

# HOLIDAY READING.

## A FAIRY STORY.

"I say," suggested one man of the group, as we parted for the night at the King Edward, "tell your readers next week about our day at Niagara, and call it 'A Fairy Story,' if you like." "No," said another, "keep it for your Christmas Number, thousands more will read it then. If they do not believe it, that is no more than would have happened to us if we had not not gone over there."

It is not an easy task to put down, in a page, the surprises and adventures of November 12th at Niagara Falls to a party of eight, being seven guests and the guide, philosopher and friend, whom we called His Nibs. But the attempt is worth the making, if it result in no more than the fringe of the affair. For some hours, then, we seven were deprived of all volition, and did merely what we were told—drove here, walked there, climbed yonder, and machinery seemed to do the rest with us. After tramping over a portion of the earth's crust, known as the County of Welland, Canada, acres and acres of a dirty gray rock of most fantastic contour, which had been the bed of Niagara river, and after winding in and out among steam engines and drills, cranes and stone cars, as an auto winds among the traffic of a crowded street, we reached the temporary dam. What temporary dam? the reader asks. The temporary dam of the Electrical Development Company of Ontario, on the Canadian shore of Niagara River.

A terrific wind was blowing, against which it was difficult sometimes for a person to stand up. How much harder was it to walk—gingerly, as unaccustomed and half-frightened people do—along the giddy footing of that impudent wall of timber and stone and puddled clay, with the angry Cascade Rapids leaping at us and calling to us: "How dare you! We will sweep you over the Falls, you desecrators, you and your petty dam!" But along we went, tip-toeing on planks, balking at stringers, holding on to one another when a stronger blast of wind than usual came. We reached and mounted the permanent gathering dam. This massive and solid structure is a straight stretch of concrete faced with granite of say twelve and twenty feet depth and width, its exterior shape, where exposed to the rapids, exhibiting a huge but graceful cyma recta curve.

"Look," said the Laurentian member of the party, "is not this Stanstead granite?" And Mr. Value, the resident engineer, told us that it was. Great hardness is needed to resist the friction of masses of swift-running water, and this material was chosen as the most available. "And what kind of stone will be used for your power-house?" someone asked His Nibs, who was everywhere, seeing to everything, and seeming to bear a charmed life amid these scenes of mechanical distraction and bodily risk. His reply was that this had not been decided upon.

We must see the wheel-pit, so we were told: a great gash cut downward in the rock, close to shore, four hundred feet long and twenty odd feet wide, in the depths of which gigantic dynamos are to revolve and over which the power-house is to be built. How Lilliputian the men looked, laboring with pick and drill in the dripping cave 150 feet below; how reckless those who worked on platforms suspended over the verge or swinging in cages slung from pulleys and wire ropes, dashing down and up with the heedless celerity of a Chicago elevator; how mysterious looked, in the dimness beyond, those huge circular galleries cut in the rock, galleries that were to reach underground and under water two thousand feet to the Horseshoe Fall! But we could not linger here, being called upon to go and dress in rubber garb for the trip underground. This trip was outlined to us in a large and simple way—they are very unaffected folk, these engineers and contractors—thus: "About 150 feet down in a cage, then walk 440 feet east and then 700 feet south, along our tunnel." We looked at one another. If any of us had qualms he did not dare to say so: our host would be offended, the engineer amused, the contractor contemptuous.

### A "Kicker."

Dare, did I say? Yes, one of us dared to be a kicker. This was T. P., who had already had enough of latter-day wonders.

He explained that his nerves were prematurely upset, and his head, besides, was swelling and shrinking like an accordion (the result of too much bankers' dinner the night before), that science was getting entirely too nervy in playing such fantastic tricks before high Heaven, that he was a man of the closet, not the Cyclopean cave, in short, that he would see the party participated before he went under the river with them. Therefore we left him in the contractor's hut. It was told us afterward that while we were gone he conversated with the men around—it was the noon hour—upon transcendental philosophy, the simple mechanical powers, the situation of Hades, and the relative merits of Pace's baccy and Quebec-built cigars. Impossible for us to refuse, when we came back from the underworld, a tribute of admiration for the man's pluck, not in refusing to go, but in admitting that he was afraid to go with us. But thar he sot, as the Tennessee girl did, and the classical member of the party phrased it, *et in aeternumque sedebit*. Like the Babu, in Kim, he was frankly and volubly a "verry fearful man." Bravo! Tay Pay the second. Remember for your comfort what Emerson says about robust resolution such as yours: "What forests of laurel we bring, and the tears of mankind, to him who stands firm against the opinion of his contemporaries."

To one who has been down a mine, the trip we now undertook did not seem startling. It was only so many feet in a quivering iron cage downward through dripping rock, and then so many hundred feet per shank's mare along a dry chamber underground. This was all. But suppose a green hand (and some of us were deeply green) every jolt of the cage—every blast shot off in the distance—every warning call of the men who looked like gnomes in the dusk of the excavation—every gust of wind and spray that dashed into the saucy mouth of that tail-race tunnel, sent tremors through him. We were not an imaginative lot, far from it, but if we had been, there would have seemed additional thrills along the nerves and chills down the spine when we thought of the reproachful glances of the genius of the place, aghast at the profanation of her haunts! this intrusion upon her privacy! The girl in green gossamer, the fairy girl, we mean (who is pictured in legend and on the menus of the Prospect House Hotel), variously known as the Maid of the Mist and the Spirit of Niagara, if ever she can get hold of His Nibs and his engineers in their dreams, she will give them a bad quarter of an hour for their temerity.

Stumbling along in the occasional dimness of this particular chamber of a North American Inferno, encumbered with rubber boots as stiff as a frozen sail upon a yard, thinking of Gray's

Windows that exclude the light,  
And passages that lead to nothing,

one comes suddenly and with an enormous sense of incongruity upon a mule's stable in the rock. This subterranean brute, munching away at his or her hay, turns a calm eye upon the amazed intruder from the upper air, as much as to say: "Hello! Clark Russell, junior, where are you from? Did the Russian naval cannon blow you over here from the Dogger Bank of the North Sea with your heavy-weather fishing togs on? Have you got a certificate of sanity from the Dominion authorities, and a permit from the Ontario Government? If not, you had better go home." The Crow's Nest delegate, who is used to cataclysms of nature, since he lives half his life near Frank, Alberta, comments as he goes along the narrow way, upon shale, conglomerate, seepage, ventilation, winding up with a reminiscence of his church-going or college-going days about somebody or something "casting a dim, religious light." Once in the main tunnel, a thirty-foot circle, the roof timbered as if it had to support the nether world, the sides, if a circle can have sides, as rocky-rugged now as they will be smooth when finished in cement and brick, we walk up stream, feeling the dull concussion of the rapids overhead and hearing, as in a conch-shell, the rush of the Falls, that so entranced Dickens and so aroused the eloquence of poets without number. "Ware car!" and our stalwart Nor' West member takes a world-compelling side step to his left and in silence drags a dazed scribe with him out of the way of a tram-car full of maimed and desecrated paleozoic rocks.