

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND ITS SCENERY.

THE INFANT RIVER ONLY SEVEN INCHES ACROSS IT.

THIS great river, upon whose broad and capacious bosom millions of bushels of wheat will yet float to the Gulf and from thence to Europe, and whose almost entire surface in a few succeeding years, will be dotted with steamboats unsurpassed for beauty and excellence, as many of the boats now are, is, in a straight line, measuring from its source, Lake Itasca — to its mouth, the Gulf of Mexico—eleven hundred and sixty-four miles. By the channel of the river it is two thousand, eight hundred miles in length. The population contiguous to the Mississippi river, will exceed 24,000,000, or nearly half of the population of the United States, and in ten years, with the present increase of emigration, the population in the valley and beyond, will reach 30,000,000, or a preponderance of power in the American nation. There are about one hundred cities and towns on the river from St. Paul to St. Louis; about eight above St. Paul, and about one hundred and fifty below St. Louis to the Gulf, making in all, two hundred and fifty-eight cities and towns on the river from its source to its mouth. This great valley of the Mississippi contains 768,000,000 acres of the finest lands in the world, sufficient to make more than one hundred and fifty states as large as Massachusetts. It embraces more territory than Great Britain, France,

Spain, Austria, European Turkey and Italy combined. If peopled as thickly as Massachusetts, it would contain four times the present population of the United States; if as populous as France, it would hold as many as now inhabit the whole of Europe.

H. L. Gordon, in his *Legends of the Northwest*, sweetly sings :

“ Onward rolls the Royal River, proudly sweeping to the sea,
Dark and deep and grand, forever wrapt in myth and mystery.
Lo, he laughs along the highlands, leaping o'er the granite walls ;
Lo, he sleeps among the islands, where the loon her lover calls.
Still, like some huge monster winding downward through the prairied
plains,
Seeking rest but never finding, till the tropic gulf he gains.
In his mighty arms he claspeth now an empire broad and grand ;
In his left hand lo he graspeth leagues of fern and forest land ;
In his right the mighty mountains, hoary with eternal snow,
Where a thousand foaming fountains singing seek the plains below.
Fields of corn and feet of cities, lo the mighty river laves,
Where the Saxon sings his ditties o'er the swarthy warriors' graves.”

The first boat to ascend the Mississippi river, was the *Virginia*, in May, 1823, or sixty-one years ago. She was a stern-wheeler—length 118x24. Now the fleet of boats from St. Louis, owned by two companies, number twenty daily, and among them are several which will easily accommodate five hundred passengers. The *Virginia* might have cost \$15,000 ; one of the present boats alone cost \$40,000, and the whole amount invested in the Mississippi steamboat trade, will reach \$2,000,000, and everything indicates a vast increase of trade upon this immense river, which, sooner or later, must become the thoroughfare for western grain to the sea-coast and to Europe.

Contemplating the past and realizing the present, I

can appreciate Mr. Gordon's further allusion to the Mississippi, when he says:

“On thy bosom, Royal River, silent sped the birch canoe,
Bearing brave with bow and quiver, on his way to war or woo;
NOW with flaunting flags and streamers—mighty monsters of the
deep,

Lo the puffing, panting steamers, through the foaming waters sweep;
And behold the grain-fields golden, where the bison grazed of old,
See the fanes of forests olden by the ruthless Saxon felled,—
Plumed pines that spread their shadows ere Columbus spread his sails,
Firs that fringed the mossy meadows ere the Mayflower braved the
gales;

Iron oaks that nourished bruin, while the Vikings roamed the main,
Crashing fall in broken ruin for the greedy marts of gain.”

Recent information would indicate that the Mississippi river has its source from another lake than that of Itasca, and which is alleged to be much larger and handsomer than the historical sheet of water which, for so many years has been claimed to be the source of the great Father of Waters.

The first white man who ever saw Lake Itasca, was Schoolcraft, in the year 1832. Some twenty years later a party of explorers visited the lake, who describe it as a three-pointed star, and out of some eight thousand lakes in Minnesota, in shape, there is not another one like it. Within about two and a half miles of the lake can be seen a little rill of water meandering through the marsh, and this little rivulet, measuring only

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is the infant Mississippi, and the little lake, only a mile long and not so wide, is where the first drop of water in the river comes from. It is now claimed that two other lakes exist above Itasca, and that the furthestmost one is the real source of the Mississippi, but time and

research will be necessary to establish this assertion beyond a doubt.

The scenery on the Mississippi river equals anything the traveler finds in Europe. The many points, bays, promontories, bluffs, canyons, prairies and beautiful landscapes which meet the eye, afford a never-ceasing source of pleasure, and the tourist on the boat, being free from dust and the jostle of the cars, enjoys serenely the bracing air, as it invigorates his lungs, or plays with his hair, or cools his fevered brow, while the palace steamer plows her way northward, or descends southward, riding the water like a thing of life. Millions of dollars will yet be expended in improving this great thoroughfare, which will drain a vast empire beyond of its wealth, bring into existence thousands of miles of railroads, and build up a city at the head of navigation, unequaled in population and in wealth by any metropolis in the West. And then, for ages and ages, as in the past so in the future, the Mississippi will continue its ceaseless flow, murmuring its lullaby dirge over thousands of those who, to-day, mingle in the great throng of our busy life, but whose memories will be washed away by the waves of the great river as they dash against the shores and obliterate the land marks of time.

“ Faintly flow, thou falling river,
Like a dream that dies away,
Down to ocean gliding ever,
Keep thy calm, unruffled way.
Time, with such a silent motion,
Floats along on wings of air,
To eternity's dark ocean,
Burying all its treasures there.”