CHAPTER 16

WE slept most all day, and started out at night, a
little ways behind a monstrous long raft that
was as long going by as a procession. She had four
long sweeps at each end, so we judged she carried as
many as thirty men, likely. She had five big wigwams
aboard, wide apart, and an open camp fire in the
middle, and a tall flag-pole at each end. There was a
power of style about her. It AMOUNTED to something
being a raftsman on such a craft as that.

We went drifting down into a big bend, and the
night clouded up and got hot. The river was very
wide, and was walled with solid timber on both sides;
you couldn't see a break in it hardly ever, or a light.
We talked about Cairo, and wondered whether we
would know it when we got to it. I said likely we
wouldn't, because I had heard say there warn't but
about a dozen houses there, and if they didn't happen
to have them lit up, how was we going to know we
was passing a town? Jim said if the two big rivers
joined together there, that would show. But I said
maybe we might think we was passing the foot of an
island and coming into the same old river again. That
disturbed Jim -- and me too. So the question was,
what to do? I said, paddle ashore the first time a
light showed, and tell them pap was behind, coming
along with a trading-scow, and was a green hand at
the business, and wanted to know how far it was to
Cairo. Jim thought it was a good idea, so we took a
smoke on it and waited.

What the heck is a “trading-scow”?

There warn't nothing to do now but to look out
sharp for the town, and not pass it without seeing it.
He said he'd be mighty sure to see it, because he'd be
a free man the minute he seen it, but if he missed it
he'd be in a slave country again and no more show for
freedom. Every little while he jumps up and says:

Where exactly is Cairo located?

"Dah she is?"

But it warn't. It was Jack-o'-lanterns, or lightning
bugs; so he set down again, and went to watching,
same as before. Jim said it made him all over trembly
and feverish to be so close to freedom. Well, I can
tell you it made me all over trembly and feverish, too,
to hear him, because I begun to get it through my
head that he WAS most free -- and who was to blame
for it? Why, ME. I couldn't get that out of my con-
science, no how nor no way. It got to troubling me
so I couldn't rest; I couldn't stay still in one place.
It hadn't ever come home to me before, what this
thing was that I was doing. But now it did; and it
stayed with me, and scorched me more and more. I
tried to make out to myself that I warn't to blame,
because I didn't run Jim off from his rightful owner;
but it warn't no use, conscience up and says, every
time, "But you knowed he was running for his free-
dom, and you could a paddled ashore and told some-
body." That was so -- I couldn't get around that
noway. That was where it pinched. Conscience says
to me, "What had poor Miss Watson done to you
that you could see her slave go off right under your
eyes and never say one single word? What did that
poor old woman do to you that you could treat her so
mean? Why, she tried to learn you your book, she tried
to learn you your manners, she tried to be good to you
every way she knowed how. THAT'S what she done."

I got to feeling so mean and so miserable I most wished
I was dead. I fidgeted up and down the raft, abusing
myself to myself, and Jim was fidgeting up and down
past me. We neither of us could keep still. Every
time he danced around and says, "Dah's Cairo!" it
went through me like a shot, and I thought if it WAS
Cairo I reckoned I would die of miserableness.

Explain what internal conflict is troubling Huck at this point? Also, why do you think he is just now dealing with this, and did not earlier in the book?

Jim talked out loud all the time while I was talking
to myself. He was saying how the first thing he
would do when he got to a free State he would go to
saving up money and never spend a single cent, and
when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was
owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived;
and then they would both work to buy the two chil-
dren, and if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd
get an Ab'litionist to go and steal them.

It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't
ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just
see what a difference it made in him the minute he
judged he was about free. It was according to the old
saying, "Give a negro an inch and he'll take an ell."
Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking.
Here was this slave, which I had as good as helped
to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying
he would steal his children -- children that belonged to
a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever
done me no harm.

What is an ell?

I was sorry to hear Jim say that, it was such a
lowering of him. My conscience got to stirring me up
hotter than ever, until at last I says to it, "Let up on
me -- it ain't too late yet -- I'll paddle ashore at the
first light and tell." I felt easy and happy and light
as a feather right off. All my troubles was gone. I
went to looking out sharp for a light, and sort of sing-
ing to myself. By and by one showed. Jim sings
out:

Why does Huck consider this to be a “lowering” of himself for Jim?

"We's safe, Huck, we's safe! Jump up and crack
yo' heels! Dat's de good ole Cairo at las', I jis knows
it!"

I says:

"I'll take the canoe and go and see, Jim. It
mightn't be, you know."

He jumped and got the canoe ready, and put his old
coat in the bottom for me to set on, and give me the
paddle; and as I shoved off, he says:

"Pooty soon I'll be a-shout'n' for joy, en I'll say,
it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I
couldn't ever ben free ef it hadn' ben for Huck; Huck
done it. Jim won't ever forgit you, Huck; you's de
bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de ONLY fren' ole
Jim's got now."

I was paddling off, all in a sweat to tell on him; but
when he says this, it seemed to kind of take the tuck
all out of me. I went along slow then, and I warn't
right down certain whether I was glad I started or
whether I warn't. When I was fifty yards off, Jim
says:

"Dah you goes, de ole true Huck; de on'y white
genlman dat ever kep' his promise to ole Jim."

Well, I just felt sick. But I says, I GOT to do it -- I
can't get OUT of it. Right then along comes a skiff
with two men in it with guns, and they stopped and I
stopped. One of them says:

"What's that yonder?"

"A piece of a raft," I says.

"Do you belong on it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any men on it?"

"Only one, sir."

"Well, there's five slaves run off to-night up yon-
der, above the head of the bend. Is your man white
or black?"

I didn't answer up prompt. I tried to, but the
words wouldn't come. I tried for a second or two to
brace up and out with it, but I warn't man enough --
hadn't the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening;
so I just give up trying, and up and says:

Why do you think Huck hesitates here to tell the men Jim is black?

"He's white."

"I reckon we'll go and see for ourselves."

"I wish you would," says I, "because it's pap
that's there, and maybe you'd help me tow the raft
ashore where the light is. He's sick -- and so is mam
and Mary Ann."

"Oh, the devil! We're in a hurry, boy. But I
s'pose we've got to. Come, buckle to your paddle,
and let's get along."

I buckled to my paddle and they laid to their oars.
When we had made a stroke or two, I says:

"Pap'll be mighty much obleeged to you, I can
tell you. Everybody goes away when I want them to
help me tow the raft ashore, and I can't do it by
myself."

"Well, that's infernal mean. Odd, too. Say, boy,
what's the matter with your father?"

"It's the -- a -- the -- well, it ain't anything much."

They stopped pulling. It warn't but a mighty little
ways to the raft now. One says:

"Boy, that's a lie. What IS the matter with your
pap? Answer up square now, and it'll be the better
for you."

"I will, sir, I will, honest -- but don't leave us,
please. It's the -- the -- Gentlemen, if you'll only
pull ahead, and let me heave you the headline, you
won't have to come a-near the raft -- please do."

"Set her back, John, set her back!" says one.
They backed water. "Keep away, boy -- keep to
looard. Confound it, I just expect the wind has
blowed it to us. Your pap's got the small-pox, and
you know it precious well. Why didn't you come out
and say so? Do you want to spread it all over?"

What exactly was smallpox? What was the death rate for those who contracted it in the 1840s?

"Well," says I, a-blubbering, "I've told every-
body before, and they just went away and left us."

"Poor devil, there's something in that. We are
right down sorry for you, but we -- well, hang it, we
don't want the small-pox, you see. Look here, I'll
tell you what to do. Don't you try to land by your-
self, or you'll smash everything to pieces. You float
along down about twenty miles, and you'll come to a
town on the left-hand side of the river. It will be
long after sun-up then, and when you ask for help
you tell them your folks are all down with chills and
fever. Don't be a fool again, and let people guess
what is the matter. Now we're trying to do you a
kindness; so you just put twenty miles between us,
that's a good boy. It wouldn't do any good to land
yonder where the light is -- it's only a wood-yard.
Say, I reckon your father's poor, and I'm bound to
say he's in pretty hard luck. Here, I'll put a twenty-
dollar gold piece on this board, and you get it when it
floats by. I feel mighty mean to leave you; but my
kingdom! It won't do to fool with small-pox, don't
you see?"

"Hold on, Parker," says the other man, "Here's a
twenty to put on the board for me. Good-bye, boy;
you do as Mr. Parker told you, and you'll be all
right."

"That's so, my boy -- good-bye, good-bye. If you
see any runaway slaves you get help and nab them,
and you can make some money by it."

"Good-bye, sir," says I; "I won't let no runaway
slaves get by me if I can help it."

They went off and I got aboard the raft, feeling bad
and low, because I knowed very well I had done
wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to
learn to do right; a body that don't get STARTED right
when he's little ain't got no show -- when the pinch
comes there ain't nothing to back him up and keep
him to his work, and so he gets beat. Then I thought
a minute, and says to myself, hold on; s'pose you'd a
done right and give Jim up, would you felt better than
what you do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad -- I'd feel
just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I,
what's the use you learning to do right when it's
troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do
wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck.
I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't
bother no more about it, but after this always do
whichever come handiest at the time.

I went into the wigwam; Jim warn't there. I looked
all around; he warn't anywhere. I says:

"Jim!"

"Here I is, Huck. Is dey out o' sight yit? Don't
talk loud."

He was in the river under the stern oar, with just
his nose out. I told him they were out of sight, so he
come aboard. He says:

"I was a-listenin' to all de talk, en I slips into de
river en was gwyne to shove for sho' if dey come
aboard. Den I was gwyne to swim to de raf' agin
when dey was gone. But lawsy, how you did fool
'em, Huck! Dat WUZ de smartes' dodge! I tell you,
chile, I'spec it save' ole Jim -- ole Jim ain't going to
forgit you for dat, honey."

Then we talked about the money. It was a pretty
good raise -- twenty dollars apiece. Jim said we could
take deck passage on a steamboat now, and the money
would last us as far as we wanted to go in the free
States. He said twenty mile more warn't far for the
raft to go, but he wished we was already there.

Towards daybreak we tied up, and Jim was mighty
particular about hiding the raft good. Then he worked
all day fixing things in bundles, and getting all ready
to quit rafting.

That night about ten we hove in sight of the lights
of a town away down in a left-hand bend.

I went off in the canoe to ask about it. Pretty soon I
found a man out in the river with a skiff, setting a trot-
line. I ranged up and says:

"Mister, is that town Cairo?"

"Cairo? no. You must be a blame' fool."

"What town is it, mister?"

"If you want to know, go and find out. If you
stay here botherin' around me for about a half a minute
longer you'll get something you won't want."

I paddled to the raft. Jim was awful disappointed,
but I said never mind, Cairo would be the next place,
I reckoned.

We passed another town before daylight, and I was
going out again; but it was high ground, so I didn't
go. No high ground about Cairo, Jim said. I had
forgot it. We laid up for the day on a towhead
tolerable close to the left-hand bank. I begun to
suspicion something. So did Jim. I says:

"Maybe we went by Cairo in the fog that night."

He says:

"Doan' le's talk about it, Huck. Po' negroes can't
have no luck. I awluz 'spected dat rattlesnake-skin
warn't done wid its work."

"I wish I'd never seen that snake-skin, Jim -- I do
wish I'd never laid eyes on it."

What bad luck are they blaming on the snake skin from earlier in the book?

"It ain't yo' fault, Huck; you didn' know. Don't
you blame yo'self 'bout it."

When it was daylight, here was the clear Ohio water
inshore, sure enough, and outside was the old regular
Muddy! So it was all up with Cairo.

We talked it all over. It wouldn't do to take to the
shore; we couldn't take the raft up the stream, of
course. There warn't no way but to wait for dark,
and start back in the canoe and take the chances. So
we slept all day amongst the cottonwood thicket, so
as to be fresh for the work, and when we went back to
the raft about dark the canoe was gone!

We didn't say a word for a good while. There
warn't anything to say. We both knowed well enough
it was some more work of the rattlesnake-skin; so
what was the use to talk about it? It would only look
like we was finding fault, and that would be bound to
fetch more bad luck -- and keep on fetching it, too, till
we knowed enough to keep still.

By and by we talked about what we better do, and
found there warn't no way but just to go along down
with the raft till we got a chance to buy a canoe to go
back in. We warn't going to borrow it when there
warn't anybody around, the way pap would do, for
that might set people after us.

So we shoved out after dark on the raft.

Anybody that don't believe yet that it's foolishness to
handle a snake-skin, after all that that snake-skin done
for us, will believe it now if they read on and see what
more it done for us.

The place to buy canoes is off of rafts laying up at
shore. But we didn't see no rafts laying up; so we
went along during three hours and more. Well, the
night got gray and ruther thick, which is the next
meanest thing to fog. You can't tell the shape of the
river, and you can't see no distance. It got to be
very late and still, and then along comes a steamboat
up the river. We lit the lantern, and judged she would
see it. Up-stream boats didn't generly come close to
us; they go out and follow the bars and hunt for easy
water under the reefs; but nights like this they bull
right up the channel against the whole river.

We could hear her pounding along, but we didn't
see her good till she was close. She aimed right for
us. Often they do that and try to see how close they
can come without touching; sometimes the wheel bites
off a sweep, and then the pilot sticks his head out and
laughs, and thinks he's mighty smart. Well, here she
comes, and we said she was going to try and shave us;
but she didn't seem to be sheering off a bit. She was
a big one, and she was coming in a hurry, too, looking
like a black cloud with rows of glow-worms around it;
but all of a sudden she bulged out, big and scary, with
a long row of wide-open furnace doors shining like
red-hot teeth, and her monstrous bows and guards
hanging right over us. There was a yell at us, and a
jingling of bells to stop the engines, a powwow of
cussing, and whistling of steam -- and as Jim went
overboard on one side and I on the other, she come
smashing straight through the raft.

I dived -- and I aimed to find the bottom, too, for a
thirty-foot wheel had got to go over me, and I wanted
it to have plenty of room. I could always stay under
water a minute; this time I reckon I stayed under a
minute and a half. Then I bounced for the top in a
hurry, for I was nearly busting. I popped out to my
armpits and blowed the water out of my nose, and
puffed a bit. Of course there was a booming current;
and of course that boat started her engines again ten
seconds after she stopped them, for they never cared
much for raftsmen; so now she was churning along up
the river, out of sight in the thick weather, though I
could hear her.

I sung out for Jim about a dozen times, but I didn't
get any answer; so I grabbed a plank that touched me
while I was "treading water," and struck out for
shore, shoving it ahead of me. But I made out to
see that the drift of the current was towards the left-
hand shore, which meant that I was in a crossing; so
I changed off and went that way.

It was one of these long, slanting, two-mile cross-
ings; so I was a good long time in getting over. I
made a safe landing, and clumb up the bank. I couldn't
see but a little ways, but I went poking along over
rough ground for a quarter of a mile or more, and
then I run across a big old-fashioned double log-house
before I noticed it. I was going to rush by and get
away, but a lot of dogs jumped out and went to
howling and barking at me, and I knowed better than to
move another peg.

What do you think might happen next to Huckleberry? To Jim?