

PRACTICAL NOTES
MADE DURING A
TOUR IN CANADA,
AND A PORTION OF THE UNITED STATES,
IN MDCCCXXXI.

BY ADAM FERGUSSON,
OF WOODHILL, ADVOCATE.

DEDICATED BY PERMISSION TO
THE HIGHLAND SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND.

"VIDI."

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH; AND
T. CADELL, STRAND, LONDON.
MDCCCXXXIII.

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CHAPTER IX.

Falls of Niagara—Journey to York—An *Extra*, or American Post-Chaise—Newark—The *White Fish* of the Lakes—Town of York—Government-House.

Friday, May 6.—After breakfast I took leave of my friend, and walked on for the Falls, leaving the stage, in which I had secured a place, to follow. The day was delightful, and as I ascended the steep hill from Queenston, I overtook a soldier of the 79th in charge of the baggage-waggons, leaning on his musket, and wrapt in admiration of the surrounding scenery: "*It's mair like Scotland, Sir, than any thing I've seen sin' I left it,*" was the poor fellow's remark, and truly it was far from misapplied, making due allowance for difference of scale. The country from Queenston to the Falls is well settled, and finely diversified by farms, orchards, and open forest. The soil is perhaps light, but in some places of a stronger description, and all apparently fertile desirable land. A very beautiful property, originally laid out by the ill-fated Duke of Richmond, and subsequently possessed by Sir Peregrine Maitland, adjoins the road. The house, which is in the cottage style, of wood, seems large and commodious. This estate is in a very favourable situation, and has been lately sold for L. 2000; it contains about 450 acres of good useful land. The distance from Queen-

ston to Niagara is about seven miles, and I sauntered on the whole way, the coach not overtaking me. About four miles from the Falls, the sound came upon my ear like the murmur of Old Ocean on a rugged strand. In certain states of the atmosphere and wind this is heard at a much greater distance. The noise gradually increased, and by-and-by the spray was to be seen rising in columns above the trees. A splendid and extensive establishment was soon after recognised as Forsyth's hotel, and, under feelings far more intense than ordinary curiosity, I hurried forward to a point, where Niagara, in all its glory, came in view. From the increasing facility of migrating now-a-days, this wonder of the world has lost somewhat of that mysterious halo with which it was wont to be enveloped; but still it must ever be Niagara. The most eloquent descriptions will prove inadequate to convey a just conception of the scene. Nor can the pencil, I imagine, ever do it justice. A cataract may be said (as regards the painter's art) to differ from all other objects in nature. The human face and figure, the rich and varied landscape, the animal and vegetable world, may with sufficient propriety be delineated *at rest*, but quiescence forms no feature here. The ceaseless roar, the spray mounting like clouds of smoke from a giant limekiln, with the enormous sheet of water which rolls over the precipice, can be felt and understood only by repeated visits to the scene. My attention was for a time distracted by the rapids which are extremely interesting, and which with any

other neighbour than the Falls would excite the highest admiration and wonder. After some time spent in contemplation, I proceeded to my friends, where a kind and comfortable home awaited me. Mr C. possesses a residence, which is certainly one of the most romantic domiciles in the world. The house stands on a small lawn upon a point overhanging the rapids, and about half a mile above the Horse-Shoe Fall. The garden is behind, washed by a fine branch of the river, which encircles a wild and thickly wooded island, and on every side new and interesting prospects appear. The river is a mile across, and of great depth, and, for the same distance above the Falls, is one continued sheet of foam. We sauntered down in the evening to the river side, and the rapids lost nothing by a closer inspection. My bedroom looked directly upon them; I could watch the smoke of the Fall, even as I lay on my pillow; and with the wild roar of the cataract sounding in my ears, I closed my first day at Niagara.

The following morning proved fine, and we devoted the forenoon to the Falls. Lake Erie had just broken up, and the icebergs came crashing down the rapids, in a way extremely interesting. My friends being quite at home in all the mazes of the river side, conducted me by a wild and rugged route to the edge of the Table-rock, when, upon emerging from a tangled brake, I beheld the Horse-shoe or great British Fall, pouring down its volume of ice and water, at the distance of a few feet from where we stood. The rock felt to me as though it vibrated,

and a large mass did in fact lately give way, soon after a party had retired from the precarious stance. It is limestone, full of ugly fissures and rents. A narrow wooden stair conducts adventurous travellers to the bottom of the Fall, where a sort of entrance is generally effected to a short distance under the sheet, and for which performance a certificate, in due form, is served out. The stair was at this time under repair, and the accumulation of ice below perfectly reconciled me to waive pretensions to such slippery honours. At some distance below the Fall, and opposite to the American staircase, there is a ferry, to which a safe and most romantic carriage-road has been lately formed, out of the solid rock, at no small labour and expense. When a similar accommodation shall have been provided upon the American side, it is expected to prove a lucrative concern, but for the present, foot-passengers only can be landed in the States. The little skiff had just put off, with a party from the Canada shore, and got involved in streams of ice, in a way somewhat hazardous, and which rendered it impossible for the boatman to return. The scene from the Ferry is indeed magnificent, the Horse-shoe, the American Fall, and Goat Island being all in view, with the great cauldron eddying in fearful and endless turmoil. In the evening I walked up the river side towards the village of Chippeway, to visit a natural curiosity upon Mr C.'s estate. A spring surcharged with sulphuretted hydrogen gas rises within a few paces of the river. A small building is erected over

it, and when a candle is applied to the tube in a barrel, which encloses the spring, a brilliant and powerful light is evolved. Close adjoining, are the remains of extensive mills burnt by the Americans during last war. The water privilege is great, and machinery to any extent might be kept in play.

Canada, for many a year to come, should have little to do with manufacturing establishments. Her resources, duly fostered, should be employed in the production of food for the artisans of Britain, and thus enable them to maintain their ground in the foreign market. Neither should our agriculturists at home be too much startled at such a prospect, as, happen what may, *our landed interest can never prosper while our manufacturing interests decay.* Should some thousand spinning-jennies, however, at a future day, here commence operations, behold a gasometer both economical and effective provided. Springs of this description are by no means rare in the Canadas and States. Some have been discovered near Canandaigua of great power, and the proprietor of the farm, annoyed by hosts of visitors, in the prudent spirit of turning all to account, has opened a tavern for the mutual benefit of the public and himself.

The suction occasioned by the rapidity and depth of the stream, extends far above the Falls, and renders it necessary to use the utmost caution in navigating canoes or boats. A servant of Mr C. was lost some time ago, in a nocturnal expedition across the river, and Mr C. detailed to me an adventure of

his own, which, though somewhat ludicrous, was certainly attended with hazard. He had gone out a-fishing with a young man in his employment, lately arrived in the country, and finding the boat rather more in the vortex than was pleasant, they pulled for shore, in doing which, his companion, by some awkwardness, let slip his oar, and in making an effort under some mental agitation to recover it, the pale and bloated visage of a drowned man presented itself, close to the boat, dissipating what little self-possession the poor lad retained. Mr C., however, by an effort, soon got the boat out of the fatal current, and put all to rights.

Upon Monday, May 9, I left my kind friends for the purpose of visiting York, and the country to the west of it. The morning was cold, and the wind a sharp north-wester, accompanied by showers of snow. As it was not a stage-day for Newark, I ordered an *extra*, which is the same thing with taking a post-chaise. It happened that old Forsyth, the landlord of the Pavilion, had occasion to go down also, and when I entered my *extra*, I found him very snugly ensconced in a corner. To a man from the *old country*, this was something new; but the old gentleman, while he offered an apology, did not seem to be much discomposed, and I rather think that the matter was not considered of much moment. Within a week I was myself led, unintentionally, to do the same thing, through the prevailing practice of using the same coaches, for public and private travelling, and upon that occasion the party received both my-

self and my explanation with the utmost good humour, frankness, and ease. My companion is proprietor of the large hotel at the Falls, mentioned by every tourist, and is a personage sufficiently shrewd and well informed. He told me that his father had been one of the original settlers in the district, and had migrated from the Genesee country. The change within a few years seems to him nearly marvellous. Often, he said, has he been racoon-hunting where is now to be seen the busy town of Rochester, with farms and villages innumerable, when he was well aware that no human being could be within a hundred miles of him, save perhaps some wandering Indian. Mr F. may be said to have satisfactorily fulfilled one duty of a colonist, by no means unimportant. When I inquired of him, whether his family was numerous, "Why," says he, "Sir, I don't know what you call numerous; *I've raised* nineteen, ten by my first wife, and nine by my second." We passed many excellent farms and beautiful orchards in this stage of sixteen miles. The day continued stormy, and ultimately the gale became so violent, that the steamer for York could not venture out. A lull was looked for towards evening, and I had nothing for it but to saunter about the neighbourhood until the dinner hour at Kreysler's hotel. In connexion with the American Fort, Newark became some years ago the scene of a tragical mystery, which has kindled an extraordinary flame in every State of the Union. We are accustomed in Britain to consider Free Masonry as a mere excuse for convivial

relaxation; but it has of late assumed a very different aspect here, and although no doubt the approaching period of electing the chief magistrate tends to give it peculiar vigour, still it must be reckoned the pivot on which all questions of a public nature at present turn. The public journals sufficiently evince the excitement of the public mind, and that baneful consequences have followed no man can deny, who is made acquainted with the fate of Captain Morgan. This unhappy man having become obnoxious to the brethren, because he either had or was believed to have promulgated the secrets of the craft, a plan was concocted to punish his treason, and make him a signal example. Whether the scheme originally contemplated his death, or only his removal from America, does not exactly appear, but it is beyond a doubt, that he was inveigled under various pretexts to Niagara, that he has never been seen nor heard of since September 1826, and that, in fact, there is every reason to believe that, when Ontario shall give up its dead, poor Morgan will rise from its depths, in judgment against his murderers. It is a melancholy tale, and fraught with matters of vital importance to the Americans. At this hour it stands on record, that after sundry attempts to bring the culprits to justice, the arm of the law has been palsied, and no jury has been found to convict, upon evidence, too, which might have been deemed reasonably conclusive, while one most eminent lawyer in the State of New York, has denounced the jurors for "utterly disregarding their

duty and their oath," adding that the "very foundation of justice is polluted." Let the nation look to it ere the hour goes by, when a remedy may be safely applied to so frightful an evil.

Among other good things upon our dinner-table, we were regaled with the celebrated *white fish*, a delicacy which, as Charlevoix has long since remarked, "nothing of the fish kind can excel." It is peculiar, I believe, to the North American lakes and rivers, and, so far as I know, has not been described by ichthyological writers. Some naturalists consider it to be a nondescript species of *Salmo*. The flesh is white, and resembles the most gelatinous part of the turbot, but considerably richer. The fish is taken with hook and line, frequently at a hole in the ice, being then in highest perfection, and runs from three to eight pounds weight. There is a coating of fat along the back, little inferior in flavour to the richest butter.

About nine o'clock I was summoned on board, and soon after took possession of a sofa for the night. We took our departure about twelve, and at sunrise next morning were just approaching the northern shore. York is the seat of government in the upper province, and a large peninsula forms a spacious and safe harbour, the barracks, public buildings, &c. making a very respectable appearance as you enter the bay. After breakfast at the hotel, where an Irish gentleman and I got a comfortable sitting-room, with our bed-rooms adjoining, I proceeded to deliver letters, and waited upon Sir John Colborne, governor

of the upper province. I found the government-house, *selon le regle*, at the west end of the capital. It is a commodious irregular mansion, of wood, with garden, shrubberies, &c. The public apartments are sufficiently spacious and handsome, and nothing could exceed the affable and easy demeanour of Sir John. It is not for a bird of passage like myself to offer an opinion upon matters of state, but I am greatly deceived if Sir John is not fraught with the utmost zeal to promote the prosperity of the province, and possessed of sound and clear views, as regards its resources and wants. He favoured me with a pretty long interview, and then gave me a note to Mr Robinson, who is at the head of the government land-office, and from whom I readily received every attention and information in his power.

My next visit was to the office of the Canada Company, where I found the commissioners communicative and truly obliging. Dr D—, who acts as warden of the forests, has spent much time in their depths, and gives the *seria mixta joci* in the happiest style, when recounting the progress and adventures of settlers in the back woods. The Canada Company, I should think, is calculated to forward the general interests of the colony, although there are certainly those who think otherwise; and if it shall continue to be prudently administered, will in time yield handsome returns. The exertions made to facilitate the transport and settlement of emigrants, and the liberal terms held out, cannot fail to secure the confidence and good-will of intending settlers.

I dined in the evening at the government-house. The party was rather numerous, and quite as agreeable as such affairs commonly prove. Sir John introduced me to Dr B——, as a gentleman particularly able to give me information upon the state of the province; a character which he fully redeemed, both then, and during a long visit with which he honoured me on the following morning. I may mention by the way, regarding this gentleman (and I certainly do so from no disrespect to him, but as illustrating good sense and liberal feelings in the governor), that, while he was marked by no exclusion from the hospitality and private esteem of Sir John, he was yet remarked as frequently opposed to government measures; and I consider it a trait of temper and tact upon the one hand, and of discretion and independence upon the other, well deserving of regard. Were such instances more frequent, fewer changes in governments would be required, and the public service would probably be essentially promoted. The government of Upper Canada is administered by a lieutenant-governor, a legislative council, of not less than seven members, appointed by mandamus from the king, and holding their situation for life; of an executive council, of not fewer than six; and of a House of Assembly, being twenty-five members returned by the respective counties. The demon of discord is no stranger here, and *his Majesty's* opposition claim notice in the Assembly of York, no less than in the hall of St Stephen's. At present I understood government measures to be gaining po-

pularity; but as politics came very little within the sphere of my inquiries, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of my information. That discontent and faction exist in the province, is to say no more than that the government of Canada resembles all other human institutions, but that any tangible grievance is perversely maintained, must, I should think, be more than doubtful. The inhabitants possess the means of enjoying as much solid happiness as any nation on earth. Mr H——, the solicitor-general, assured me, that however turbulent or discontented individuals may have been prior to their arrival in the province, comfort and plenty soon work wonders on those who are of industrious habits, and loyalty and good-humour speedily follow.