



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

Trenton Falls.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-65789](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-65789)

TRENTON FALLS.

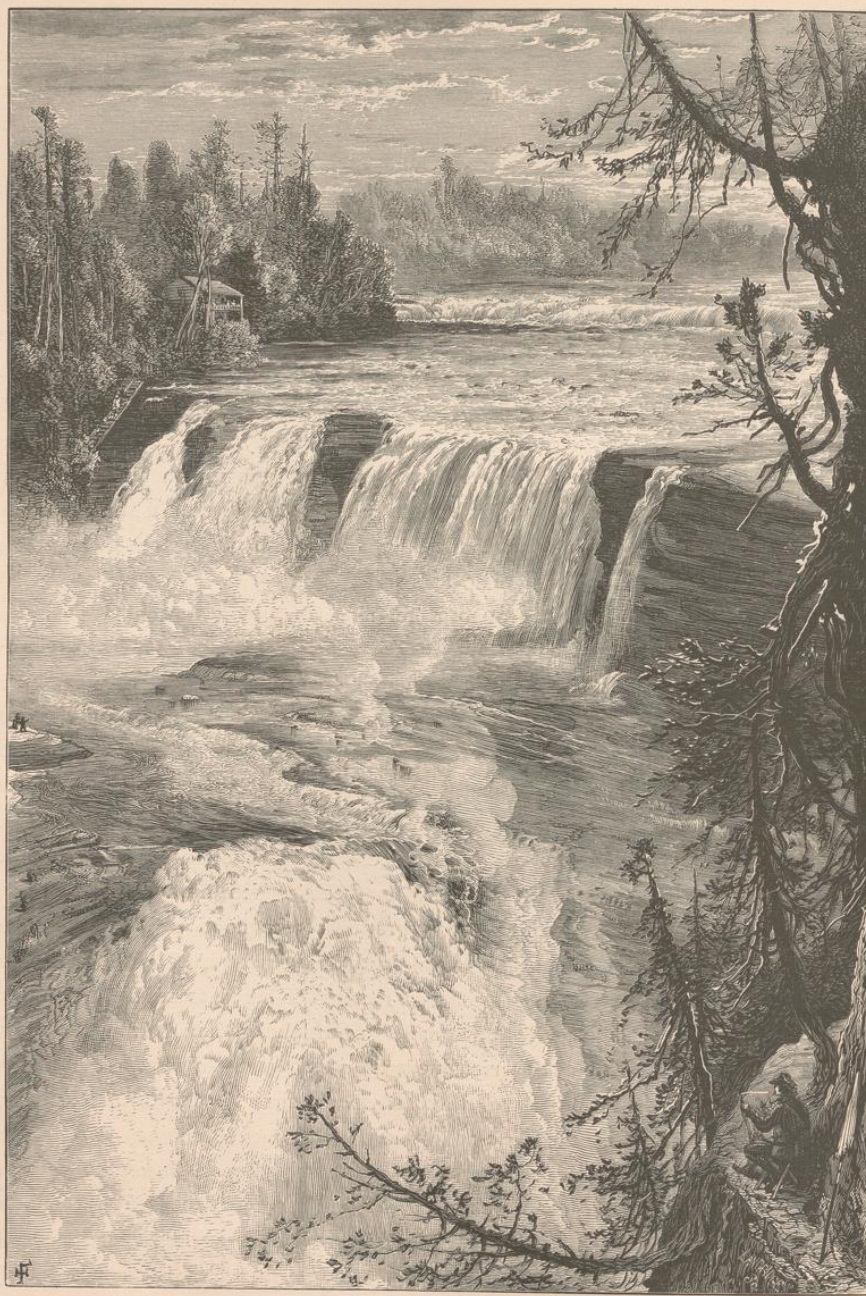
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY FENN.



Sherman Fall.

MANY persons who visit Niagara from the East make a point of seeing Trenton Falls on their return, as this most picturesque and superb chasm lies almost upon the road, being some fourteen miles from Utica. Could the secret thoughts of these be made known, it is not impossible that we might discover a decided preference for the less famous place. Our expectations are so wrought up with regard to Niagara, by the praises of poets from every land, and by the efforts of the most famous painters

to translate its glories upon canvas, that, when we first see it, the feeling uppermost is, not unfrequently, one of disappointment, if not absolute dissatisfaction. It is not so with Trenton Falls, where we expect much less, and find, indeed, far more than was expected. And, again, the surroundings of the latter are in every way more pleasant. The exchange from the infinite extortions and swindlings, and the measureless rapacity of the Niagara cormorants, to the polished ease and refined hospitality of the Trenton Falls Hotel is one that inevitably puts us into good-humor with every thing we see, and enables us to see every thing through a roseate hue of pleasure. And, more than this, it must be admitted that the glories of Niagara are confined to the wonderful chasm through which that enormous body of water flows. At Trenton the approaches to the enchanted land are made through a beautiful pastoral country, where the fields, laden with bearded grain, rise and fall in undulating slopes and rich bottom-lands, permeated by babbling brooks, that go singing on their meandering way. The immediate advent to the falls themselves is in the close vicinity of the hotel. Leaving a beautiful and extensive garden on the right hand, smiling in all the luxuriance of the lush summer vegetation, we plunge at once into the heart of a forest filled with noble trees, many of them dark cedars of huge size, and spreading, feathery foliage. The light of the July sun streams through the dim cathedral atmosphere, made by the overhanging boughs, in broad, golden arrows, which, slanting through the heavier foliage of the trees, fall lovingly upon the earth beneath, covered in many places with an actual carpet of wild-flowers. Among these, the lovely bluebell is the most prominent, and, by contrast with the darker hues around it, specially of the mosses, its azure becomes almost violet in tone. The ground rises higher and higher, and beyond, in the immediate distance, we discern grand hill-forms, covered with noble trees. But, between them and us, there is a great gulf, for suddenly our progress is arrested. We find ourselves upon the very brink of a great chasm, whose very existence has been hidden from us, being masked by the rise of the earth, and by the glorious growth of the noble trees. Across upon the opposite side is a rock-wall of limestone, hard, and nearly black, that rises, almost perpendicularly, to a height varying from two to three hundred feet. This is crowned with great hemlocks, with fine birches, whose white trunks glimmer through the forest obscurity, and with cedars, many of which, from the yielding of the roots, are bent down at a most perilous angle, and hang over the abyss, nodding to their own expected and imminent fall when the wind strikes among their outstretched branches. Down below, the eye drops instinctively, as if to see what would become of them, and catches a glimpse of the Kanata River rushing onward through its rocky bed in a tumultuous torrent. Here the first descent is made by a series of wooden ladders, and, after a little exertion, we are landed safely upon the bank of the stream, which is composed of flat masses of limestone cut by the hand of Nature into great slabs, as evenly and as regularly as a mason would have done it. We look up and see the blue, brilliant sky, across



GENERAL VIEW OF TRENTON FALLS, FROM EAST BANK.

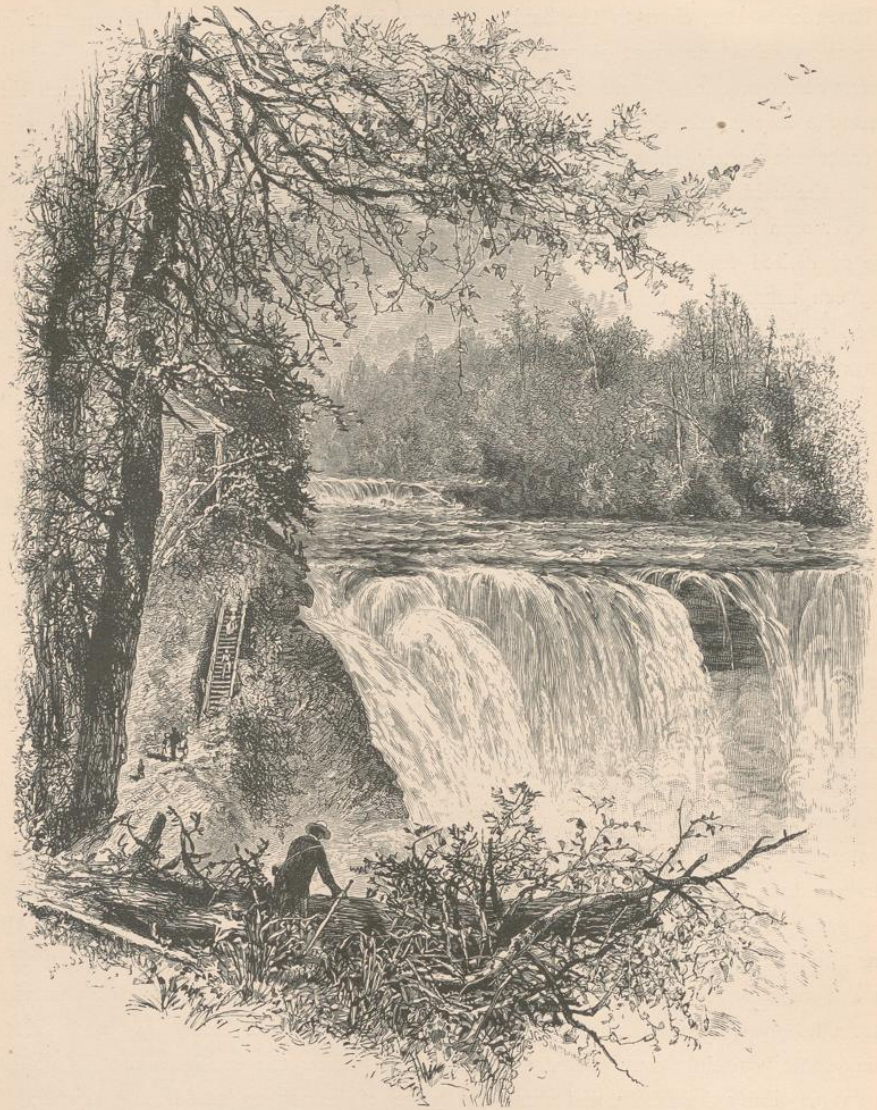
which the cedars hang in dark lines. We look ahead, and see the first one of the series of the falls, which are six in number, and known as Sherman Fall, after John Sherman, the grandson of Roger Sherman, of Revolutionary fame, who discovered this superb chasm in 1806. Here the river has formed an immense excavation from the limestone, and falls some forty feet into its bed below with a most furious roaring. Its color is a rich brown, which, touched here and there by slanting sun-rays, presents the hues of molten gold. Back of this sheet of water, the reaction of the torrent has worn away the rock in an exact circular curve, some ten feet in diameter, which exhibits a furiously-boiling caldron of white foam, streaked with every possible shade of brown. Below this is a cloud of spray, looking like the thick smoke of burning leaves, which hides the tumult of the falling water. Here, in the afternoon, is a most lovely rainbow, which forms at right angles to the chasm, and spans one side of the bank on the right-hand side. Some twenty yards from this spot a thin shelf of rock juts out from the wall, under which we stand perfectly sheltered from the showers of spray. Above this fall the Kanata boils in a succession of the most furious rapids, where the brown water is forced up into great ridges, on which the sunlight falls with most delicious effect. The walls on either side open out considerably, and their height varies, going down to one hundred and fifty feet, and mounting up two hundred feet higher at that point, which has been named the Pinnacle. The path here is very wide, and will allow of the progress of thirty and even forty people in places. But suddenly the rapid Kanata, as if jealous of her supremacy, makes a bend to the bank, and drives us all under a low, projecting cliff, where we are all compelled to bow the head. When this obstacle has been surmounted, we find ourselves immediately in presence of the great fall, two hundred yards ahead of us. This fall is duplex, but the eye from this point can take in all. Immediately in our front is a tumultuous mass of foam, covering a descent of forty feet. This distance is not overcome in one bold fall, but has evidently been broken into a succession of rocky stairways, so close to each other that the whole appears as one huge, extravagant, boiling stretch of whirling, shifting foam, quite covering the rocky ledge. Passing this, nor stopping to admire the great rapidity of the water rushing from the other half of this high fall, we see the latter in its full beauty. The water here rushes over a ledge of rocks, which stretch from bank to bank diagonally, with a full height of seventy-five feet. Above this the walls rise for one hundred and thirty feet, not quite perpendicularly, on account of a change in the stratification. For, between the great slabs of dark-gray limestone, come thin strata of loose, crumbling shale, which afford root-hold to dwarf cedars of low height, but of exquisite fulness of branch and foliage. In the centre of the ledge the black limestone shows in frowning masses, like the projecting corner of a bastion or a bartizan tower, and this divides the fall here into two. Between the opposite shore and this dividing rock the stream falls in a thin, silvery sheet for seventy-five feet, being broken into numerous cascades by projecting slabs



HIGH FALLS.

of limestone. But, close to the bank, at whose foot the visitors creep in alternate ecstasy and awe, is the great glory of the chasm. For here is the gross volume of the water poured in one tremendous, arching flood down into the bed below. On each side, where the leap is taken, are jutting masses of rock that enviously would hem it in, but, by contracting their gates, they only concentrate the strength of the leaping river, and add to the bold force of its curves. The color is an extraordinary topaz hue, like nothing ever seen in any other land, or in any other part of America. It resembles a cascade of melted topaz, or of liquid, translucent porphyry, as far as the color goes; but what can compare to the exquisite character of its changing tints? For, as the water descends, that which was brown becomes lighter and lighter, until actually white, and then, as it nears the smoky clouds of spray at its base, becomes dark again. It is like the changing sheen on velvet, or the glancing hues on the finest fur. Gazing steadily upon it, and letting its beauties infiltrate slowly into the mind, we realize how bold is the leap, how vigorous is the curve, for it is to the latter that this curious effect of colors is due. The stream is impelled forward into the air as vigorously as if shot from some wheel constructed by a Titan miller. Hence the immense clouds of spray that rise up from the boiling, seething, twisting, tormented flood below. The great chasm is full of it. It not only comes upon us in showers, and makes us hug the side of the bank, but it floats in great wreaths in the upper air, sailing through the chasm at a height far above that which rises from the second section below. Turning ungrateful backs upon the glorious topaz flow, we gaze down the gorge, lost in love and admiration of the God that made the world so fair.

The bank on the opposite side, owing to the shale additions, has lost its perpendicular majesty and frown, but has received compensation in gentler curves and in a mantle of lovely dwarf-cedars. High above us is the line of firs and cedars that stretch along the tops of the hills, forming the crests of the chasm; and beyond, below the first fall (which, however, cannot be seen, by reason of the curving of the stream), is the great Pinnacle, mitred with hemlocks and cedars, button-woods and great lindens. Below this the walls again become perpendicular, and shut out the day with their rock-curtains, leaving, however, a topmost peeping of brilliant-blue sky, and hints of gentle, golden clouds sailing placidly over the abyss. And then come the sunlight and its golden arrows to glorify the whole, and raise the pulse of ecstasy to maddening height; for beneath the touches of the sun-enchancer the clouds of smoke, as they break into mist-wreaths, are transformed into prismatic sparklets of transcendent glory, and below them a rainbow is formed, of such delicate beauty as words cannot paint. Higher, higher, sails the mist, and streams of radiant color impinge upon the deep green of the cedars and the hemlocks. The chasm becomes full of prismatic hues; it is alive with living light, glowing with strange, unexampled splendors, burning with lambent flushes; and the Kanata below, raging with all the wrath of battle with the primeval rocks, becomes



Part of High Fall.

glorified in patches here and there, and glows with all the lustre of burnished gold wherever the sunlight falls upon its waves. Even the dark pools, streaked with white lines of racing foam, become a tender green through the orange mist. And the diapason of its roaring becomes, to the ear of the man penetrated with the beautiful, a loud hymn of triumph and of praise to the great Maker of all. Nor will the wind

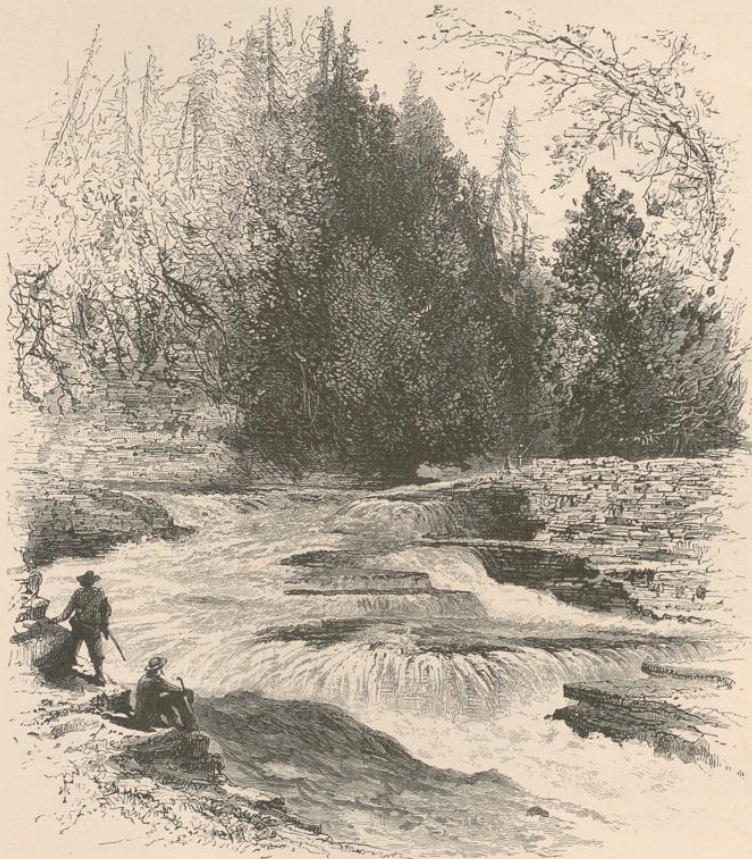
be denied its share in the choral lay; for it stirs the huge branches of the evergreen, and makes them give forth tender rustlings of thanks and joy. Earth, air, and water, join in one grand harmony; but man, the master-spirit, is silent, for in silence his spirit speaks most eloquently. But, though no word is spoken, the heart—the human heart that weeps and trembles—is touched to its remotest depths, and from its deeps comes back an answer to the song of the elements.

With eyes unsatiated, with ears that would fain drink in more, and with steps that reluctantly leave the enchanted spot, we turn once more to the topaz flow of the cataract, and we mount up a stairway, built by Mr. Moore, to a rocky plateau stretching out over the brim of the fall. Here we watch the crossing lines of the stream, that indicate the jarring violence of its currents, and laugh to see the great trees, that have been torn from their roots among the passes of the distant hills, come, swift as arrow from the Tartar bow, upon the surface of the waters, that hurl them down the remorseless rapids.

By this time, the ladies of the party are generally pretty tired, and are glad to find refreshment and rest at the Rural Retreat, a comfortable wooden *chalet*, built at the foot of the plateau, under the shadow of the bank. This is the half-way house. Here a halt is gladly made. But enthusiastic geologists take the opportunity of searching for fossils, for the rocks here abound in petrifications. It would be useless to go into a detail of all the different genera and species of the fossils, but an omission of the large *nilobite* peculiar to this spot would be unpardonable. The generic name given to it by Dr. Dekay, of New York, is the *isotelas*; and it seems to be settled that it was a crustacean, of which the only living thing that at all resembles it in modern days is the horseshoe-crab. It had dorsal slips, or lobes, terminated like Indian paddles; so it is to be presumed that the *isotelas* could swim as well as crawl along the bottom of the sea. Besides this one, there are the fossils which all over the world are found in rocks of the same order and character. There are *nilobites* of other genera; *orthoceratites*, both large and small; *ammonites* and *favosites*; and other things of dreadful nomenclature, dear to the scientific heart. Besides these, there are those queer geologic forms known as *geodes*, which country-people believe to be thunder-bolts, but which, when broken open, show beautiful crystals of quartz.

After leaving the Rural Retreat, the chasm opens out to right and left, and the banks become less formidable. Two hundred yards from the Great Fall is another, which is called the Mill-Dam, from its regularity and soberness of demeanor. The ledge over which the waters pour in one uniform flood, with a descent of twelve feet only, extends from side to side in an unbroken stretch of level rock. There are no protruding masses of limestone here to disturb the equanimity of the Kanata, so that the landscape here presents nothing rough or angular. The banks are not more than a hundred feet high at this point; but they are perpendicular, and would be gloomy, were it not for the ex-

pansion of the chasm, which admits a full view of the vegetation on the tops of the banks. These are undulating, rising into hill-crests, and falling into pleasant dales, all being deeply wooded by fine trees. The path along the smooth, even, limestone rock becomes here broader and broader, until it opens out upon the Alhambra Fall, a place which has been the despair of artists and of descriptive writers. The rocks on each side



Alhambra Fall.

are here much bolder, and are fringed from top to bottom with superb cedars, extending down to the pathway. The branches are all thrust forward in fine, pyramidal shapes, the trunks being quite denuded, and as bare as the rock-walls which the cedars conceal. This gives to the foliage an unusual fulness and development. The rock-ledge over which the water tumbles is here quite naked, and fully sixty feet high, showing its stratification line upon line, tier upon tier. The top shelves over somewhat, and the water

pours over this in a superb, amber sheet on the right hand; while on the left is a wild cataract, where the stream rushes over the various strata, arrayed like great stairs in a succession of infinitely-varied falls, combining the forms of the gentlest cascade and the most savage torrent. On the very verge of the rock, on the right hand, are tall cedars whose apices are lifted aloft, pointing up to the skies, and whose thick branches, elongat-

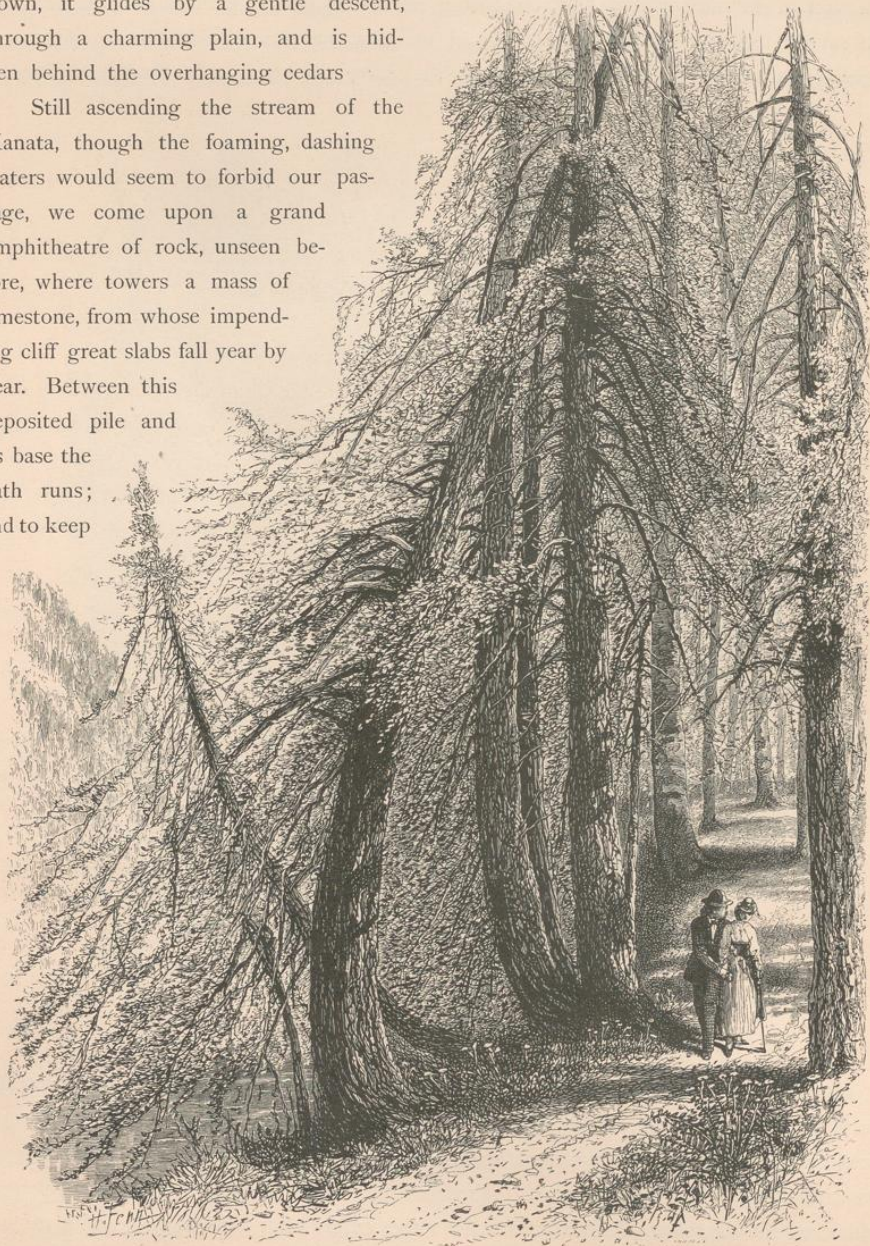


Head of the Ravine.

ing gradually toward the roots, reach far down the projecting cliff with an impenetrable shade of deepest verdure. And now the expansive form of the chasm suddenly contracts, and leaves a narrow aperture, through which we see mountainous walls retiring in various curvatures and projections. Directly opposite our eyes is a large rock, perpendicular as the Tarpeian Cliff, at whose base the waters glide with a swift, calm motion, and are dark and deep. Close to this, a tower of limestone rises in a vast column at

its side, commanding like a king the hills around. At our feet is a basin, where the water collects its forces, and reposes in preparation for the contests to come. Farther down, it glides by a gentle descent, through a charming plain, and is hidden behind the overhanging cedars

Still ascending the stream of the Kanata, though the foaming, dashing waters would seem to forbid our passage, we come upon a grand amphitheatre of rock, unseen before, where towers a mass of limestone, from whose impending cliff great slabs fall year by year. Between this deposited pile and its base the path runs; and to keep



Lovers' Walk.

out of harm's way, for fear a slab should take a fancy to drop at the moment of our visit, we hug the water's edge, being less alarmed at its threatening roar than at the silent menace of the overhanging limestone. The danger from the falling rocks is greater in the spring-time, after the frosts of winter.

As we pass beyond this column, we discover a singular natural fireplace, carved out by the river, in a sportive mood, from some soft spot in the rock. Here, also, a rill descends a few feet below the shelving ledge of the summit. A cedar extends down its elongated boughs, which a sailor could easily seize, and mount upward. Here the stratum is composed of bivalve shelves, terebratulæ, and producti, with merely a cement to unite them together; and, a few rods up the stream, there is an extraordinary interruption of the strata—a dendriform interposition, which has very much the appearance, as to size and form, of an aged hemlock turned up by the roots, with its trunk inclining at a considerable angle. From this, passing a high projection, we come to a place where the stream gives an exemplification of its manner of working through the rock. The curvatures here are as regular as if drawn by the compass. One of these has been called the Rocky Heart, from its perfect resemblance to the ace of hearts. In a flat rock, on the same side, there is a circular hole, called Jacob's Well, which is five feet deep, and usually filled with stones of various sizes, worn perfectly smooth. These are of harder substance than the lime, some of them being granite; and the river uses them as a kind of drilling-machine, working them through the soft stratification. The walls, being every season penetrated by moisture, are also cracked asunder by the frost for an inch or more; and this, combined with the drilling process, produced the tremendous chasm. The passage beyond the Rocky Heart is difficult, and even dangerous; but to the intrepid it is usual to ascend up to the Born's-Bridge Fall, where the chasm commences, and where there is the first fall. The descent here is about twenty feet, and there are many beautiful points about it. But, after so much of the grand, the lovely, and the awful, the scenery here seems rather uninteresting.

The visitor is not likely to depart from Trenton Falls without visiting a beautiful avenue of hemlocks, near the hotel, known as the "Lovers' Walk." The bridal parties from the East who go to Niagara for their wedding-four commonly make Trenton Falls one of their stopping-places; and Mr. Fenn has depicted a picture, under the shadows of the hemlocks, which the fine old trees often witness. It is a walk, shadowy, calm, sweet, and full of a tender beauty, well designed to suit the mood of lovers. We trust the illustration recalls to some of our readers a personal and agreeable experience.