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Lee

THE BLIND NATIVE: From the Sky Pilot's Log, 2CH Broadcast

George, Palmer and I were mustering on the plains north of the Roper River in Arnhem Land. We were closer to the Rose River than the Roper, and had entered country that was rather new to us, though we had travelled through it several times before.

We made camp one evening and as the sun was setting we sat round the ground sheet that served as a table and enjoyed the evening meal — even if it was only salt junk and damper. Some distance away we saw several rock wallabies hopping slowly about as they fed on the green grass near the water, or sat up watching us, though with little evidence of fear. George drew our attention to one of the wallabies that was acting strangely.

"Have a look," he said, "at the wallaby out on its own; can you notice anything wrong with it?"

"You mean that dark brown one facing us now?" I asked.

"That's the one. Watch how it feeds. There you are! Can you see anything wrong with it?"

"I saw it stumble just now," I replied, "as if it wasn't watching where it was going. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes; it's done that several times since I've been watching. It must be sick or something."

"It seems fat enough to me," Palmer put in, "and healthy, too. George, you've always worrying about something or other. We can't do anything for it even if it is sick. I don't know why you waste so much time over animals and things. You're worse than Smithy."

"Well," said George, "you have books and things to read in your spare time, Silas; that's your hobby — or whatever you like to call it. I ain't much good at readin' and I like to watch the things in nature; that's my hobby. I'm interested in that wallaby. I think I'll take a stroll over to see what's the matter with it."

As George walked quietly towards the wallabies they began hopping away. The sick one was the last to move. It turned its head this way and that and finally stared straight at George. As he drew nearer to it, the animal turned and hopped away. Its movements were clumsy for it stumbled once or twice and even bumped into a tree that was in the way.

"Hey," George called. "Let's try to catch it, you fellows. Get the stock boys to help and we'll surround it. It shouldn't be difficult."

Palmer grumbled a bit but did as George asked and soon we had the animal cornered

against the side of a steep cliff. As the men closed in the frightened animal turned its head from side to side. George was standing still and the wallaby made straight for him, as if it could not see him. George stooped suddenly and grabbed, holding the struggling animal by one leg.

"By jove!" he exclaimed. "It can kick! There can't be much the matter with it. Help me hold it, Smithy, my hand's slipping. Now, little fellow, no one's goin' to hurt you; we only want to see what's the matter. It seems fat enough and healthy enough, I can't see what . . . good heavens! The wallaby's got no eyes! It's stone blind."

We crowded round and examined the frightened animal. George stroked its head softly, and as if understanding that he was a friend, the wallaby sniffed at his hand and then nestled close to him for protection.

George spoke gently. "Upon my soul!" he said. "Just look at that. It's all right, Joey, you don't need to be afeared of old George. I'll look after you and feed you for the rest of your life. I wonder what could have happened to its eyes?"

"Maybe it's had some disease," said Palmer, "you'd better look out in case it's something catchy."

"That's not likely," I suggested. "Although there are some diseases that can be passed on to man from animals, there are not as many as people think. Animals have a higher temperature as a rule; that may have something to do with it."

George shook his head. "I don't think it was a disease at all. If it were the eyes might have lost their sight, but they'd probably not have dropped out. No, I reckon a crow or somethin' must have picked out the eyes when the wallaby was a baby. It's a wonder it's able to live without its sight."

"I didn't realise that it was blind," said Palmer. "It must have wonderful hearing to get away from us as it did. You caught it because you were standing still and it ran right into your arms. What are you going to do with it?"

"I'm goin' to make it my mascot," George announced. "I'll take it back to the hut and look after it. I'll teach Pincher to look after it; he's a good dog and he won't let nothin' hurt it. Poor little animal."

* * *

The weeks went by and George's blind wallaby became used to his hut. It was wonderful the

acute hearing it had. It knew the sound of George's footsteps and could go to him immediately, even if he was with several other men.

One day George came to me with a spare horse and saddle and I guessed he wanted me to go somewhere with him. I was not mistaken, but George was some time introducing the object of his visit.

"Hullo, Smithy," he said. "How's things?"

"Not too bad. What can I do for you today?"

"Well — ch — you know that blind wallaby of mine?"

"Yes. Don't tell me it's sick or injured or something."

"No, oh no, it's all right. It wasn't about that I came to see you."

"Well, what was it you came about?"

"Are you very busy?"

"Up to the eyes in work. Why?"

"There's a fellow I'd like you to come to see — a black man; leastways he's nearly black, I suppose you could call him a half-caste."

"What's the matter with him?"

"He's blind, Smithy, like my rock wallaby — stone blind. He's been livin' alone for a long time with no one but an old black gin to look after him. But he's been eddicated in Darwin and he can speak English like a white man. He's terrible lonely and I thought maybe — that is, if you ain't too busy — well, anyways I've brought a spare horse."

"Of course I'll come. I'll be ready in half an hour. Thanks for letting me know about him."

As we rode towards the hut where David, the blind halfcaste, lived, I wondered what sort of man he would be. A great physical affliction, such as blindness, very often makes a man very gentle and patient or else hard and bitter. It all depends on the way he takes it. I was not long left in doubt as to how David had taken it. George took me into the hut and introduced me to the blind man. He looked up at me with a smile on his face. When I say that he **looked** at me, that is exactly how it appeared, in spite of his blindness.

"I'm so glad you came," he said in a soft voice. "George said you would come, but I know how busy you are. Sit down, won't you? I'm afraid I can't do much to entertain you. Jinny does my cooking and she can make you a cup of tea, but I haven't anything to offer you to eat except salt junk and damper."

"A cup of tea would be fine," I said. "Don't worry about anything to eat, we put biscuits and stuff in the saddle bags in case we got hungry; George will put them out while Jinny

makes up the fire. Now tell me, how long have you been here?"

"Only about a month. Jim brought me here and built the hut on his land. He wanted me to stay with him, but I prefer not to be — well, not to be a burden on anyone."

"Don't talk rot," George interrupted. "You wouldn't be a burden to either Jim or me. Any time you like you can come and stay with me — or with Jim — you know that."

"Yes," said David. "It's very good of you both. But I like to be alone and I'm never lonely. I have a friend always with me."

"You mean old Jinny?" said George, with a laugh. "She's not a bad sort is Jinny, but she's about seventy in the shade. Besides she's a deaf as a bettle. She ain't what you might call good company at any time."

"Jinny has been very good to me; but I was not thinking of her. God is very close to me here and I have learned to talk to Him all day long. We understand each other so well. He speaks to me sometimes in various ways and I'm always talking to Him; but mostly we just sit. It's very comforting to have someone you love sit beside you all through the day and night."

"Hem! yes, I suppose so," George sounded doubtful. "But tell me, David, how long you have been blind?"

"I was blind for twenty years; but I only lost my sight about five years ago."

"What do you mean," George asked, "by sayin' that you were blind for twenty years, but you lost your sight five years ago?"

"I mean I was blind to God for twenty years; then He opened my eyes. Soon after that there was an accident in the mine — a blasting accident in the tin mine — and I lost my sight. But I didn't mind so much then because I had God with me. It would have been terrible without."

"I always feel terribly sorry," said George, "for anyone that's blind. I have a pet wallaby at home that's blind; but it seems very happy."

"That is because you are good to it. You are like a God to it and it's happy just to be with you. I expect it's very sad when you go away mustering?"

"Yes, it frets somethin' awful. If I have to be away for a long time I usually take it with me."

"But you see, God never leaves me — not for an instant. That's why I'm never lonely."

"Don't you sometimes regret losing your sight?" I asked.

"Yes, often; especially when I can't see friends

who are kind to me. But if I can touch them it helps. Do you mind if I touch your face?"

"Of course not. Go right ahead."

"David sees with his fingers," George explained unnecessarily. "If I bring him a flower he smells it and touches it with his fingers and then he can tell me more about it than I've noticed myself."

David smiled and walked across the room as easily as if he had his sight. Then his long, delicate fingers touched my face. Their lips ran lightly over my features and then David sighed and went back to his seat. He had seen me with his fingers. An hour later George and I rode from the hut but we felt that we had been on holy ground.

We had listeners to this radio session who were blind — or nearly blind — and these simple stories brought some brightness and interest and maybe something of comfort into their long, long night. I am very glad that my earlier books were translated into Braille and have been read by many hundreds of blind people. Did I say **blind** people? Many of these we call blind have keener eyesight than those of us with eyes. A friend sent me a paper with these verses:

FOR THE BLIND

A special tenderness and love
Within my heart I find
For those whose light is blotted out,
For you whom men call blind.
Because you grope through darkened days.
Yet often have I seen
Your sightless faces glow with light
As though you long have been
Alone with God, as though you dwelt
In some bright place apart,
Where lighted candles lighted all
The chambers of your heart.
Give me your vision! These my eyes
Too often look on sin
And human woe, and must until
My heavenly life begin.
Oh patient eyelids, closed and still,
How blessed it must be

To know HIS FACE WILL BE THE NEXT
YOUR OPENED EYES WILL SEE.

And the final entry in today's Log is taken from the 42nd chapter of Isaiah: "I will bring the blind by a way which they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them."

THE DARK CHILDREN: The school reports for the children are usually very disappointing.

In almost every case the teacher's comments are to the effect that the children could all do a lot better if they made a simple effort to do so. They are not lacking in ability or opportunity but they are unwilling to make an attempt to help themselves. This is a characteristic of the Aborigines but it also applies to all children with unfortunate backgrounds or who come from broken homes. It is marked amongst the children of refugees in all parts of the world.

Eddie, who worked at Marella after he left school until he was twenty-one, is still working with the P.M.G. Department where he is doing well. His brother, Colin, is working on a dairy farm at Camden and is happy in the work. Both these boys have looked after themselves and are a credit to us.

Nurse Isabelle Thorne has been working at the Sydney City Mission Home for elderly folk at Redfern for about ten years. We hear very good reports of her work and she is a favourite in the Home.

Rita Fisher is now married and recently we heard that she is very happy and doing well. Marj. Sheard married Mr. Pittman in October 1971 and they are very happy living at Merriwa, N.S.W. Several of our other girls have married and settled down; they sometimes bring their children along to see us. It is very rewarding to realise that so many have made good.

Mervyn broke the School Record for the hurdles at a recent Sports Day; he has been picked to represent the State in several events. Geoff is also doing well at sport. He has been sportsman of the year at his school and is continuing to keep up his reputation on the playing field.

Some of the boys played Soccer during the winter and will be playing cricket with a Methodist Church Team under the guidance of Mr. Nash, the Farm Manager.

Ronnie Smith, who was one of our problem boys years ago, met with a fatal car accident. He lost his mother just a week or so earlier and our sincere sympathy goes out to his Father and his sisters, Dawn and Eleanor. Mr. and Mr. Langford-Smith and Mrs. Norma Warwick represented Marella at the funeral.

Some of our children have been attending Castle Hill High School and others the Baulkham Hills High School. With the approval of the Department we have now arranged for all our children to be transferred to Castle Hill High School.

We would value your continued prayers for our children, the staff and the future developments in this work.