

# The River of Life

## Who is for Purity and Who for Defilement ?

By "AOTEAROA"

**L**ITTLE girls and boys start life as little streams and creeks and clear springs start life.

The springs and little creeks are clear, clear as crystal, because, at their start, there is nothing to muddy them.

A little boy sees himself—sees his reflection—in the quiet spring or in the musical creek that flows from the spring. Creek and boy see each other face to face. They have nothing to hide from each other. The creek and the boy are not old enough to be false or deceitful. They do not know what is ahead of them in the future, but they are full of hope. The creek reflects the boy's likeness just as it is, without lie and without flattery. Everything is honest between them. Also, everything is beautiful.

What is beauty? Perhaps a little boy (or girl) may not understand beauty with his mind, and may not be able to put beauty into words; but even in infancy he feels it. The silver and green, the silvery flash of the limpid water running over or round the stones of rapids and the green of the native bush overhanging, are seen and heard and felt by the little boy. He cannot write words of praise, but all that they mean, and more, are known to his inner self. If he did not have these deep feelings, why should the boy be drawn to the creek-side? Any day, anywhere, one can see how running water fascinates children. What does this fascination—such a big word!—mean? It means that the child, girl or boy, loves to be near that silvery, tinkling thing, the creek; and, in fact, can hardly keep away. Without knowing why, children seek the company of things or persons that are pleasant to them. Like attracts like. Child and little stream are young, preparing for a long journey. They have not lost their clarity, that is, their transparent clearness. Children's impressions are sensed; that is to say, they learn through their senses, through their eyes, ears, and nose.

Later in life, by labour of the mind, children may add to what they feel by knowing some of the reasons for those feelings. The wonder-

ful fragrance of the gorge they may trace to a New Zealand orchid that flowers on trees or rocks overhanging the stream, and the smell of the orchid gives delight. Then some older person may tell the child the name of the orchid, and the names of other New Zealand orchids, and may explain how our orchids show that long ago New Zealand had a hotter climate. Our orchids, now separated from their richer and more colourful orchid-cousins in the warm north, fight a never-ending rearguard battle against the cold south. But all of these things learned later in life are ahead of the story on which we started—the story of the child and the streamlet preparing, almost like twin beings, for their long journey in those young days when beauty was not stated in big words, but yet was felt.

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When the creek said goodbye to the children and wandered off downhill it began to lose its plant and tree companions. The bush that it entered did not remain the same on its downward journey. This high country bush, consisting largely of trees which the bushmen call birch and which the professors call beech, was not the kind of bush that sawmillers prefer to use. But it was roamed over by, and the trees and small growths were damaged by, bushline farmers' wandering cattle and by deer brought years ago from Europe; also by fires lighted by careless people who think that bush is made to be burned, and who are sometimes correctly called vandals. As the creek flowed on, downward and downward and bigger and bigger as other creeks joined it, it entered the country where sawmillers had cut and removed what they deemed best in the bush, and vandals burned what was left. Released from the roots of the dead trees, and washed by the unchecked rains, the earth of the hillsides fell into the creek, which, dammed up, became a temporary lake and in floodtime washed the earth of the hillsides down on to the farmers' plains, where farms were ruined. Thus, in fifteen or fifty miles of downhill running, the stream, now river, learned by muddy experience that life