



Picturesque America; or, the land we live in

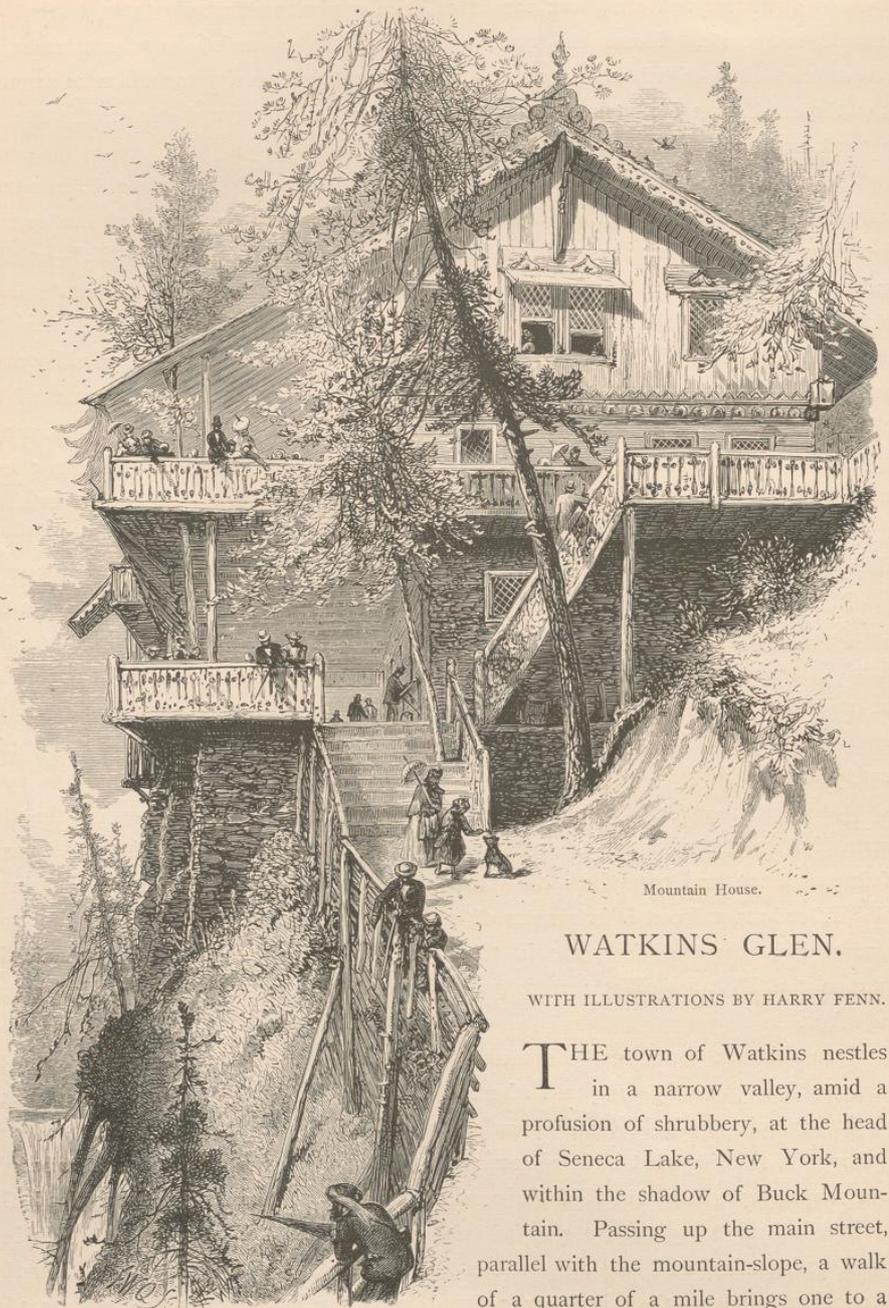
a delineation by pen and pencil of the mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, water-falls, shores, cañons, valleys, cities, and other picturesque features of our country ; with illustrations on steel and wood, by eminent American artists

Bryant, William Cullen

New York, 1872

Watkins Glen.

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Mountain House.

WATKINS GLEN.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY FENN.

THE town of Watkins nestles in a narrow valley, amid a profusion of shrubbery, at the head of Seneca Lake, New York, and within the shadow of Buck Mountain. Passing up the main street, parallel with the mountain-slope, a walk of a quarter of a mile brings one to a

bridge which spans a shallow stream. This stream has cut its way through the lower slope of the mountain-range, and formed for itself a short pass, or *cul-de-sac*, which terminates abruptly, at a distance of a few hundred yards, in a lofty wall, that stretches across the pass and bars all further progress.

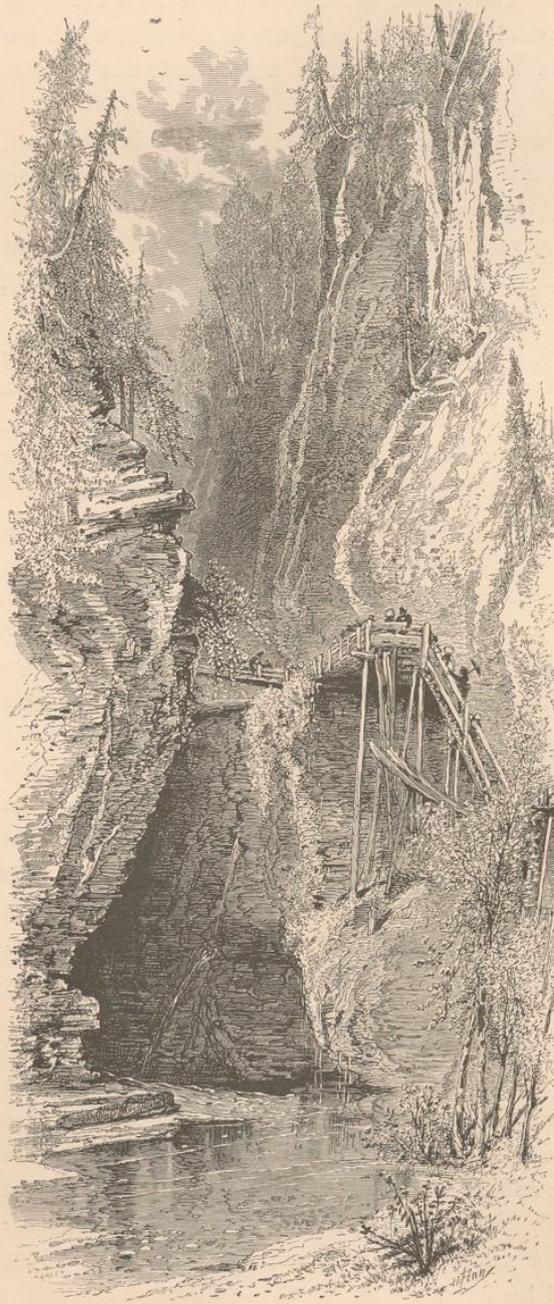
The wall is not, however, continuous on the same line, but falls back in the centre, and forms a cavernous recess, from one angle of which the stream issues. Behind this solemn gate-way of natural masonry, broken and abraded in places by time and the action of the elements, lie the gloomy ravines, and the infinite variety of water-falls, and foaming rapids, and deep and silent pools, which have become famous, within recent years, under the designation of Watkins Glen.

The mode of ingress for visitors to the glen is by rude stairways, running diagonally along the face of the wall, braced strongly to it, and propped, also, firmly from beneath. Landing-places are provided at intervals, from which other stairways spring; and thus the ascent is made until the angle of the northern portal is turned and a footway gained, when the first difficulty—the entrance to the gorge—is surmounted.

We are now in Glen Alpha, as it has been somewhat fantastically styled. Inside the great rock barrier, which we have just succeeded in passing, a narrow but secure bridge crosses the chasm; and from this bridge a fine view is had of the first cascade, as it pours swirling through a rift in the rocks, and falls, roaring and foaming, into a deep basin, scooped out of the solid rock-bed by the constant fret and chafe and turmoil of the waters. Quitting the bridge, and clambering up a series of steps, we gain presently a narrow foot-path, cut out of the face of the cliff, and follow its fantastic windings until all further progress is barred by a transverse wall, over which the waters of the long cascade fall from a great height into the dark pool below. At this point the rugged and lofty walls of the gorge draw closer together. Where the foot-path ends, a long staircase, wet with the mist and spray of the cascade, is flung, at an angle of ninety degrees, across the tremendous chasm, and at its upper end connects with another foot-path, some fifty feet above the one which has just been abandoned. After traversing this new path a little space, we come upon a series of cascades, dropping from one low ledge to another, with deep pools and broad shallows intervening.

Pursuing our onward and upward course, the aspect of the place grows weird and ghastly. The world, and the things of the world, are utterly shut out, and we seem to be struggling among the ruins of some older creation. The rocks take on more grotesque forms. The air is cold and moist. The path—a mere ledge in the face of the cliff—overhangs a deep chasm, at the bottom of which the waters chafe and struggle and brawl. Overhead, the gray walls rise, tier upon tier, inclining gradually toward each other, until finally, far upward, only a narrow slip of sky can be seen, with the light struggling dimly through a fringe of hemlocks.

Beyond this gloomy pass, with its strange, unearthly aspect, the ledge we are



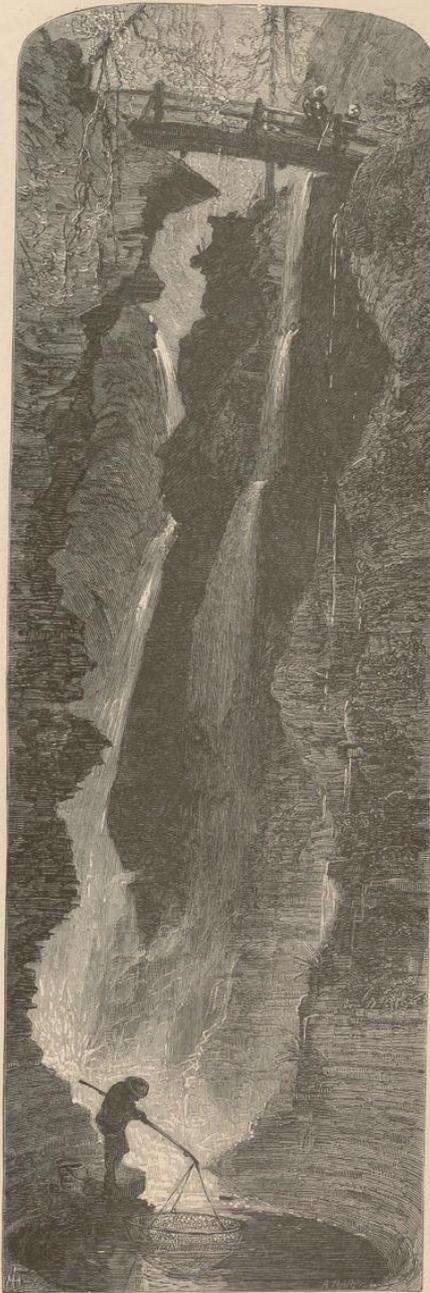
Entrance to the Glen.

traversing ends abruptly, and the obstacles to a farther advance have to be overcome by a succession of stairways, now crossing to one side, now changing to the other, until, by an ever-ascending grade, another pathway is reached. Here the rock walls recede, and sufficient soil has accumulated over them to admit of the growth of shrubs and large evergreen-trees. The path, too, is easier. Following it for a short distance, we come to a stairway placed against the bank, and, on ascending it, reach a shelf of the mountain on the north side of the ravine. On this shelf is perched the Mountain House, built somewhat after the style of a Swiss *chalet*, but comfortably furnished, and well supplied with essentials and non-essentials, and affording an excellent resting-place for those who have become fatigued with their rough but exciting journey, thus far, through the marvellous gorge.

Leaving the Mountain House, the path dips steadily downward, almost to the bed of the stream; and, after passing another series of small cascades and rapids, we cross a bridge to the opposite side of the gorge, where the cliffs, rent and torn into every conceivable

shape, first contract, and then expand into an enormous amphitheatre, to which has been given the name of Glen Cathedral. The area is vast. The immense walls, nearly circular in form, rise to a great height, and, where they terminate skyward, are crowned with the fresh, green, pendulous foliage of the hemlock. The floor of this amphitheatre is almost as level as if it had been paved by human hands; and over the great slabs of rock, laid regularly and close-jointed, the stream spreads out, but an inch or two in depth, flowing easily and quietly, with scarcely a ripple to break the smoothness of its surface.

Passing through a break in the great circular wall, by a path still broad, but more broken and water-worn, the tall cliffs recede upward

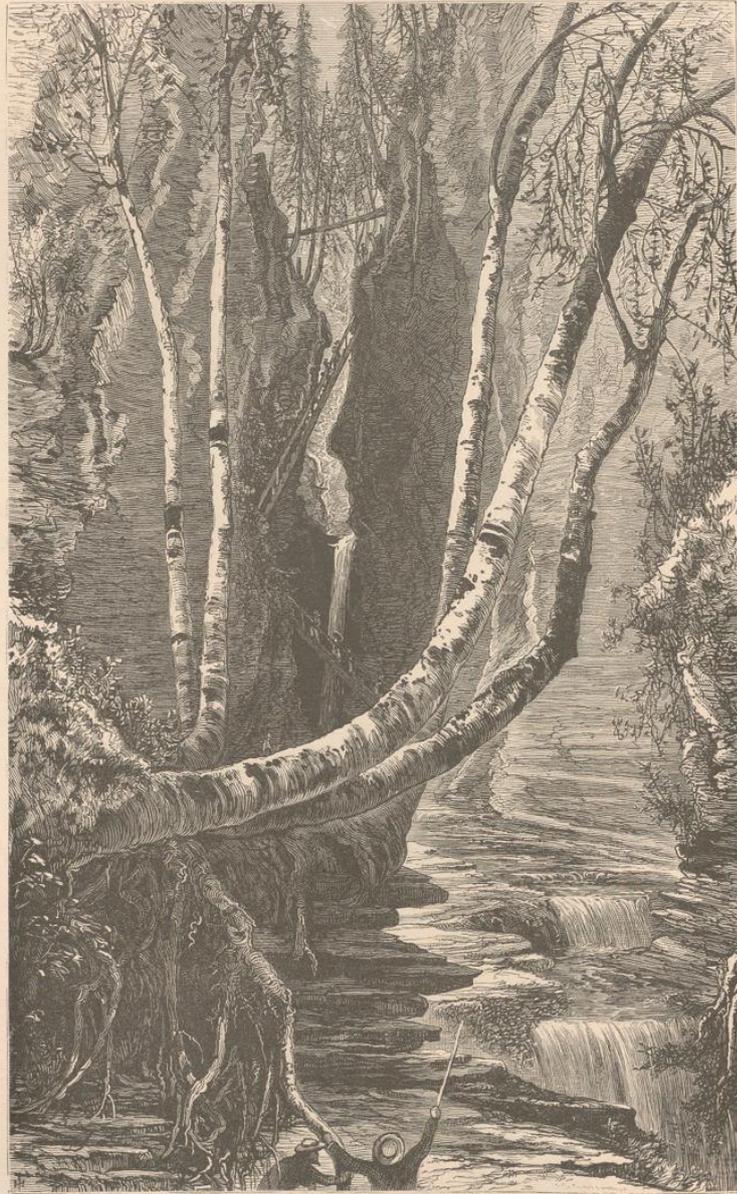


Glen Alpha.

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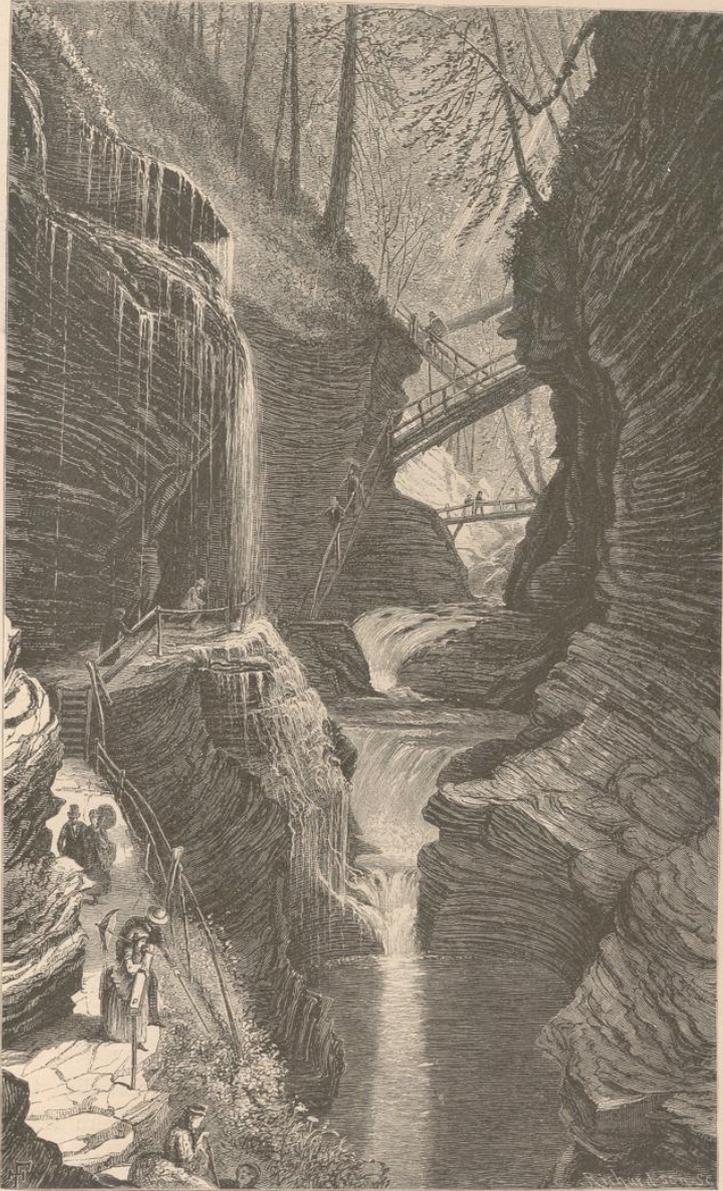
from their base; and on the slopes thus formed, and shelving outward, some hemlocks and deciduous trees find sustenance. Suddenly, the tall cliffs, as if spurning these picturesque accessories, close in again, and in the cavernous gloom of the remote distance another cascade is seen flowing in a white sheet over its rocky ledge, and pouring its waters into the gorge.

On nearing this fine cascade, another stairway, thrown across the gorge to a higher shelf projecting from the face of the cliff, gives access to a remarkable scene. Before us is what is called the Glen of Pools, from the variety and extent of its water-worn basins. Standing on the bridge, and looking up the gorge, the eye falls upon a series of cascades and rapids, low and



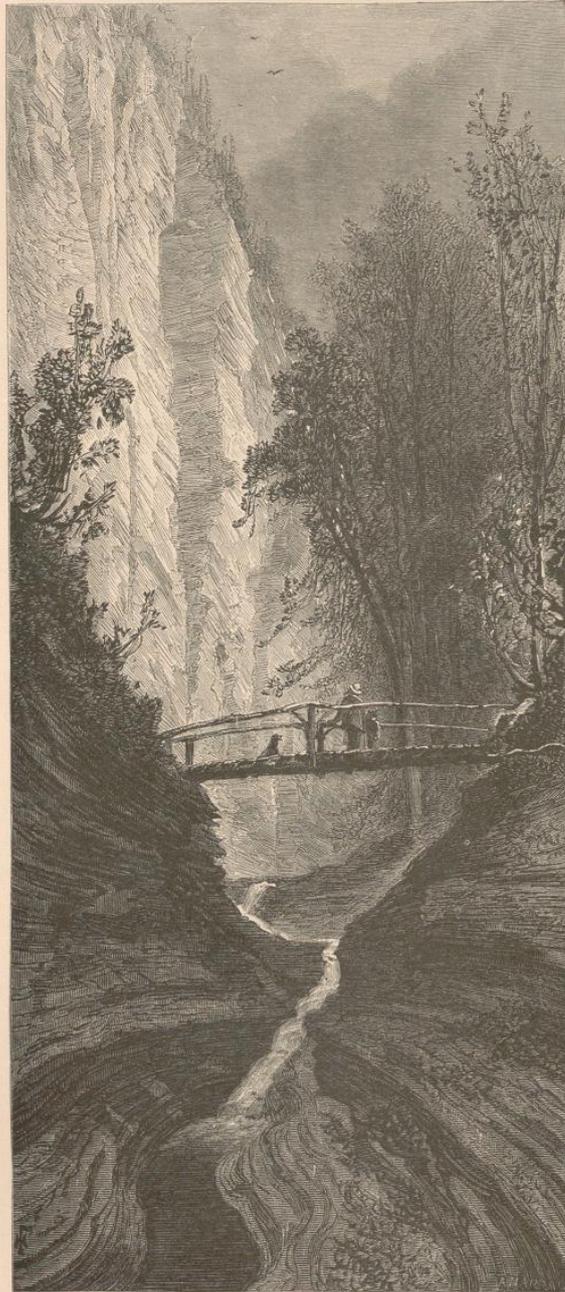
Cavern Cascade, below Mountain House.

broad, but very beautiful. The enclosing walls are again sufficiently broken to allow of the growth of trees in some places, and to let the light in freely. Beyond these, again, cascades of greater breadth drop from one rocky ledge to another, foaming and seething;



Rainbow Falls.

while over the southern wall, and the pathway that clings to it, a thin stream, falling from a great height, spreads itself out like a veil of silver mist, and mingles its waters with those in the rock-bound channel far below. At certain seasons of the year the sun

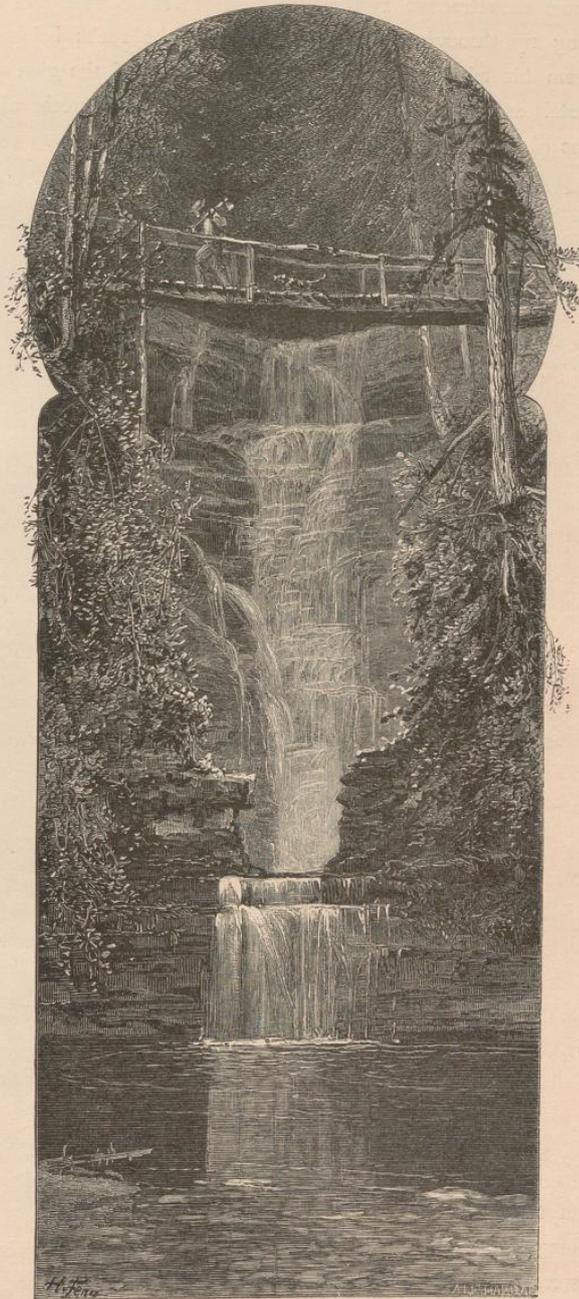


Cliffs, Glen Cathedral

is at an angle which sends glancing lights through the gorge, which break in prismatic colors on this thin fringe of a water-fall, and hence give it the name of Rainbow Falls. But the nomenclature of the glen is hopelessly free and confusing, each season giving a new series of designations to its various falls and aspects. "Glen Cathedral" is a term that seems to have adhered with some tenacity, but the other water-falls and pools have almost as many terms as there are different tastes and fancies among the visitors; and names, at best, apply to one feature only of the scene they describe, whereas in each picture there are usually a hundred phases that rival each other in beauty and interest. In this strange rift in the rocks the eye shifts from beauty to beauty, from marvel to marvel, with restless delight. The tumbling water-falls; the dark, silent pools; the light above reflecting from cliff to cliff, and glancing with rich beauty on rock and cascade; the fantastic growths of trees at every 'point of 'vantage," and the interlacing branches above; the picturesque bridges and stairways; the profound si-

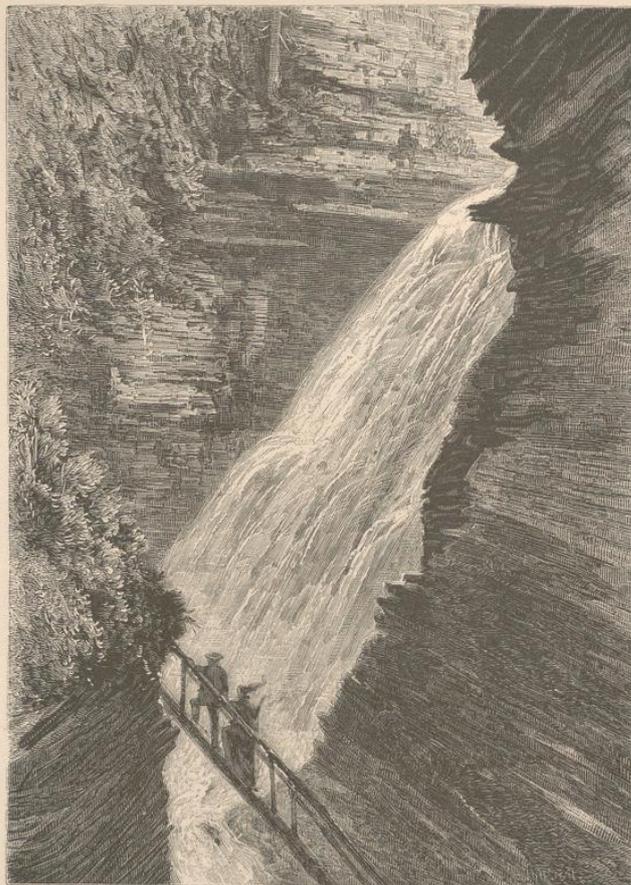
lence, broken only by the sound of waters—all these conditions make up a fascinating charm that each succeeding picture varies in detail, but which pertain with almost equal force to every part of the entire glen. Among the 'strange beauties of the place are the dark pools that lie at the foot of the cascades. The water in this strange gorge is of a brilliant green, and beautifully transparent. In shallow places it is of an almost perfect emerald hue, and in deep pools becomes the darkest sea-green. There is one pool which no one has ever been able to fathom. A pole thirty feet long, thrust into it totally disappeared, never returning to the surface. It is assumed that a channel exists far down under the rock, the subterranean current thus created sweeping objects let down in the pool out of reach or of power to return.

The very picturesque Mountain House, built directly on the side of the rift, affords one of the few instances where, in this country, man has worked in harmony with Nature. This *chalet* is, in its own way, al-



Curtain Cascade, Havana Glen.

most as attractive as the glen itself. Its balconies overhang the gorge, with trees jutting up through them from ledges in the rocks below; and the visitor looks down from his advantageous position into depths of the glen that remain inaccessible. Large hotels are now promised, in view of the yearly increase of visitors; but it is to be hoped the *chalet* will never be disturbed.



Bridal Veil, Havana Glen.

It is remarkable that this freak of Nature has only recently become known. None of the old New-York gazetteers make mention of it. The entrance to the glen was long familiar to the people of the neighborhood; but, until bridges and stairways were made, it was impossible to explore it, and hence nothing further was known of it beyond that which was revealed by a hasty glance into its dark mysteries. The extreme

length of the glen is about three miles, and the cliffs, at the deepest part of the gorge, have an altitude of probably three hundred feet.

Three miles south of Watkins is Havana Glen. It is very picturesque, more airy, and is quite easy of access, but is wanting in those elements of gloom, and vastness, and solemn grandeur, which are the peculiar characteristics of Watkins Glen. Nevertheless, there is a class of tourists who admire Havana Glen even more than its great rival. The cascades of which illustrations are furnished are but two of many which the tourist will meet with, in rapid succession, as he ascends it. The same system of stairways and ladders prevails as at Watkins; but these aids to progress are fewer in the former, and the paths broader. The glen, moreover, is short, as compared with Watkins, while the height, from the level of the valley to the table-land above, is much less. In the early summer months the volume of water is greater than that at Watkins; but it is said to shrink almost to a thread during the heats of July and August, while that of Watkins, being fed from bold springs far up the mountain, is much more permanent, though subject to the influence of the seasons.



Gothic Arch, Watkins Glen.