

Shooting the Rapids



ON a trip up the great lakes we stopped one windy morning at Sault Ste. Marie. Almost the first thing we noticed upon our arrival was the peculiar appearance of the lake at the mouth of the St. Mary's River. The lake in general was moderately smooth, but here at the entrance to the river the dark blue waters raged and foamed until in parts they tossed bunches of white spray. "What is the cause of this unusual disturbance?" we asked, and were informed that before us lay the St. Mary's Rapids. Of course, our curiosity being aroused, we started off to shoot these wonderful rapids.

After following a small path for some time, we came to an open space, out from which there ran a small pier. On the pier, looking at us with stolid, motionless countenances, stood a group of three or four half-breed Indians. After we had named our desire and settled the price, two of the Indians slowly drew up a canoe devoid of seats, but having little rails extending at intervals from side to side, in all probability to keep the occupants from falling out. We took our places and were properly covered up with waterproof sheets. Then the two Indians, armed with poles, took their places—one at the bow and the other at the stern of the canoe.

We pushed out slowly into the rapids. Gradually the canoe glided more swiftly, and we were enjoying the fresh breeze in our faces, when suddenly there loomed up before us one of the many brown boulders scattered through the rapids. The bow of the boat was almost upon it, and, holding our breath, we looked in terror and entreaty at the guide. His face never changed a muscle, but, with a skillful movement of his pole, he guided the boat by the rock unharmed. Nor was this the only occurrence of the kind. Soon we had progressed far enough to breathe quite naturally whenever we avoided a rock.

Down we flew now. The waters on all sides were dashing; we could not hear each other speak; the Sault seemed far away, and Lake Michigan looked like the Atlantic Ocean. We held on to the canoe tightly, when suddenly all vision was cut off. Before us rose what appeared to be a veritable wall of water tipped with a feathery fringe of white. With our hearts in our mouths, we felt the boat rock, and experienced a sensation somewhat akin to that caused by the sudden start of an elevator. Soon, however, the world appeared again, and the one English-speaking Indian in the boat told us that we had passed the largest whirlpool in the rapids, and that had we gone six inches nearer, our boat would have been dashed to pieces.

Gradually the boat glided less swiftly, the flecks of foam appeared less often, the waters became calmer, and we were told that we had shot the rapids.

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