

Our Pulpit.

THE RIVER OF LIFE.

(Sermon preached at Woodstock, N. B., on Sunday evening, Sept. 27, by the pastor, Rev. F. Allison Currier, A. M.)

To me there are few things in this world more beautiful than a river. When a child, I loved to sit on the grassy banks of the beautiful St. John that flowed past our door, and hour after hour watched the waters as they moved toward the sea. In the spring the melting snows in the great forests of Maine poured great torrents of water into the river beds and the lowlands of Mauderville and Sheffield were overflowed. Then it was that I loved to sit by the river side. On its surface was a year's accumulation of drift, Hewn timber, logs, slabs, fences, barrels, gates, uprooted trees, shingle-bolts, vegetables, old scows and boats, canoes, dead animals, bottles, tin cans, tubs, grain, sawdust, barns, houses, and a thousand other things, some useful, some useless, some large, some small, some valuable, others worthless, all mingling together, and rapidly drifting to the falls and the wide ocean beyond, to be beaten and battered by ocean winds, some never to reach a shore again, but to sink in the deep waters, others to be picked up by savage races on the islands of the southern seas.

It always suggested to me the "River of Life." On its surface drift all the human race. Rich and poor, high and low, strong and weak, kings and beggars, princes and varlets, wise and foolish, the learned and the ignorant, all drift along side by side, and the swift current is bearing all on to the cataract of death and the wide ocean of eternity beyond.

There is something about a river that suggests God to me. A river suggests permanency. When I go home this year, I shall find many changes, the farms shall have changed, old houses have been torn down and new ones builded, even the faces that I shall see on the streets will be strange.

When I go into the church I shall face a new congregation, one that shall be strange to me. The old faces have gone, new ones have appeared. It is all changed; but when I turn my face eastward, all is familiar. There is the same grand, old river, along which I played and into whose waters I plunged when a merry, happy lad. No change here. When God made the world and scooped out the valleys with his hand, he made that river bed, and filled it with waters, and it has flowed on. My father and my grandfather, and my grandfather's father, all lived beside it, and it has not ceased to flow. A thousand years ago the Milicete Indians launched their barks on the dark wooded shores of the Ouangondi; and before Indians had ever floated on its tides for thousands of years, that stately river had poured its clear waters out into the sea. So flows on the "river of life." For four, and, maybe, for ten thousand years, the river of life has been pouring its multitudes into the great ocean of eternity. How near you or I may be to the falls, we do not know. Of one thing only are we sure, and that is, that sooner or later we must go over.

The river of life takes its rise under the throne of the Almighty, flows down through time, and empties into the black night of eternity. The water is clear at the source, as clear as crystal, but grows muddy and impure as we go

further down, until, at its mouth, it pours a dark, foul torrent of reeking filth into the ocean beyond.

We all launch upon the river at the same time. All of us start at the same point in the river, at the town of Nativity. This city is on the left side of the river, about half way between the source and the mouth. It is a busy town, but its population is ever changing. So soon as one is borne he launches his boat upon the river and begins the voyage of life, either up the river or down.

There are two immense cities on this river, one at the source and a much larger one at its mouth. The city at the river's source is a beautiful one. The people of this city are kind and good. Their statute laws were written on two slabs of stone a great many years ago, and given to one of its citizens—Moses. One other law has been added since this, namely, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." On these eleven commandments this city is governed.

There are no saloons or gambling dens there, no theatres, no houses of infamy, no pawn shops. There is no poverty there, no strikes, no hard times, no one is ever sick, your friends never die, there are no pains nor sighing nor crying, no wrinkled foreheads, no old age, no complaining, no hate, nor jealousy, nor any such thing. The Mayor of this great city is Jesus, who at one time was a carpenter at Nazareth. There is no night in this city. It is always day. No excessive heat nor cold; the food is the best; the water is life-giving.

Not so in the city at the river's mouth. There is not a happy man or woman in the city. There is no day there, for no sun ever rises over these fire-swept hills. Crime and bloodshed and vice and death and ignorance walk hand in hand. Drunkenness and pain and sin and lust and murder and despair fill the streets with wailing and woe. No song was ever sung in this city, no prattle of innocent children, no laughter of happy lovers. No love here, but hate, deadly hate.

The streets are filled with cursings and blasphemies, and oaths fearful to hear. The people live on whatever they can pick out of the river. They stand along the shore in vast multitudes hoping that perchance something might drift down from the city above, or that they might get a glimmer of light from its dazzling portals. They drink the filth of the river, and fight and kill and curse and groan and starve, but cannot die. The air is foul with the sulphurous fumes of the pit. They breathe smoke and flames, the earth blisters their feet with the internal fires beneath.

The mayor of this city is Satan, the prince of hell. He hates the King of the city further up the river, and more than once has he led his hosts against it. But he can never get even in sight of the golden city.

Some years ago you and I were launched upon this "river of life," and have been moving ever since, either down the river or up. I started up the river, some of you started down.

The city of Nativity is well situated. The water is very sluggish here, and in fact one can scarcely tell which way the water flows. It is about as easy to go up the river as it is to go down. But this does not continue. If you go up the river you will find it easy sailing for about ten miles, until you come to the village of Youth. Not far above here you come to the first of a series of cataracts and rapids, that continues with smooth water here and there for about fifteen miles. If you can get

above this, you will have pretty easy paddling all the way up to the city of Zion.

It is at the foot of these rapids that so many turn back. They get discouraged when they look at the rapids and whirlpools above and then at the smooth waters below; they turn round and go back. There is little hope that you will ever persuade that person to try again. You may tell him that there is a guide that will show him an easy way up over these rapids, and that the King of the city has even dug a canal, so that one can be lifted up from one lock to another; but if he has gone down the river any distance, and gotten into the main suction, there is little chance he will ever paddle back again. It is much easier drifting with the tide than pulling against it. It is more exciting to shoot down a rapid than it is to carry up over one.

You can go down river whether you work or not. You can take in the oars and drift along with some jolly companions, and drink and sing songs, and carouse and have a merry time, and still your boat will be going along.

Not so if you go up stream. If you stop rowing for a minute, your boat stops. It is ever the same. Work or else go down with the tide.

It is at the foot of these rapids that so many turn back. The father camps here for the night with all his family. The boats are all tied, that they may not get adrift during the night. Then the father sends in a petition to the King above to send him help for the morrow, and then all lie down to sleep. He wakes in the morning to find that one of his sons is missing, and also sees that one of the boats is gone. He knows what it means. His son has gone down the river during the night. On the other side of the stream he sees another father and mother wringing their hands. Last night the happy family landed there. In the evening they saw their son with some other boys who had made up their minds to go back next day, and they persuaded these two others to go with them. Alas, for the unhappy parents and sisters. They will never see their sons and brothers again. They are now far down the river, beyond the reach of father or sister.

How long before they will reach the City of Woe, it is impossible to tell. Boys have been known to paddle all the way from the foot of these rapids to the City of Destruction in one night. Others linger for years along the shore.

Do none ever come back? Oh, yes! Once in a while you see a man run his boat to the shore, kneel down and lift up his voice in prayer for help, and then takes his oars and start up the river again. Sometimes you see whole flotillas of canoes turn round and begin to go up again. A great preacher or evangelist has come to the river and told them of the dangers that await them further down the river, and warns them, and with entreaties persuades them to go back. Sometimes as many as a thousand will turn their boats round and start back. But many of them do so because others do, and others because they are afraid, whilst a few really are in earnest, and bend to the oar with a will.

Most of these will only go up a mile or so, and will then drift back. They hear the shouts of derision of those who are going down, and they hear their companions calling them to come back, and at last they give it up, and their boat is in the tide once more. Here and there you will see a man, scarred with sin and dissipation, forcing his way up against the strong tide, with a look of

determination on his face that means that there is no turn back for him.

All along this river, at almost every bend, there are signboards nailed up. They were originally put there by the King of Zion City to direct people up to his city, and to warn them of the danger of going down with the tide. But these boards have been much tampered with, so that now it is very hard oftentimes to tell what they mean. Satan has come up the river and has tampered with most of these signs. All along the right side of the river the good King had put up boards with a hand on it pointing up the river, and under the hand some such words as these, "This is the way to Zion." "This is the way of eternal life." Satan has simply carried these boards to the other side of the river and set them up there, where, of course, the hand points down river. So has he tampered and changed all the warnings and invitations that God has put along the river. Sometimes even the guides whom he has posted along the river to warn those who are going down to turn, and flee from the wrath to come, deceive the people. Ofttimes instead of warning the people, they try to please them, and preach flattering sermons, and ease the consciences of the voyagers for revenue sake. Alas, God will require the blood of these whom they have deceived at their hands. Oh, how necessary it is that parents and preachers and teachers cry aloud and spare not. We must stand on the shore and cry day and night, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" There is no time that we may be silent, for there is no time when there are none drifting past us to the awful destruction beyond.

Mother, you must teach your boy the right way. For six days in the week and often for seven, on the street he is taught that it makes no difference whether he go down the river or up; that all the stories about the beautiful city at the river's source are myths; that all the frightful stories that are told about the sin and suffering and bad air of the city at its mouth are nonsense, and are only hatched up by a band of lunatics who want to attract people to their city so as to help support their churches.

You take your child to church, and not always does the child get the truth there. Ofttimes the preacher is told that if he says anything about the city below, or even intimates that there are dangers on the way, that he will have to resign. These men are found in many of our churches. They are special agents that Satan has put into the churches to see that preachers say nothing against his city. In the pulpit is the man whom the King of one city has sent into the city to tell the truth, and in the seat is one of Satan's agents to see that he does not tell it. What is the man to do. Why, tell the truth, of course. If he has not enough backbone to do that, they ought to tie a stone to his neck and throw him into the river.

When we consider these things we cannot be surprised that there are very few going up the river compared with the vast multitudes going down.

Of course there are many who deny this, but the guide says it is so, and the great book that keeps records of all things says there are few who go in at the narrow gate of Zion, whilst many go in at the broad gate of destruction.

There are others who say that all will at last reach the City of Zion. That somewhere this side of the City of Destruction the river takes a turn and flows back to where it began, landing all at the City of Zion at last.

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