

The Rapids of the St. Lawrence! who, within the domain of intelligence, has not heard of these stupendous phenomena? They needed not the muse of Moore to spread their fame: they are too gigantic in their sweep—too impetuous in their flow—too mighty in their power—too terrible in their aspect, ever to be forgotten by those who have once beheld them. As I was hurrying to the upper country, I had but a few hours to spend in and about Montreal, of which I took advantage to cross to La Prairie and see the Rapids of La Chine. The main rapid is almost entirely screened from the city by some islands, which here break into different channels the great body of the stream. La Prairie, which is about nine miles from Montreal, lies at the foot of the great Rapid, which rolls in tumultuous grandeur between one of the islands and the south bank of the river. The steam ferry-boat, in crossing, had to stem a portion of the rapid, but only where the delirious waters had subsided into comparative quiescence. Below, all was smooth and quiet: above, all was noise, tumult, and commotion. The river appeared to be rolling down the broken fragments of some gigantic staircase; and as it leapt maddened from rock to rock, the deep-blue current dashed itself into masses of foam, which for miles up covered its surface, like so many snow-wreaths borne down upon the tide. It is impossible that, in the presence of such a scene, even the most stolid and unimaginative can escape being struck with awe. The first feeling which it inspires is that of terror, the troubled flood seeming to bound onward to overwhelm you. Once assured by a sense of security, the mind becomes divided between amazement and self-humiliation; for you cannot avoid contrasting your own weakness with the stupendous development which nature here vouchsafes of her power. This is not the greatest rapid of the series, which, with some interruptions, agitate the river for the next hundred and fifty miles up, but it is in some respects the most terrible to encounter.

Having determined to ascend the river in a 'Durham boat'—a trafficking vessel which visits the upper country for flour—I set out, in the first place, in the stage for La Chine, in order to avoid the tedium of the first canal ascent. Here I found about twenty Durham boats ready to proceed on their upward voyage, but having no favouring wind, they were to be towed up the lake by the mail steamer. There being nothing novel in this part of the journey, I preferred the steamer to the Durham boat; and it was about noon when the 'Swan' started for the head of the lake, with a little fleet of cygnets behind her. Lake St. Louis, now entered upon, is the result of the confluence of the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa. It is a small body of water for these regions, but it is surpassingly beautiful, being studded with islets, covered with shrubbery dipping into the lake, so that they seem to be afloat upon the water. At its head the Ottawa enters it by a broad and placid estuary, stretching off to the right, and flanked by lofty banks, the St. Lawrence bounding into it on the left through a screen of islands by a series of raging rapids called the Cascades. On getting ashore, it was with no little interest that, standing upon a small rocky point, I witnessed the first intermingling of the confluent waters of these two mighty torrents.

The Cascades being impracticable to upward-bound craft, they are turned, as on the La Chine Rapids, by a short canal, which leads into still water above them. Here, for the first time, I betook myself to the Durham

boat, which was 'polled' close along-shore by the crew, until we reached the lower end of another series of rapids called the Cedars. These being practicable, first brought me in contact with the peculiarities of the navigation. A strong rope was attached to the boat, by means of which we were pulled by eight lusty oxen, which slowly scrambled along about midway up the high sloping bank to our right. They were attended by two Canadians—one to drive them, the other walking immediately behind with a large, sharp, and trusty knife in his hand, from which the sunlight every now and then flashed in our faces. I was about to inquire the object of this formidable armament, when an alarming incident furnished me with ocular demonstration of it. We were close upon shore, but the current which we had to stem ran prodigiously swift, although but little broken on the surface. Twenty yards farther out, however, it was roaring, and covered with breakers. The great point in steering was to keep the boat's head direct to the current. We had nearly mastered the rapid, when, by some unfortunate accident, her head was allowed to tend slightly outwards. The current thus caught her broadside, and brought the oxen in their snail-like course to a stand. The confusion on board was only equalled by the hullabaloo raised by the two Canadians ashore, who, in an incredibly short time, exhausted all the oaths in their fertile vocabulary. In vain did the driver urge the oxen to their utmost efforts; the resistance was too great, and they could not move. In the meantime, by the action of the current, the boat was being driven farther out into the stream, until at length the oxen failed in their powers of resistance, and began to give way. They had been dragged backwards and downwards about three feet, when the man with the knife sprang to the rope, and in a twinkling severed it in two. The cattle were thus saved; but the boat, abandoned to the mercy of the current, shot, stern foremost, like an arrow down the stream, tossed about amid foaming breakers, which now and then dashed upon her deck. So suddenly did all this happen, that for a moment or two I felt as if awaking from a trance. Trees, banks, bushes, houses, every fixed object ashore, seemed reeling around me, as if in the delirium of some fantastic dance. The great anxiety of the crew was to prevent her from shooting the Cascades, which were within sight but a short distance below. At one time it appeared in the highest degree likely that she would do so.

'Stand to your oars, and be ready to put her head about,' cried the captain.

The men obeyed, ready to turn her round as soon as she was in smooth water, so as to shoot the Cascades safely and in regular style. Fortunately this was not required, for at the foot of the rapid she swung into an eddy, which enabled her to gain the shore.

'What would have happened had we gone down the Cascades?' I inquired very simply of the captain, who was already giving orders for reascending the rapid.

'We should have been back again in Lake St. Louis by his time,' he replied with an air of great indifference, leaving me lost in wonderment at his estimate of the greatest calamity contingent on such an event.

We were not long in making up lost ground. The oxen were once more attached to the boat, and by dint of better steering we soon mastered the Cedars. The channel of the river is here again broken by numerous islands, between which it passes with prodigious force and velocity. Close to the southern bank, some miles