

THE RIVER

Again the path grew tiring. Up and down hills. Through brush and thick trees. The heat made Aaron sweat a lot. Some strange flies started to pester him. This left him swatting flies without much success. Things were getting more difficult instead of easier. And yet he was told again that it would be soon.

It was already past the time when they usually stopped to have an evening meal and to find a place to sleep. Aaron felt exhausted and thirstier than he could ever remember being. His head felt a little dizzy and numb. He at least had to have some water! There must be water somewhere!

After muttering something to his friend, he began to look for a stream bed, a pond or a lake or something. The mountain behind had many streams and springs on it. Aaron moved here and there combing the woods nearby as well as several open areas. Nothing; only more thirst and more tired. Then he heard familiar words and a voice shouting from across the last field to "try over here". Nearly totally exhausted and crying by now, Aaron followed after the voice.

He stumbled back and forth along a wooded area until he came to a clump of bushes. Peeking behind them he saw a beautiful sight- a small trickle of water was flowing from what looked like beneath a large rock! Immediately Aaron cupped several handfuls of cool delicious water. Instantly he felt refreshed. When he finally looked up he saw his friend watching with a satisfied smile on his face.

"There's more, Aaron," he said. "We have another hour of daylight. Let's follow this little spring to see where it leads."

Feeling so much better, Aaron agreed.

Off they went with Aaron eagerly following the spring as it trickled along for several hundred yards through the woods until it spilled into a stream. Aaron looked at his friend's eyes and saw that they should follow this stream.

Somehow following the stream made the walk easier. Because, before Aaron knew it, he was standing on the bank of a small river that moved

steadily along. Its water seemed as clear as the spring, and Aaron found out that it tasted just as good.

"Now what?" thought Aaron. But when he looked up at his trusted friend, he knew. They walked along the bank for a short while until Aaron shouted out in delight pointing to a peculiar raft with a roof over part of it.

"Look! Look! Is it for us?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, my little friend. I've used it before. Come now. Let's see what other adventures are in store," he said.

So they climbed aboard and pushed off into the gently flowing river. Aaron sat in a state of amazement; his tired body seemed to melt into the surface of the raft. The sun was starting to set causing a spectacle to appear in the sky as well as in the reflection on the water. Aaron cupped some more water and drank it. The sweet water was also taking away his hunger and bringing strength back into him. As he gazed down into the river, all the details of the bottom were clear. The water was transparent, as smooth as glass. He saw colored fish swimming around as well as other things he couldn't quite describe. Sleep settled finally like the blanket of stars that covered the night. A deep, calming soothing sleep.

All the while the river carried the raft along at a quiet pace that at first was slow, but later quickened as the hours passed and the moon moved across the sky making way for the shiny birth of a new day.

The silent river moved along bringing life wherever it went. It grew deeper and wider and stronger. From a trickle it had turned into a powerful source for countless forms of life--every kind of plant and creature. Its waters were cool and clean. The taste was sweet and reviving. It cleansed within and without. Thirst fled and hunger soon followed it. Waters without limit and without cost. For all who desire--freely. A gift to all.

Like a joyful dream the river carried a deeply resting Aaron. Confidence surged almost as strongly as the river. When he woke up, Aaron thought for a long while that he had simply changed dreams. The pure transparency of the river with its numberless life forms leaped up at his long gazes. Flowering trees of all kinds lined the banks.

Then the unusual friend caught Aaron's attention. He was sitting not

far from Aaron with his eyes fixed straight ahead. Again it was if he could see more than the river and the few hills ahead. That look seemed to fly beyond the hills, even beyond the sun. Yet those eyes, as piercing as they might be, held a gentle sway soothing any uneasiness and chasing away any fears. One of his glances spoke more than many words and did more than many words. They invited trust. They offered rest in that trust.

And the river continued along. Relentless. Endless. A sea of glass poured through time. Powerfully it flowed. Majestically growing larger and larger. So large that Aaron could no longer see across to the other bank. Growing larger, yet remaining quiet, almost still in its awesomeness. Aaron could hardly believe the changes that had taken place just over night. The growth. The rate of the water's movement. The uncountable life forms that filled the river, living because of it. His eyes had feasted on wonder at every look. The happy excitement he felt was unmatched.

The wind swirled above the raft gently fanning its riders. Birds flew overhead. Others played circling around the raft. Their songs were sweet. The melodies crisp and clear. Every so often a fish broke the surface sending a spray along with little ripples that made funny circles. About then Aaron began to hear a simple melody. It sounded much like the wind.

Aaron found himself listening closely to the melodic wind and was startled to realize later that the sounds were coming more from his friend than from the wind. Soothing, gently playing on his imagination. He imagined butterflies fluttering from flower to flower, brilliance playing upon brilliance. A great field of equally bright flowers of so many colors Aaron had never seen before. All the shapes and sizes captured his eye. Colors that seemed to pulse and dance like flames. Every shade of red and blue and yellow.

Off into the distance the brightness grew until a mountain could be seen. It shone as brightly as the sun and appeared to radiate the light that made bright the endless fields of flowers. Aaron stood in awe, overwhelmed.

Next he was lifted up in the sky looking at a great cloud. This cloud gave off a high pitched sound that was pleasant to the ears. As he drew closer and closer the sound grew more and more into a beautiful song. And the cloud became a cloud made up of people singing as with one voice.

Many held hands as they rose together. Soon Aaron spied himself among them- he was one of them! He was seeing a vision or sort of a dream he did not understand.