

## *Yosemite Valley in Flood*

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MANY a joyful stream is born in the Sierras, but not one can sing like the Merced. In childhood, high on the mountains, her silver thread is a moving melody; of sublime Yosemite she is the voice; the blooming *chaparral* or the flowery plains owe to her fullness their plant-wealth of purple and gold, and to the loose dipping willows and broad green oaks she is bounteous in blessing. I think she is the most absorbing and readable of rivers. I have lived with her for three years, sharing all her life and fortunes, dreaming that I appreciated her; but I never have so much as imagined the sublimity, the majesty of her music, until seeing and listening at every pore I stood in her temple to-day.

December brought to Yosemite, first of all, a cluster of ripe, golden days and silvery nights—a radiant company of the sweetest winter children of the sun. The blue sky had Sabbath and slept in its high dome, and down in its many mansions of *cañon* and cave, crystals grew in the calm nights, and fringed the rocks like mosses. The November torrents were soothed, and settled tranquillity beamed from every feature of rock and sky.

In the afternoon of December 16th, 1871, an immense crimson cloud grew up in solitary grandeur above Cathedral Rocks. It resembled a fungus, with a bulging base like a sequoia, a smooth, tapering stalk, and a round, bossy, down-curved head like a mushroom—stalk, head, and root, in equal, glowing, half-transparent crimson: one of the most gorgeous and symmetrical clouds I ever beheld. Next morning, I looked eagerly at the weather, but all seemed tranquil; and whatever was being done in the deep places of the sky, little stir was visible below. An ill-defined dimness consumed the best of the sunbeams, and toward noon well-developed grayish clouds appeared, having a close, curly grain, like bird’s-eye maple. Late in the night some rain fell, which changed to snow, and, in the morning, about ten inches remained unmelted on the meadows, and was still falling—a fine, cordial snow-storm; but the end was not yet.

On the night of the 18th rain fell in torrents, but, as it had a temperature of 34° Fahrenheit, the snow-line was only a few feet above the meadows, and there was no promise of flood; yet sometime after eleven o'clock the temperature was suddenly raised by a south wind to 42°, carrying the snow-line to the top of the wall and far beyond—out on the upper basins, perhaps, to the very summit of the range—and morning saw Yosemite in the glory of flood. Torrents of warm rain were washing the valley walls, and melting the upper snows of the surrounding mountains; and the liberated waters held jubilee. On both sides the Sentinel foamed a splendid cascade, and across the valley by the Three Brothers, down through the pine grove, I could see fragments of an unaccountable out-gush of snowy cascades. I ran for the open meadow, that I might hear and see the whole glowing circumference at once, but the tinkling brook was an unfordable torrent, bearing down snow and bowlders like a giant. Farther up on the *débris* I discovered a place where the stream was broken up into three or four strips among the bowlders, where I crossed easily, and ran for the meadows. But, on emerging from the bordering bushes, I found them filled with green lakes, edged and islanded with floating snow. I had to keep along the *débris* as far as Hutchings', where I crossed the river, and reached a wadable meadow in the midst of the most glorious congregation of water-falls ever laid bare to mortal eyes. Between Black's and Hutchings' there were ten snowy, majestic, loud-voiced cascades and falls; in the neighborhood of Glacier Point, six; from Three Brothers to Yosemite Falls, nine; between Yosemite and Arch Falls, ten; between Washington Column and Mount Watkins, ten; on the slopes of South Dome, facing Mirror Lake, eight; on the shoulder of South Dome, facing the main valley, three. Fifty-six new-born falls occupying this upper end of the valley; besides a countless host of silvery-netted arteries gleaming everywhere! I did not go down to the Ribbon or Pohono; but in the whole valley there must have been upward of a hundred. As if inspired with some great water purpose, cascades and falls had come thronging, in Yosemite costume, from every grove and *cañon* of the mountains; and be it remembered, that these falls and cascades were not small, dainty, momentary gushes, but broad, noble-

mannered water creations; sublime in all their attributes, and well worthy Yosemite rocks, shooting in arrowy foam from a height of near three thousand feet; the very smallest of which could be heard several miles away: a perfect storm of waterfalls throbbing out their lives in one stupendous song. I have criticised Hill's painting for having two large falls between the Sentinel and Cathedral rocks; now I would not be unbelieving against fifty. From my first stand-point on the meadow toward Lamon's only one fall is usually seen; now there are forty. A most glorious convention this of vocal waters—not remote and dim, as only half present, but with forms and voices wholly seen and felt, each throbbing out rays of beauty warm and palpable as those of the sun.

All who have seen Yosemite in summer will remember the comet forms of upper Yosemite Falls, and the laces of Nevada. In these waters of the jubilee, the lace tissue predominates; but there is also a plentiful mingling of arrowy comets. A cascade back of Black's is composed of two white shafts set against the dark wall about thirty feet apart, and filled in with chained and beaded gauze of splendid pattern, among the living meshes of which the dark, purple granite is dimly seen. A little above Glacier Point there is a half-woven, half-divided web of cascades, with warp and woof so similar in song and in gestures, that they appear as one existence: living and rejoicing by the pulsings of one heart. The row of cascades between Washington Column and the Arch Falls are so closely side by side that they form an almost continuous sheet; and those about Indian Cañon and the Brothers are not a whit less noble. Tissiack is crowned with surpassing glory. Her sculptured walls and bosses and her great dome are nobly adorned with clouds and waters, and her thirteen cascades give her voice of song.

The upper Yosemite is queen of all these mountain waters; nevertheless, in the first half-day of jubilee, her voice was scarce heard. Ever since the coming of the first November storms, Yosemite has flowed with a constant stream, although far from being equal to the high water in May and June. About three o'clock this afternoon I heard a sudden crash and booming, mixed with heavy gaspings and rocky, angular explosions, and I ran out, sure that a rock-avalanche had started

near the top of the wall, and hoping to see some of the huge blocks journeying down; but I quickly discovered that these craggy, sharp-angled notes belonged to the flood-wave of the upper fall. The great wave, gathered from many a glacier-*cañon* of the Hoffman spurs, had just arrived, sweeping logs and ice before it, and, plunging over the tremendous verge, was blended with the storm-notes of crowning grandeur.

During the whole two days of storm no idle, unconscious water appeared, and the clouds, and winds, and rocks were inspired with corresponding activity and life. Clouds rose hastily, upon some errand, to the very summit of the walls, with a single effort, and as suddenly returned; or, sweeping horizontally, near the ground, dragged long-bent streamers through the pine-tops; while others traveled up and down Indian Cañon, and overtopped the highest brows, then suddenly drooped and condensed, or, thinning to gauze, veiled half the valley, leaving here and there a summit looming alone. These clouds, and the crooked cascades, raised the valley-rocks to double their usual height, for the eye, mounting from cloud to cloud, and from angle to angle upon the cascades, obtained a truer measure of their sublime stature.

The warm wind still poured in from the south, melting the snows far out on the highest mountains. Thermometer, at noon, 45°. The smaller streams of the valley edge are waning, by the slackening of the rain; but the far-reaching streams, coming in by the Tenaya, Nevada, and Illilouette *cañons*, are still increasing. The Merced, in some places, overflows its banks, having risen at once from a shallow, prattling, ill-proportioned stream, to a deep, majestic river. The upper Yosemite is in full, gushing, throbbing glory of prime; still louder spring its shafts of song; still deeper grows the intense whiteness of its mingled meteors; fearlessly blow the winds among its dark, shadowy chambers, now softly bearing away the outside sprays, now swaying and bending the whole massive column. So sings Yosemite, with her hundred fellow-falls, to the trembling bushes, and solemn-waving pines, and winds, and clouds, and living, pulsing rocks—one stupendous unit of mountain power—one harmonious storm of mountain love.

On the third day the storm ceased. Frost killed the new falls; the clouds are withered and empty; a score of light is

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drawn across the sky, and our chapter of flood is finished. Visions like these do not remain with us as mere maps and pictures—flat shadows cast upon our minds, to brighten, at times, when touched by association or will, and fade again from our view, like landscapes in the gloaming. They saturate every fibre of the body and soul, dwelling in us and with us, like holy spirits, through all of our after-deaths and after-lives.

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