

Rising Water

By Janet S. Porter

The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook
pp. 40-41, using his own words

CHARACTERS (4 – 2 males, 1 female and 1 Narrator)

Phineas Wolcott Cook (PWC)

Ann Eliza (his wife)

Benjamin Waldron

Narrator

Narrator: In May of 1846 Phineas Wolcott and Ann Eliza Cook and their two children left Richland, Michigan to join the Latter-day Saints at Nauvoo. Half-way there they discovered the Saints were on their way to the temporary camp at what came to be known as Winter Quarters.

PWC: I've never seen rain like this. Standing water is two-thirds of the way to the hubs of our wagon, and we're just plodding along through it. We're drenched to the skin.

Narrator: Along the way the Cooks had met Benjamin Waldon and Levi Savage, and the three families traveled together.

PWC: But we're traveling slowly, and my oxen are exhausted from pulling through so much water. It seems as though the heavens are composed of clouds and water. It has rained almost continually night and day, and has done so almost the whole time since we left Walnut Creek.

Narrator: The rivers and streams became torrents of mud and water, and overflowed their banks. Small streams became raging rivers, uprooting trees and washing them downstream.

PWC: You can see what it was like to cross the streams. One morning we came to a stream which should have been a simple matter to cross, but under the circumstances we hardly knew what to do.

Narrator: While the three families traveling together were hard-working farmers, they were not equipped for the challenging river crossings. Phineas Wolcott Cook generally took the lead in all the hard and dangerous places.

PWC: The Lord was with me and this always encouraged me and gave me strength.

Narrator: Even so, as they crossed one of the streams, it was such hard going, Phineas had to keep pushing his oxen forward, even though it was too hard on them.

PWC: I couldn't just let my wagon float down twenty miles to the Mississippi River. When we finally got to the other side, I could see I had strained one of my oxen. It was very bad because the next morning I could see he had the dry murrain.

Narrator: Murrain is a Biblical term which passed into modern usage. It meant some kind of infection in cattle. It wasn't really a diagnosis for a specific illness, but rather an observation of the symptoms of disease.

PWC: Whatever you call it, my ox was dying.

(Ann Eliza comes on the stage)

Ann Eliza: Phineas what are you doing out here in the dark?

PWC: I'm doctoring my ox. By noon today he could hardly even walk. I knew he was sick, so I had medicine at hand: 1 pint of hog's lard, ½ pint of soot, a lump of rosin about the size of a hen's egg, and ½ pint of salt."

Ann Eliza: Yuck, no wonder he's sick. That's pretty bad medicine.

PWC: Often that has helped my cattle in the past, but this time, he was no better. When we finally stopped, he just lay down still in the yoke.

Ann Eliza: Then how did he get over here under the trees?

PWC: After I let him loose, he rested right there on the road. Then I got him up and brought him here to the trees, but he's no better. I think he's a goner. It's very hot, but he won't even drink anything.

Ann Eliza: You stay out here with him and I'll go take care of the children.

(Ann Eliza leaves and the Narrator comes to the stage.)

PWC: I have a feeling I should lay my hands on him and pray for him.

Narrator: Phineas gave his ox a blessing, right there under the trees. He had never given a blessing before. In fact he hadn't even been in the church a year yet.

PWC: But nevertheless, I knew about the power of God, and had faith I could do it. And do you know what? While my hands were on him I heard a rumbling noise inside of him. I took it to be a testimony that my prayers were answered.

(Ann Eliza returns)

Ann Eliza: Phineas, you were out here almost all night. How is your ox?

PWC: He's much better. I gave him a blessing, and right away he improved. This morning I found him eating grass, so I took him down to the water and he drank hearty. Then, as he turned around, his physic operated. That must have been the rumbling noise I heard inside him last night.

Ann Eliza: I'll not forget to thank the Lord for this blessing. We need that ox.

PWC: I think I'll borrow one of Brother Savage's loose cattle to put in his place today to give him a rest, but he'll be all right now.

Narrator: After crossing the Mississippi River in a barge, the little party of travelers came to the Des Moines River.

(Ann Eliza and the Narrator leave the stage and Waldron comes in)

PWC: The Des Moines River is at least 50 rods--about 300 yards wide, and the current is so swift we can't just cross it by driving our teams into the water. We'll have to raise up our wagon beds 6 or 8 inches to keep them out of the water. I think I can do it, but I have no tools. Does anyone have a hammer?

Waldron: I have a hammer. Let's get busy. It's going to take an entire day to get the 3 wagons and all our animals across the river.

PWC: I waded every river 9 times back and forth to help all the others. The sheep were the worst. They were more trouble than all the other animals combined.

Waldron: You look tired, Phineas.

PWC: I worked too hard today. My ague ('ā,gyōō) is returning. I think I'll just take my opium pills for Malaria and go to bed.

Waldron: Thanks for helping all of us. I'm glad we met up on the road. We couldn't have made it without you.

PWC: It was worth it. Now we're on the Mormon Road from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters. We're almost there! Nothing can stop us now!

Family Discussion

There was no handbook for the stressful situations in which the Cooks found themselves.

How did Phineas gain the knowledge he needed to accomplish work he had never done in situations he had never faced?

Many times Phineas gave credit to the Lord for his ideas and his success. He was a common farmer, unprepared for the rigors of such a long journey. He admitted he knew nothing about what to do, but followed the spirit:

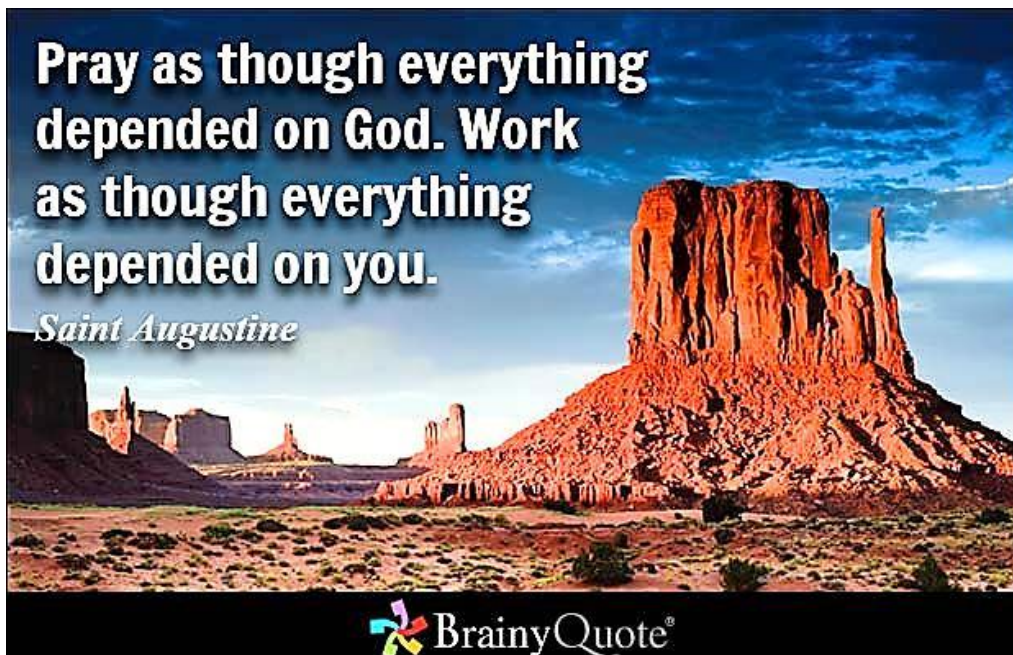
"The thought came into my head I should lay my hands on (my ox) and pray for him."

"The Lord was with me and this always encouraged me and gave me strength."

The strength of Phineas Wolcott Cook came from his ability to let the spirit teach him. He was well aware he wasn't smart enough to know everything, but trusted the Lord to help him learn what to do next.

Phineas was the perfect example of a statement attributed to Saint Augustine, printed below. He honored his inspiration and ingenuity, but he worked as if it all depended on him.

How can understanding where his strength came from help us in our stresses and trials?





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