

SKY PILOT NEWS

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"Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while."

ONLY A BLACKFELLOW: A story from the Sky Pilot's Log (2CH Broadcast).

It was flood time. The seething, muddy waters of the Roper River tossed against the overhanging cliffs and tumbled over obstacles that stood in their way. Great flashes of lightning split the sky, and the crash of thunder caused even the forest giants to shiver and tremble to their roots. When rain came it was great sheets of water poured on to waterlogged soil; it flooded off the surface in huge yellow streams, pouring into the rapidly-

rising river.

In a bark hut on a sand ridge back from the river, an aboriginal man lay dying; beside him, head in hands, his half-caste wife. The daughter, no more than three years of age, played happily in a corner, unconscious of the tragedy that was imminent.

The monsoon whistled and howled round the hut, straining and tearing at the bark walls and roof; then, as if conscious of its inability

to dislodge the hut, it moaned, and died in the distance. The silence that followed seemed suddenly loud, and the weak voice of the dying man could be heard clearly. "Mary," he said, "it's no use. I'm dying, and you know it. There ain't nothing we can do about it. You—you'll look after little Brownie, won't you?"

"Stop it, Jack," his wife said fiercely. "You mustn't talk like that. I'll go to the Mission for help, and Moninga will come in the aeroplane and take you to hospital."

The sick man smiled faintly. "You've been a good wife to me, Mary," he told her. "But the river's in flood. How you goin' to cross? That there dug-out canoe ain't no good in a flood. You know that."

"I don't care. If the canoe tips over, I can swim. I'm not going to let you die, Jack. The storm seems to be lifting a little; I'll go right away."

"No, Mary," he cried, reverting to pidgin English, "don't leave 'im me. More better you stay longa me. No matter me die. You hold me hand an' I can't be frightened no more. Me only blackfellow, but you all-a same white girl."

"Don't talk like that, Jack. I'm not white, I'm a half-caste. You were taught at the Mission the same as I was—only I was there longer."

"You could have married a white stockman. Allabout talk that way. You can cook, sew, read, write—everything like white girl. What for you marry a full-blood like me?"

"I didn't love a white stockman, and I did love you, Jack. Oh, I know they said I was mad. They said you were only a myall blackfellow and would soon get tired of me and leave me. But you didn't. You've been very kind to me, and I'm not sorry I married you. But I'm sorry you're sick. You're very sick, and I haven't got any medicine. Never mind, I'll go for help now, and soon you'll be in hospital. The floods don't matter to the aeroplane."

"No, Mary, don't go. The river is in flood too muchee. Mightbe you drown. An' what about Brownie? You can't take her."

"You'll have to look after Brownie, Jack. She won't be frightened with you, and I won't be away for long. You're a Christian boy now, Jack. We'll say a little prayer together. God can't take you away from me when we love each other so much. You pray with me."

Brown hair mingled with black as the little half-caste wife bowed over the rough greenhide bunk and prayed as simply as a little child. When she arose her eyes were

shining. "It's right now, Jack, quite all right. I know God can't let us be parted. I feel it in my heart, deep down. You look after Brownie. Maybe you'd better hold her hand, in case she gets away and follows me to the river. You'll look after her, won't you? She's all I've got, except you."

The river was still in flood when we sent the motor boat across to pick up George. He was dancing and yelling on the opposite bank and seemed impatient at the delay. We could not hear what he was saying, which was, perhaps, just as well. There was a little coloured girl with George; she looked up with wide, frightened eyes as one of our kitchen lubras took her away for a meal. When she was gone, I turned to George. "Come on, George," I said, "let's have the story. I can see you're nearly busting to tell it. Who is this girl, and where did you find her?"

George cleared his throat and answered by a question. "Do you remember a half-caste girl named Mary? She left the Mission close on four years ago, maybe five—I ain't sure."

"Yes, of course I do. She was a fine Christian girl. She married a full-blood. He was a good lad, too; I expected great things from him. I've lost track of them lately."

"Well, I can tell you now they was camped near the mouth of the river. This little girl I brought is their only child. Her name's Brownie. I want you to look after her at the Mission from now on."

"But what about the parents? Are they agreeable? I must have their consent."

"Wait till I tell you the story. You keep buttin' in and won't give me a chance. Me an' Jim found Brownie. We was comin' up the south bank of the river and making hard goin' of it, too. The horses was bogged almost up to their bellies sometimes. I ain't never seen such country for ridin' about in after a storm. Believe me . . ."

"What about Brownie? Never mind the state of the track."

"I'm tellin' you, ain't I? Gimme a chance. Well, me and Jim found a bark hut on a sand ridge. It was nearly surrounded by water. We could do with a bit of shelter, so we went in. And do you know what we found?"

"You're telling the story. Go on."

"By heavens, Smithy, I never met such a man for interruptin'. Now, where was I? Oh, yes. We went into the hut, and blow me if there wasn't a dead blackfellow there, lyin' on a greenhide bunk. But that ain't all. He was holding this little girl by the hand real tight."

"I thought you said he was dead?"

"So he was. Dead as the salt junk the Mission calls 'corn-beef'! But he was holdin' this little girl by the hand, and, cross-me-heart, Smithy, it took Jim and me all our time to force open his dead hand and let little Brownie free."

"But where was Mary—the mother?"

"I don't rightly know where she is, Smithy, but I can guess. The kid told us her dad was sick. He was asleep, she reckoned, and she was sittin' real still, in case she woke him. Her mother had gone to the Mission to get you and the aeroplane to take her dad to the hospital."

"But she never came here, George. I've been here all the time myself, and I didn't get even a message."

"I ain't surprised at that. You know what the river is like right now. Would you like to cross it in a hollowed tree trunk? Maybe you could; I've seen you do mad things often enough. But Mary was only a little slip of a thing. She weren't strong, and she weren't much of a swimmer. But by heavens, Smithy, do you realise what that couple did? She was only a half-caste married to a black-fellow, but she must have loved him to leave her little gal and try to cross a flooded river. And what about him? Brownie said he promised to mind her while the mother was away. He minded her, all right. He never let go her hand, not when he was dyin', and long after he was dead we had to break his grip to get her free. Some white folks don't love like that. Me, I ain't married, thank God, but I've heard a lot about divorce down south. There weren't no talk of divorce when Mary and Jack got side-lines and hobble straps on each other."

George's voice died away, and I looked out the window at the cruel, sullen water sweeping relentlessly in flood to the Gulf of Carpentaria. I was not thinking of the dead father with his faithful love grip on his only child, nor was I thinking of the slim, brown body, with a halo of long wavy hair, tossing its way out to sea; no, I was thinking of another remark the child had made to George. "Mummy prayed for daddy, and she said: 'Please, God, don't let us be parted, 'cos we love each other so'."

And the final entry in to-day Log is taken from the eighth chapter of Romans: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

THE "SKY PILOT." We are glad to say that, in spite of various delays, the "Sky Pilot" eventually got away on his much-needed holiday. He is travelling alone by car through Nyngan, Cobar, Wilcannia, Broken Hill, Adelaide, Port Augusta, Ceduna, Kingoonya, Coober Pedy, Ayers Rock, Alice Springs, Arnhem Land and Darwin. We were much impressed by the many invitations which came from friends and Missions on the "truck". Unfortunately, time does not permit Mr. Langford-Smith to spend time with them all. Already he has visited several old Territorians (now retired), and many Church and Mission Stations in the various States. We look forward to having a full description of his travels after his return. In recent letters, he speaks most highly of the splendid work being done by the Bush Church Aid Society with their churches, hospitals and flying medical services in the country surrounding Ceduna, where he was the guest of Sister Dowling, one time from Summer Hill, and a great friend of the Langford-Smith family. The following extracts from his last letter may be of interest to our readers:

A DESERT PLACE

"I am writing this under the rather doubtful shade of a mulga cluster. I am sitting on sand. There is sand all around me, and almost as far as the eye can see: loose, red, drifting sand, scarcely held in place by the salt-bush and false spinifex that grows, sometimes, in these parts. At present there is not a living thing in sight. Not a crow, a hawk, a lizard, or even an ant. One's first thought is: 'What a hopeless, lonely, deserted place!' But it is not really lifeless or deserted. The cool of the evening approaches, and see, there is an eagle-hawk, gliding on effortless wings. There is a twittering in the mulga, and thousands of finches appear. The shadow to the left is really a lizard, wary and ready to raise his great frill at the slightest sign of danger. There are faint rustlings in the undergrowth, and one learns that the desert is full of life, teeming with little folk living out their brief lives in the sand hills. I can imagine our Lord saying: 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest a while.' Years of strain, anxiety and overwork have had their result in tired mind and weary body. Where is the best place to rest? Is it strange to choose a desert? Paul had his time in the desert and our Lord in the wilderness. In every case the desert was the preparation for some greater work to follow. A desert is no place for the man who is 'finished', for one who has 'retired' or given up the struggle; for such there are green pastures, still waters,

and an armchair to doze in the sun. If you are going through a 'desert place' in your life, it is because God has something very special awaiting you after that experience. If we dodge the desert, we miss the blessing—and others miss the blessing that flows from our experience.

"God never **sends** us into the desert, He **leads** us there. Who is afraid of a desert shared with Christ? I have lessons to learn, you likewise. When these are learned our path will lead out of the desert into the place of service. But the sun is setting and I must make camp, for to-morrow my path leads deeper, still deeper into the desert. Carry on the good work till I return fit and well to bear my share of the burden."

DAY FOR "SHUT-INS." The annual day for "shut-ins" was held on Saturday, 2nd March. For the first time, we had sufficient voluntary drivers to bring not only all our guests, but also the members of the Women's Auxiliary, who so kindly gave up their time to care for the catering and other necessary work. There was a wonderful feeling of Christian fellowship on the day. God had sent us perfect weather, and we feel that this was the happiest and most successful day of the kind we have ever had. We do want to express our thanks to the car drivers who gave time, petrol and effort to make the day a really happy one. Then the members of the Women's Auxiliary prepared a delicious lunch, including turkey sandwiches and fruit salad and real cream. We thank these workers very sincerely; also those who made gifts of cakes, scones, tea, sugar, butter, etc., not forgetting the Rector of St. Paul's Church of England, Castle Hill, who kindly lent us seats.

APEX CLUB. The members of the Apex Club have already done so much for us that we are beginning to think of them as "OUR" Club. We received another visit from them during the month, and they laid concrete paths, cemented the floor of toilet and bathroom for the dark children, and laid new concrete in the all-weather shelter shed they built previously for the children. Our sincere thanks go out to them.

WOMEN'S AUXILIARY. The members are as active as ever, and the monthly Street Stall in the grounds of Parramatta Town Hall

seems to be better each time. Date for the next one is Wednesday, 15th May. During the absence of the "Sky Pilot", Mrs. Hampson will take the chair at the monthly meetings of the Auxiliary. We will be glad to welcome any new members or visitors who may be able to come along. For further particulars, please 'phone Mrs. Hampson (LF9757), or Marella Mission Farm (YA2427).

PRAY FOR US. Much as we realise the need for a complete change and rest for Mr. Langford-Smith, we are faced with problems that arise due to his absence. Firstly, there is the question of finance. Friends have been very good in sending along special ear-marked gifts towards the cost of this trip. That has meant that we have not yet had to call on general funds. The Shell Company, recognising the value of the pioneering work done by Mr. Langford-Smith in the past, has made a substantial reduction in the price of the petrol used on the trip. We are deeply grateful for this. However, the fact remains that we have many children to feed, and we have been asked if we can accommodate more in the near future. Please remember this in your prayers and your giving. God is able and willing to provide, but He does it through human agencies. Are you one of His agents?

Another problem is that of labour. Caring for so many dark children, as well as trying to carry on the routine farm work, such as feeding poultry and pigs, milking, caring for the pets, is hard work, and it usually falls on Mrs. Langford-Smith and Isabelle. Then there are letters to be answered, reports to compile and forward, books to be kept up-to-date for audit, and many other duties which fall entirely on the shoulders of the Secretary, Mrs. Norma Warwick. If you should visit the Farm and discover a few weeds in the crops, if you find urgent jobs such as painting and repair of buildings more or less at a standstill, if you have to wait a little longer for a reply to your letter than you expected, please remember that a limited staff is doing what it can to keep going. We need your kindly understanding and prayers. This work is growing almost daily. The future is promising. God will undertake for the present, and with your help we will see that when the "Sky Pilot" returns he will find that during his absence the work has not only been carried on, but has grown greatly to the glory of God and for the extension of His kingdom.