

The Missionary

By Victor Beshir

John and Mike were in their way to the first home visit of their mission. They came from Chicago to the village of Gabal El Tair in Egypt to feed the hungry and the needy. Both were college students. John was a steward in his church. Mike was not a religious young man, but he was searching for a meaning of life. For him, life still has no value or meaning or purpose. Material items, in his opinion, cannot water his thirst for something inside him. However, it still beyond him, and he does not comprehend it, but he is in searching for. His happiness was depending upon finding a purpose and a meaning for his life. When a local church asked for volunteers for the relief mission, he gave his name, not because of interest in helping others, but because of the tasteless life he has. He just liked to go away!

It was a cold night, when Mike and John knocked at the door of the poor family. The door was opened to one room with no furniture except one old bed and a small table that has an aged stove on the top of it. Mike looked around the room, he saw a family of Five; parents and three children; two girls and one boy. When they saw the guests they hardly get off the bed to greet them. The children's clothes were so old that you can see their bodies through the holes of it. Mike said to himself: 'My god . . .how could they survive the cold of the winter with this kind of cloth?' Soon Mike and John found out that there is no place for them to sit except on the rigid cold floor. Once they have sat down, they felt a strong cold air coming from all-round the door like arrows coming after them. Mike's eyes went around the room to find only two pale sad pictures hanging from the wall. He found the children's school books on three piles on the floor. On bed, there was only one old blanket for the whole family.

To welcome their guests, the family turned on their stove to warm the place. John was planning for a bible reading, but he noticed that children look sick, and weak. They hardly walk or even open their eyes. Children were so skinny that you can count their ribs. John whispered in Mike's ear: "I cannot read the Bible tonight." Mike tried to start a dialogue with the family, but he could not; he was overwhelming of the poverty of the family. So, he thought to give them what he has and leave.

Mike went outside to his car and carried some food and cloth, and get inside quickly; he could not stand the cold outside, and gave it to the mother. When children saw the food, they snatched it and started eating wildly, while tears shed on the mother's cheek, her voice came shaking: "excuse the children. This is their first meal in two days. The children and I were praying every hour to God to send us food. They were crying before your coming because their abdomens were aching badly." Mike hardly controlled himself, asked parents to eat too, and then left with John.

Mike went back to his assigned headquarter, but he could not sleep. The voice of the mother saying that the children have not eaten for two days was so stirring. He could not bear to hear about the pain they had because of hunger. He covered his

face with his hands and cried bitterly. He heard about poverty before, but he never thought it could be that devastating. He remembered himself when he was a small child. He had his own room filled with tens of games. He also remembered how much clothes he had; for winter, for summer, for casual and for important occasions. He compared that with a whole family living in one room that has about nothing. He cried again and again. Finally, he gathered his strength, and for the first time in his life, he felt that he needs help from God. He knelt down and prayed, then went to sleep with his eyes still full of tears.

Second day, Mike saw the children in the main square of the village. They ran to him, and hug him for a long time. They sat with him, played with him, and showed him around the village. Their small hands were engaged with his big hands in real happiness. He had a wonderful time with the children that comfort his grieve of yesterday.

Mike and John went back to the family with food, and they knew that the life of this family, and other families in the village, hang on their support. Many times, Mike called his church on Chicago and screamed on the phone asking for more assistance. When their response came back with the words "We have many other important affairs to pay for," Mike shouted impatiently: "You don't know what is important? You have not experienced ache of hunger." Always his words and emotions resulted in more assistance to the poor.

Mike and John started new classes in their headquarter. Children from the village came to learn, and even adults came to the classes too. When people came to the class, children hugged Mike and kissed him with love. Men shake hands with him very friendly with a big smile and pat on the back. At the end of the class, they sat outside on the sand. They played, laughed heartily, told jokes, sing joyfully, and then leave happily.

Mike was amazed of these poor people. How could they be happy, while they have nothing, even their food they don't have! He said to himself: "They live in our assistance, and when we leave, they may go on hunger again!" He tried to find an answer, day after day, but in vain! Meanwhile, he did not ask them, because he did not expect an answer, since they were not that intellectual. He also questioned their love to him and their warm relationship to each other, but he could not find an answer either. Finally, he said to himself: "It seems that to live the happiness is more meaningful than to question it, and to enjoy the love is more fulfilling than to examine it." This thought gave his mind peace, and pushed him to spend more time with the poor.

Soon, summer was over. Mike and John had to go back to their colleges. Mike had to say good bye to the people he loved. It was not an easy farewell. For the first time in his life, he realized the true meaning of life and experienced the purpose of it. He felt that a stream of life flew from the hearts of the poor to his heart. They gave him what he could not get with all the money he had, they gave him back his lost life.