



# By the Rivers of Water: A Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey

*Erskine Clarke*

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In late 1832, a young missionary couple sailed from the Chesapeake Bay, headed for western Africa. John Leighton Wilson and his wife, Jane, were traveling to the colony of Liberia, where they—and their fellow passengers, mostly liberated slaves and freeborn African Americans—hoped to find an alternative to the inequality of the American South. Soon after their arrival, though, conflict erupted between the settlers and their Grebo and Mpongwe neighbors, shattering the Wilsons' utopian dreams. The true nightmare, however, came when they returned to the United States. Confronting an onrushing war, the Wilsons were forced to make a terrible choice, revealing with tragic finality where—and with whom—they felt they truly belonged.

A sweeping transatlantic story of good intentions and cruel consequences, *By the Rivers of Water* offers a humane portrait of two very different worlds, both riven by war and racial hatred and sustained by deep—and, occasionally, shared—faiths.

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