterway will be a great boon to our culture, and will give us a new outlet for our arts. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources. The waterway will be a great benefit to our science, and will give us a new outlet for our research. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources. The waterway will be a great boon to our history, and will give us a new outlet for our past. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources. The waterway will be a great benefit to our future, and will give us a new outlet for our dreams. It will also give us a new source of power, and will enable us to develop our natural resources.

