

Chapter 1

The Father of Waters

Father of Waters! I worship thy mighty stream! As the Hindoo by the shores of his sacred river, I kneel upon thy banks, and pour forth my soul in wild adoration!

Far different are the springs of our devotion. To him, the waters of his yellow Ganges are the symbols of a superstitious awe, commingled with dark fears for the mystic future; to me, thy golden waves are the souvenirs of joy, binding the present to the known and happy past. Yes, mighty river! I worship thee in the past. My heart thrills with joy at the very mention of thy name!

Father of Waters! I know thee well. In the land of a thousand lakes, on the summit of the "*Hauteur de terre*" I have leaped thy tiny stream. Upon the bosom of the blue lakelet, the fountain of thy life, I have launched my birchen boat; and yielding to thy current have floated softly southward.

I have passed the meadows where the wild rice ripens on thy banks, where the white birch mirrors its silvery stem, and tall *coniferae* fling their pyramid shapes on thy surface. I have seen the red Chippewa cleave thy crystal waters in his bark canoe — the giant moose lave his flanks in thy cooling flood — and the stately wapiti¹ bound gracefully along thy banks. I have listened to the music of thy shores — the call of the cawee, the laugh of the wa-wa goose, and the trumpet-note of the great northern swan. Yes, mighty river! Even in that far, northern land, thy wilderness home, have I worshipped thee!

¹ Wapiti — a Canadian deer. (Here and farther on the notes by the editor.)

Onward through many parallels of latitude — through many degrees of the thermal line!

I stand upon thy banks where thou leapest the rocks of Saint Antoine, and with bold frothing current cleavest thy way to the south. Already I note a change in the aspect of thy shores. The *coniferae* have disappeared, and thou art draped with a deciduous foliage of livelier hue. Oaks, elms, and maples, mingle their frondage, and stretch their broad arms over thee. Though I still look upon woods that seem illimitable, I feel that the wilderness is past. My eyes are greeted by the signs of civilisation — its sounds fall upon my ear. The hewn cabin — picturesque in its rudeness — stands among prostrate trunks; and the ring of the lumberer's axe is heard in the far depths of the forest. The silken blades of the maize wave in triumph over fallen trees, its golden tassels giving promise of a rich return. The spire of the church peers above the green spray of the woods, and the prayer of the Christian ascends to heaven sublimely mingling with the roar of thy waters!

I launch my boat once more upon thy buoyant wave; and, with heart as buoyant, glide onward and southward. I pass between bold bluffs that hem thy surging waves, and trace with pleasant wonder their singular and varied outlines — now soaring abruptly upward, now carried in gentle undulations along the blue horizon. I behold the towering form of that noted landmark "*La montaigne qui trempe à l'eau*," and the swelling cone on whose summit the soldier-traveller pitched his tent. I glide over the mirrored bosom of Pepin's lake, regarding with admiration its turreted shores. I gaze with deeper interest upon that precipitous escarpment, the "Lover's Leap," whose rocky wall has oft echoed back the joyous chaunt of the light-hearted voyageur, and once a sadder strain — the death-song of Wanona — beautiful Wanona, who sacrificed life to love!

Onward I glide, where the boundless prairies of the West impinge upon thy stream; and my eye wanders with delight over their fadeless green.

I linger a moment to gaze upon the painted warrior spurring his wild steed along thy banks — to gaze upon the Dacotah girls bathing their lithe limbs in thy crystal wave — then on again past the "Cornice Rocks" — the metalliferous shores of Galena and Dubuque — the aerial tomb of the adventurous miner.

I reach the point where the turbid Missouri rushes rudely upon thee, as though he would force thee from thy onward course. Poised in my light canoe, I watch the struggle. Fierce but short it is, for thou triumphest, and thy conquered rival is compelled to pay his golden tribute to thy flood that rolls majestically onward!

Upon thy victorious wave I am borne still southward. I behold huge green mounds — the sole monuments of an ancient people — who once trod thy shores. Near at hand I look upon the dwellings of a far different race. I behold tall spires soaring to the sky; domes, and cupolas glittering in the sun; palaces standing upon thy banks, and palaces floating upon thy wave. I behold a great city — a metropolis!

I linger not here. I long for the sunny South; and trusting myself once more to thy current I glide onward.

I pass the sea-like estuary of the Ohio, and the embouchure of another of thy mightiest tributaries, the famed river of the plains. How changed the aspect of thy shores. I no longer look upon bold bluffs and beetling cliffs. Thou hast broken from the hills that enchained thee, and now rollest far and free, cleaving a wide way through thine own alluvion. Thy very banks are the creation of thine own fancy — the slime thou hast flung from thee in thy moments of wanton play — and thou canst break through their barriers at will. Forests again fringe thee — forests of giant trees — the spreading *platanus*,

the tall tulip-tree, and the yellow-green cottonwood rising in terraced groves from the margin of thy waters. Forests stand upon thy banks, and the wreck of forests is borne upon thy bubbling bosom!

I pass thy last great affluent, whose crimson flood just tinges the hue of thy waters. Down thy delta I glide, amid scenes rendered classic by the sufferings of De Soto¹ — by the adventurous daring of Iberville² and La Salle³.

And here my soul reaches the acme of its admiration. Dead to beauty must be heart and eye that could behold thee here, in this thy southern land, without a thrill of sublimest emotion!

I gaze upon lovely landscapes ever changing, like scenes of enchantment, or the pictures of a panorama. They are the loveliest upon earth — for where are views to compare with thine? Not upon the Rhine, with its castled rocks — not upon the shores of that ancient inland sea — not among the Isles of the Ind. No. In no part of the world are scenes like these; nowhere is soft beauty blended so harmoniously with wild picturesqueness.

¹ *Hernando de Soto* (c 1496—1542) — a Spanish navigator and conquistador who headed the first war of conquest of the Europeans to the north of Mexico; he was the first European who crossed the Mississippi river and left the documentary confirmation of this fact. He died having caught fever in the valley of the Arkansas river.

² *Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville* (1661—1706) — a French soldier, corsair, the native of Canada; fought against Englishmen on the part of France for the possession of North America; dislodged Englishmen from modern provinces of Ontario and Toronto. Headed naval guard of Canada; discovered the mouth of the Mississippi and founded French colonies on this river. For courage, resolution, and fairness he was called Canadian Cid.

³ *Rene-Robert Cavalier de la Salle* (1643—1687) — a French traveler, founder of the French colony Louisiana which later on passed to the USA. He tried to assign to France the whole territory around the Mississippi.

And yet not a mountain meets the eye — not even a hill — but the dark *cyprieres*, draped with the silvery *tillandsia*, form a background to the picture with all the grandeur of the pyrogenous granite!

The forest no longer fringes thee here. It has long since fallen before the planter's axe; and the golden sugar-cane, the silvery rice, and the snowy cotton-plant, flourish in its stead. Forest enough has been left to adorn the picture. I behold vegetable forms of tropic aspect, with broad shining foliage — the *Sabal* palm, the anona, the water-loving tupelo, the catalpa with its large trumpet flowers, the melting *liquidambar*, and the wax-leaved magnolia. Blending their foliage with these fair *indigenes* are an hundred lovely exotics — the orange, lemon, and fig; the Indian-lilac and tamarind; olives, myrtles, and bromelias; while the Babylonian willow contrasts its drooping fronds with the erect reeds of the giant cane, or the lance-like blades of the *yucca gloriosa*.

Embowered amidst these beautiful forms I behold villas and mansions of grand and varied aspect — varied as the races of men who dwell beneath their roofs. And varied are they; for the nations of the world dwell together upon thy banks — each having sent its tribute to adorn thee with the emblems of a glorious and universal civilisation. Father of Waters, farewell!

Though not born in this fair southern land, I have long lingered there; and I love it *even better than the land of my birth*. I have there spent the hours of bright youth, of adventurous manhood; and the retrospect of these hours is fraught with a thousand memories tinged with a romance that can never die. There my young heart yielded to the influence of Love — a first and virgin love. No wonder the spot should be to me the most hallowed on earth!

Reader! listen to the story of that love!