

SECOND THOUGHTS ON NIAGARA

Being Two Views of Canada as Seen on a Cheap Excursion

By ELIZABETH, ET AL

NECESSITY drew me, not long ago, across the American border to Buffalo and Cleveland and thence by a series of different railway lines, each worse than the last, far into the rural heart of Iowa. The passengers on the Toronto-Buffalo train had scarcely looked out the window, as we crossed the Niagara Gorge below the Falls and I, for one, gave them no thought until, in the dirty Iowa local train a hog-raising Iowan sat in the seat with me and in a gentle, friendly way, insisted on conversation.

On this point we

though these things must continue to attract people such as my friends in Iowa and even the great blase folk, the English tourists of pre and post-war days who condescended and will in the future condescend again to colonial scenery and colonial investments, even the plunging of an impetuous river over a suicidal brink becomes monotonous. The Niagara River is, for one thing, so blatantly egotistical. It makes as much bother and fuss about traversing the short distance from Lake Erie—quite a sober and

big gasoline 'bus. Thus I hoped to pave the way, as it were, for a decent little motor outing—we sold our 'bus: couldn't afford to keep it oiled—and revisit Niagara without having to join an excursion crowd. But Elizabeth wouldn't hear of it. "Mark my words, Dick," she said, "it's not Niagara we'll care about. It's the folks that go to Niagara, and 'specially the young folks that will remind us of what happy dubs we used to be before you owned a dress-suit and smoked heavy cigars and read French plays to me at nights—"

Elizabeth did not see what I saw that day. That

is one of the great things about Elizabeth. I saw hot docks and a sweltering crowd and a ticket seller with his coat off scowling and answering the unnecessary questions that women excursionists always ask of everybody. I saw two self-conscious officers standing at a gang-plank collecting tickets, and I heard children innumerable clamouring in the melee as though they enjoyed the very excitement of getting aboard.

ELIZABETH, on the other hand, pointed out the curious mixture of types in the crowd—she had taken her share of jostling as good naturedly as anyone else and we were seated on the top-most deck of the vessel facing over the stern. "If you want to see how this country is changing, Richard," she said to me, "look at the people on this boat. Was it twenty years ago that we used to cross here—with a chaperone? Do you remember the kind of people we travelled with then?"

"No," I said, for I was still hot from the scuffle on the gang-plank, "I don't think I do. Were they different?"

"They were nearly all Anglo-Saxons, or Scotch or Irish-Canadians, with Buffalo-Americans mixed in."

"What are they now?"

"Look for yourself," she said.

"Foreigners," I exclaimed, after a cursory glance at our fellow-travellers. "Foreigners! Jews!"

"No," said Elizabeth, "you're wrong. They aren't foreigners—though some of them are Jews right enough—they're Canadians!"

"But look at that one! That's a Greek, I warrant. That one's an Italian. There are three Swedes and the rest—Jews."

"And yet Canadians," persisted Elizabeth, quietly.

"With votes?"

"I don't doubt it."

"And children growing up?"

"They all have children with them."

"It's too much for me, Elizabeth," I said. "This country is going to the dogs. . . . Why aren't those men at the front?"

"They might ask the same of you," retorted my companion of even disposition. "They can't tell by your face that you've been refused. Other people may have honest reasons, too, Richard."

I SAID, "humph," and opened my magazine. "It's too windy to talk much," I added. "Got your book, 'Lizabeth'?"

"No," she said, "but never mind. I see some people I know. I'm going to talk to them. You stay here and keep my chair."

I hitched my feet into the rungs of Elizabeth's chair and opened the magazine. Time passed.

"Ya," said a boy's voice close by my windward ear, "I like it. D'you?"

"Very much," said a voice I knew. "Is this the first time you've seen a lake like this?"

"Not the first time I've seen a lake, lady," the boy

Lighthouses are as fascinating at fifty as at ten—and as laconic and mysterious.



Nowadays you can see the whirlpool not just from the banks of the river, but you can ride in a new cable railway right out over the very centre of the maelstrom and look down into it, writhing below. Spanish engineers had just completed the cable-way and the first passengers were crossing as Elizabeth and I arrived.

respectable lake—to Lake Ontario, which is even more respectable, as though the whole world were interested in its destiny. Elizabeth and I know a river—you could never find it on an ordinary map of Ontario—which is so unlike the Niagara that the latter can never, in our estimation, recover from the contrast. Our river rises out of nothing—a self-made river—somewhere up in the back end of a certain county. It gathers volume as it approaches Lake Ontario, and occasionally it breaks out into a modest song at a rapid or two here and there. Niagara bellows, threatens and dares you to do some fool stunt. Our river in another part of Ontario, has quiet manners and does its work behind a number of power dams, without protest, yet with great efficiency.

It is the cataract of human beings that makes Niagara interesting. First of all, when I had told Elizabeth about the Iowans and when she suggested a trip to revisit Niagara, I had agreed, but with a secret reservation in mind. I would go over to Tom Johnson's place and suggest to him the joy of motor-

It was so sincere, so naive, so evidently the great anticipation of the lives of these people that I hastily summoned my recollections of the really tiresome cataract—tiresome when it is only a dollar-fifty away from one's own home town—wondering what I had overlooked that made it seem so great to these Iowan farmers. I told them what I could, but their thirst was unwhetted. I fished out of my grip a dog-eared post-card someone had sent me from the Falls, and the pair absorbed its lithographed detail eagerly. I might not have understood them had we not mentioned the Mississippi River, which to me was a sight yet to be enjoyed—to them, like Niagara to me, commonplace.

Last week Elizabeth and I, who are in some danger of growing old and set in our ways, re-visited Niagara. I am not going to write of the Falls, or the Gorge, or the water which is still going to "awfu' waste," as the time-worn Scotch-ish tourist observed. For

This time, however, he said nothing, but after a long time rose, excusing himself and teetered down the aisle of the swaying car. Presently he returned, pushing ahead of him a little pale old woman, his wife. "Ma," he said, holding her at the end of my seat, "this gentleman's been t' N'ag'ra!"

"Eh?" piped the little lady. "T' N'ag'ra!"

"Goodness!" she breathed. "T' the Falls—"

"Y'see," explained her husband, after she was seated and while he perched like a boy on the plush arm of the seat.

"Y'see, Ma and I've been planning t' go t' the Falls someday. We've been savin' a long time and we reckon we c'n go 'bout two years this fall—all bein' well. Na-ow, ef y' could tell Ma 'n me somethin' about what we better do when we get there—"

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