

## THE RIVER OF LIFE.

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We seldom see a river flow down hill, and then turn and flow up again. Others say that on the other side of the great falls, where the river of life tumbles its black waters into the mystic ocean of eternity, are boats that pick up all the floating bodies, and send them through to the City of Zion on trains. So that it makes no difference whether a man goes down river or up, he will at last ground his canoe on the same bar. What would be the influence on the world were all to believe this? Who would paddle up river, against tides and rapids, when he can reach the same place by going down with tide and rapids? By running with the tides? I am sure that I would not. Universal salvation is a pleasant thought for the guilty soul, but for my part I will run no risk.

I do not think you can make an ideal city by dumping heaven and hell into one. It will not make a "greater heaven," but it will make a "greater hell."

I have consulted the guide book very carefully, and so far as I can learn from it, when a man once goes over the falls into the City of Destruction, there is no escape from it forever. That no boats can stem the falls again; that no train ever runs back to Zion again. It is a remorse without a glimmer of hope; a night without a star.

For about twenty-five miles, twelve above and thirteen below the town of Nativity, all is smooth and pleasant, and the water is generally as smooth as a mirror. But as you go further down it does not continue so. Just below this smooth water is about three miles of rapids that is very pleasant to shoot. The frail canoe fairly glides over this swift water, and the heart bounds with joy to see the sharp bow split the water. At the foot of this rapid, quite near to a great whirlpool, is the village of "Good Cheer;" and most of the boats land there after the excitement of shooting the rapids. It is pretty hard for the boy to get away from here. The saloon doors stand open day and night, and the wine flows freely and sparkles in the cup; the theatres are running late into the night, where nude Sapphos in Bacchanalian revels, receive the sensuous applause of passion-inflamed youths; up from the river banks comes the laughter and coarse songs of boys and maidens; and the shouts of merry carousers.

But there are other attractions further down the river, and again the canoes are launched. Some get into the whirlpool and are lost, but the most escape; and with songs and merry-making begin the descent through rapids and falls and dangerous waters to the town of "Maturity," eighty miles further down. On no part of the river does the water run so wildly as through these eight miles, from fourteen to twenty-two miles below the town of "Nativity." There is not a mile in the eight that has not some dangerous fall or rapid, and many a boat goes to pieces there.

Your boat is no sooner out of one of these dangers than she is in another. Here they are strung all along this part of the river, "The Eddy of Idleness," "Cigarette Cove," "Cock-Tail Falls," "Shoals of Don't Care," "The Devil's Dance," "Rattle-snake Island," "The Rapids of Pull-and-be-Damned," "Euchre Eddy," "The Rock of Rahab," "Brewer's Run," "Profanity Gulch," and a number of others.

Not one-half of the boats succeed in running past all of these dangers. You

see shattered crafts and broken oars and crushed canoes and torn sails and pieces of wreckage on every foot of this water. You see human bodies whirling round in the pools and paled on the sharp rocks and plunging over the falls. No one can stop to pick up these dead bodies, as they have all they can do to guide their own boat over the dangers; and so these bodies are left in the river pollute the water, of which all going down this river must drink sooner or later.

At the foot of this series of dangers the river plunges down one hundred feet over an awful precipice into the wild, seething whirlpool of Infidelity. The waters are no longer pure and clear as they were at the town of Nativity, but are dark and foul. This immense whirlpool of Infidelity is enough to make the heart faint.

This pool is one mass of human bodies and broken canoes and torn clothing and wreckage whirled round and round in this fearful cesspool of death. Beneath are the ravenous eels and sharks of Remorse and Hate, whilst above hover the screeching vultures of Despair, descending now again and again to tear with beak and talon the bleeding bodies that are thrown to the top. Some pass over this fall unhurt, whilst a great many are merely stunned by the fall; and if they do not strike a rock, will "come to" again, and, finding a boat that is not altogether broken, will patch her up and continue the voyage down river. Sometimes a person will turn back. He will climb the rugged rocks till he gets above the falls, and then will begin to walk back to the town of Nativity, where he will get a new boat and begin the voyage up the river. But the heroic men who do thus turn back, after they are so far down as the Falls of Infidelity, are very few.

There are some here to-day who are getting down pretty near the Falls of Infidelity, and I would advise you to run your boat ashore and go no further. If you once go over the falls, it is an awful climb to get back again. I have seen a hundred try to climb over that rock, and only a few have succeeded in getting over. I see men, sweltering in passion, swimming in this pool of Infidelity and coming to the base of the rock and trying to climb out.

Some are further up than others. Some are weak and cannot hold on for a minute. Some, as they cling to the face of the cliff, are attacked by the fierce vultures of despair, and are forced to let go. Some are high up, but when they look down on the seething pool beneath, and at the dizzy heights above, the head swims, the fingers loosen on the rock, and they plunge down again; and where one climbs to the top and stands above the falls, ninety and nine fall back and are lost.

The run from the Falls of Infidelity to the Gulch of Social Impurity is not long, and the water flows so swiftly that one is scarcely out of the one before he is in the other. The rocks rise perpendicularly on both sides of this gulch, in some places almost meeting overhead, making the gulch dark and damp. Very few who go through this gulch ever go back. In fact the guide-book says that no one who has ever gone through this gulch has ever returned, and that they would not be admitted to Zion even if they did go back.

It is very difficult to get any authentic information about this part of the river. It is getting so near the mouth, and so few persons ever come back to tell us about it, that we have no other way to find out what it is like than from the

guide-book. Sometimes one does come back and tells such frightful tales of suffering and misery and pains that we cannot believe him, and people will not listen to him. They tell us that at its mouth the river, whose waters are black and thick with filth, rush through a dark canyon, and then plunge down 10,000 leagues into the unfathomable abyss of eternal night. They tell us that no sounds are heard here but the shrieks of madmen, the whistling of fiends, the laugh of devils; that there is no light save when tongues of fire shoot through the fire-cracked cliffs, blistering the face and drying up the breath with the heat.

These reports agree so well with what we read in the guide-book that we fear they are true. Where the river goes to after that awful plunge, no one can ever know in this life, for no one has ever come back to tell us what he saw there. The "book" tells us, but it is so awful that I dare not speak of it to you. May none of us ever know by experience what horrors live under those curtains of eternal night.

Oh, my hearers, this is no allegory; this is truth. I have painted the River of Life to you as faithfully as I knew how. I have made it as it has been represented to me and as I have learned by conversation with those who have come back from those awful dangers; and as I have learned from the "guide-book," the Bible.

Friends, we are all on this River of Life. We are either pulling up the river or are drifting with the tide. We are either going up to Zion, the city of the Blessed, or we are running the rapids to the city of Doom below.

Where are you? Have I no right to ask? I stand on the bank of the river to-day and shout out to the multitudes who are drifting down to their doom, "Turn ye, Oh, turn ye, for why will ye die?" I have not much hope that my call will be heeded. I know how you will receive my warning. I know the inevitable lot of speaking. I know that my invitations and warning will fall on the ears of those who will not hear, and although the sound may linger in the ear for a while, to-morrow ever the memory of it shall have passed away. So be it. My only hope is that some one who has just begun to drift down may be stopped, or that some one who is undecided which way to go may be induced to go up and not down; or that some poor sinner who has now drifted far from God and thinks there is not now any longer any hope of ever getting back, may be encouraged to know that it is not yet too late. I also hope that those who are bearing the burdens in the heat of the day, and are pressing forward, may be encouraged to know that soon they shall hear the city bells, and then see that city "not built with hands, but eternal and in the heavens," that they shall soon meet the Saviour face to face, and hear those blessed words, all the sweeter because we have earned the reward, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of the Lord."

God grant that when the voyage of life is ended we may ground our weather-beaten bark on the Zion sands and pillow our aching and weary head on the bosom of our Heavenly Father.

"Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me;  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep,  
Turns again home.

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Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark.

For tho' from out our bourne of Time  
and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar."

—Tennyson.

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