

THE KING OF RIVERS.

THE Mississippi is mighty in his imperial dignity, but more mighty in his lessons of unity and confederation. That matchless tide is the magic cestus which ensures the harmony of the sovereign sisters of the Union, and no peevish eruption of unsisterly jealousy can dispart the silver zone that so firmly and graciously binds their varied climes and products into one common interest. The Mississippi is the most persuasive mediator, the most energetic arbiter, and the most vigilant defender of the federal compact, linking into one chain of communication fourteen powerful states, and nearly half our entire population. Gathering to one outlet uncomputed thousands of miles of navigable waters; holding in a condition of facile interchange a vast series of diverse, yet mutually dependent, agricultural, manufacturing, mining and commercial interests, there is no fraction of the wide territory enfolded in the embrace of the hundred armed river, that could cut itself from the rest of the body, without destroying the growth and vigor of its own fair proportions. Free-soil Iowa and Illinois may chide the heresies of slave-holding Kentucky and Louisiana, but not the less must wheat-growing and lead-producing Iowa and Illinois vend their wares, and buy their sugar and cotton in the markets of their southern sisters, while their highway river holds open invitation to come and go in unrestrained profit and good will, and rebukes the intemperate folly of sectional aggression.

In ascending the Mississippi, you pass through all the climates of the temperate zone; through a countless variety of production; through infinite changes of scenery, and through every phase of sectional prejudice. Leaving behind, on the fertile, but hot and unhealthy sugar plains, the darkest and most tenebrous shades of African servitude, the tints lighten step by step, and state by state, up to the lofty, health-inspiring shores of genial Kentucky and adventurous Missouri, where slavery visibly relaxes its grasp; and onward, to the romantic and enchanting heights of Iowa and Wisconsin, where it never had a hold, until finally, at Minnesota, the beautiful cradle of this marvellous stream, and two thousand miles above, where its waves salute the sea in sullen grandeur, you hear the brief and proud declaration of territorial freedom. "Every state must, and every territory *ought*, decide for itself, and by itself, whether it will admit or exclude slavery."

In the month of June, 1849, I stood on the island that cleaves asunder the wild chaos of amber-hued waters, forming the cataract of St. Anthony, that second Niagara, whose overwhelming sublimity silences the mortal beholder; and before that heaven-reared altar, with its veil of diamonds, and its rainbow crown, I almost vainly essayed to remember there was another world outside of this stupendous whirl and elemental warfare—a world of petty efforts and pigmy human strifes. Yet there, with nature ringing her high eternal anthem in cadence with the plaint, a daughter of the Dakotas detested the wrongs of the red race, and completed a lesson which I had half-learned at the other extremity of that far-reaching river.