



R o y a l t y A t t e n d s a C h u r c h M e e t i n g

THE TWO MEN ASKED JIM AND ME MANY QUESTIONS. THEY WANTED to know why we hid the raft and why we never traveled in the daytime. Traveling at night was far more difficult and dangerous than traveling during the day, and they suspected that we were hiding for some reason. Finally, they asked if Jim was a runaway slave.

“Would a runaway slave run south? Would a runaway slave travel toward New Orleans? You know that New Orleans is as close to hell as a slave can get,” I answered.

“Of course he wouldn’t. But why are you two always hiding?”

“My family lived in Missouri, where I was born. Everyone died except for my Pap and my brother Ike and me. We were traveling down to New Orleans to live with my Uncle Ben when a large boat hit our raft. My Pap and my brother drowned; only our slave Jim and I escaped. The following day, several people came out to our raft to try to take Jim, saying they believed that he was a runaway slave. For this reason, we don’t travel in the daytime anymore. At night, no one notices us.”

The duke said, “Let me think of a way that we can travel in the

daytime if we want to. I'll think of a plan—but not today. Until we get far away from this town, we should travel only at night.”

When it was dark, very dark, we started down the river. At about ten o'clock, it began to rain and blow and thunder and lightning. The king told us both to stay awake and watch for danger, while he and the duke went inside the tent to sleep. I didn't mind staying out in the storm. How the wind screamed! And every few seconds, the lightning would light up the waves in the river. Then would follow the *whack!—bum! bum! bumble-umble-um-bum-bum-bum-bum* of the thunder. The waves nearly washed me off the raft sometimes, but I wasn't wearing clothes and didn't mind. When I became sleepy, I tried to enter the tent, but there was no room for me inside. I slept outside in the rain while Jim stayed awake to watch. When he saw the first lights in cabins on shore, he awakened me and we began to look for a place to tie the raft.

After breakfast, the king and the duke sat talking about how they could earn some money. The duke told of plays that he had acted in and showed us some of the clothing that he had worn in these plays. The king said that he would be happy to take part in anything that would pay but that he had never acted in a play before.

The duke said that he had finally thought of a plan that would allow us to travel during the daytime without it being dangerous for Jim. He said that he wanted to visit the next town we passed, and the king said that he would go with him. They hoped to find a way to earn some money. We needed some supplies, so Jim told me to go with them.

When we reached the town, the streets were empty. No one was to be seen anywhere. A black slave told us that everyone had gone to a church camp meeting held in a nearby forest. The king asked me to go with him to this church meeting. The duke said that he didn't want to attend, but would look for a printing shop.

Nearly 1,000 people were at the camp meeting. Church services were being held in cheaply built wooden buildings. The people sat on logs instead of chairs and sang many church songs. The more they sang, the louder they got and some began to shout. Some seemed almost

crazy, and rolled on the floor in a wild manner.

Suddenly, the king started to shout. He ran to the front of the room and told them all that he had been a pirate in the Indian Ocean for 30 years. He said that many of his pirates were killed in a fight last spring and that he was looking for men who would be willing to work as pirates. He said that all his money had been stolen from him and he was glad that it had happened. He was now a changed man and was happy for the first time in his life. Though he was poor, he planned to begin to work to pay for a return trip to the Indian Ocean and would spend the rest of his life trying to get pirates to stop their killing and stealing and live good, respectable lives. He said that he could do this better than anyone else because he knew all the pirates in the Indian Ocean. And each time that he helped a pirate he planned to say, "Don't thank me. Thank the good people who live in Pokeville, whom I met at a church camp meeting."

Then he began to cry and so did everyone else. Then someone shouted, "Collect money for him." Then several men jumped up and said, "Let *him* come around and collect money." Which is what he did.

When we returned to the raft, he counted his money and had 87 dollars. The duke had already returned to the raft, and told how he had done some printing jobs for farmers and took the money. The owner of the printing company was at the church camp meeting, so the duke acted as though he were the shop owner and took money for printing jobs. He had earned more than nine dollars in this way. Then he showed us a job he had printed for us. It had a picture of a runaway, black slave and the words "200 DOLLAR REWARD" under the picture. The writing beneath this was about Jim and described him exactly. It said that whoever caught Jim and returned him to his owner in New Orleans would get the reward money.

"After tonight," said the duke, "we can travel in the daytime. Whenever we see anyone approaching, we can tie Jim's hands and feet with a rope and say that we had caught Jim up the river and are returning him to his owner in New Orleans and that we will be paid the reward money."

We all thought that the duke had arrived at the perfect solution to our problem. We knew that there would be trouble in Pokeville when the print shop owner returned and realized what had happened, so we stayed hidden until late at night. Then we traveled our last night on the river. After this, we would be free to travel during daylight hours and could do so at a much faster speed.