



BEHIND MOUNT ROYAL—A MIDWINTER SCENE.

THE FAIRY'S CAVERN.



IN 1874 Peter M—— and I were schoolboys together in Kamouraska. About two miles from that place there is a mountain called the Elephant Mountain; a name which was probably given on account of its being shaped like an elephant.

Near the summit of the mountain there is a cavern, to the mouth of which only the strongest men of the surrounding villages dared to venture, because of a superstition that had prevailed for nearly a century that it had been for years the hiding place for a fairy.

A dozen or more of the schoolboys, of whom Peter M—— and I were two, had often been within view of the entrance of the cavern, which resembled a large church door surrounded by shrubbery of a light hue. The entrance was a large hole of inky darkness, and truly was an uninviting place to behold.

How well do I remember when we schoolboys would peer through the foliage of the trees at the frightful and dismal-looking aperture, after hearing the old folks tell of it so often, and the timorous listening with blanched faces, that the interior of the cavern was laid with skulls and human skeletons; and, after a moment or two's peering, we would, with hat in hand, dart like a bird down the mountain towards home.

At times some of the boys when bounding over the rocks would trip and fall and sustain scratches and bruises that they would carry for several weeks. At divers times several of them would suffer the penalty of flogging for being tardy at school when we had been to the mountain; and those who had the most scratches almost invariably got the severest "licking;" yet, for some reason, Peter and I never received a punishment (which probably we deserved as much as others), nor a wound in descending the Elephant Mountain; although we ran as fast as the others, for the fun of the

thing more than any other reason; because, to tell the truth, we were not afraid. We were too young then not to question that "fortune favours the brave," and we actually thought that we could accomplish feats akin to those of a great general in war, and really what had been uppermost in our young minds for several days was that we would explore that cavern!

Of course we would say nothing to the other schoolboys, and especially not to our dear parents, of what our intentions were. Peter had often heard his father say, and so had I mine, that they (with other stalwart men) had made an ineffectual attempt at exploration there, but were frightened back by something; still we would have believed them just the same if we had not remembered it, because our fathers were never known to lie.

As before said, we had been thinking of it for several days, and now we set our minds at work in earnest and began to make active preparations for that which men of mature years had never ventured to do.

"But what if our adventure should all flash in the pan?" said Peter.

"Well, if it does, no one will know it but you and me; but we won't drop the matter now, for it would look too boyish!" I answered, with a good deal of bravery.

That remark made Peter laugh outright, and seemed to inspire him with new confidence; for, a year before he commenced talking about exploring the cavern on the Elephant Mountain, and we, of course had referred to it between ourselves often during the year; and to make it known to the reader, I will say that Peter and I were the foremost in getting the other boys started to ascend the mountain, all the time marking the lay of the land when we were near enough to see the aperture.

The rest of the boys knew nothing of our intentions, and, as a matter of fact, for a brief period just subsequent Peter

and I were sorry that we knew anything about our intentions in the direction of exploring that cave, or cavern, as it was always spoken of. A day or two before we were to start out on our adventurous exploit we talked the matter over confidentially and decided that we must be very careful not to act suspiciously in the least in the presence of our parents, well knowing that they would "shut hard pan" on us at once if they surmised what we were intending to do; and, be it known, we were too good not to obey our parents!

We had arranged to go on the following Thursday (when there was no school), and the day we formed the final resolution to that effect was Monday of the same week; that gave us two days to complete our final arrangements. This was the most particular job for us to accomplish, and not be found out.

It was in September, and we only had the time before nine o'clock in the morning and after school at night. But we had time enough.

My companion had an old revolver that he had traded for some weeks before; and, what little he had used it, had found it "sure death" every time to whatever he aimed at, whether it was a squirrel or a maple leaf. His father never knew that he had it, for Peter was sagacious enough to know that his parents would always be in anxiety, thinking that he would not know it was loaded, and would be afraid that some of the other children might be seriously wounded or killed outright; (which is a very wise precaution for parents to possess, as has been since learned). But Peter never hurt any of the other children with that or any other revolver. His ferocity and war-like proclivities did not run in that direction. At his age, at the time of my story, he thought more of battling with savages or robbers than with urchins of his age. Alas! for the vanity of uncouth youth.

The next things we arranged for were two pitch-pine torches. We must have light to go into the black, dark cavern with; and we were confident these products of the forest, which were quite plentiful on the hillsides, were just the things, as we had often heard of men of larger growth using them for illuminating purposes with prolific results.

Why not we? we thought. Big men as we were, and the hazardous adventure we were about to make!