

# SKY PILOT NEWS

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Patron: Rt. Rev. Bishop W. G. Hilliard, M.A. Director: K. Langford-Smith, F.R.G.S. Secretary: Norma K. Warwick.  
Postal address: P.O. Box 29, Castle Hill, N.S.W.

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"CHRISTMAS WITH THE R.A.A.F."

Photo by courtesy R.A.A.F.

**CHRISTMAS:** With the coming of Christmas, thoughts turn somewhat naturally to parties for the children. No matter if we take the Authorised Version rendering, "On earth peace, goodwill toward men," or the corrected version, "Peace upon earth among men of goodwill," the fact remains that, as Christians, we long to express that goodwill.

The dark children have missed so many of the good things of life that it is a special pleasure to bring added happiness to them at this season. We are deeply grateful to those friends who have arranged parties for the children; friends far too numerous to mention

by name. Besides many Churches and affiliated organisations, we have been assisted by individual members of Rotary, Apex, Soroptomist, the combined employees of the G.P.O., the R.A.A.F., Red Cross Younger Set, Woollen Mills Employees, the Exhibition Tennis Court, Greenacre . . . . but it is quite impossible to list them all. Many of these friends are not content with a party or outing for the children, but have worked for the practical care of the children throughout the year.

Without detracting one iota from the love and Christian thought behind these Christmas festivities, one is reminded that not only will

Christmas soon be here, but Christmas will also soon be over — and what of the future?

**LIFE IS NOT A PARTY:** For the Aboriginal, life cannot be just a party; it would not be good for him if it was. Most thoughtful white people today want to do something really constructive for the dark people of our own land. Unfortunately, there is a lot of confusion and doubt as to the best thing to do. The mere handing out of free rations by Governments or Missions, or any other such interested bodies, is no permanent answer; it is, perhaps, an easy way out — an extension of the party idea — let us “eat, drink and be merry” . . . . and forget the past wrongs or the future hopelessness. But why should we forget?

**PRIDE OF RACE:** Many of the mixed bloods of today are ashamed of their colour and ancestry. They would “pass” for white, if possible, and this seems to be the great ambition of many. A lot of this is caused by ignorance fostered by the once popular belief amongst whites that the aborigines were the lowest race on earth. To generalise in this way is not only dangerous, it is misleading. They have some primitive physical features, as have some other races. If we take culture as a guide, it is obvious that they are poor in material possessions, as a nomadic people must be; but they are capable of fine craftsmanship and artistic expression that we are only beginning to appreciate. Their social organisation was quite satisfactory for their way of life and, indeed, it was in some ways, no less intricate than our own. They were quite capable of adapting themselves to changed conditions and adjusting their laws to meet them, PROVIDED THEY HAD TIME. The white man gave them no time; with thoughtless ignorance or callous disregard, he swept away the foundations of their beliefs, laws, and customs — and then expressed surprise at the result!

**UNDERSTANDING THE ABORIGINES:** Volumes have been written about the Aborigines, their way of life, laws, customs, and beliefs; it is impossible to attempt to do more than answer one or two questions here. We can all point to individual Aborigines who have succeeded, in competition with whites, in reaching more than average heights in art, music, technical and professional walks of life. These efforts are interesting, praiseworthy, but not very important to the Aborigines as a whole, except as examples. If we are to understand the Aborigines, we could begin with a few simple thoughts:

**WHY FOOD-GATHERERS?** In isolated Australia there were few plants worth cultivating, and still fewer animals worth the husbandry. This is not the whole story, but at least it

shows that conditions were unfavourable to develop a race of gardeners or graziers; the obvious thing was to adopt the parasitical way of life.

**WHY NOMADS?** The nomadic life was essential under the circumstances. But those of us who lived amongst them soon found that they did not wander aimlessly from place to place because of “itchy feet”; they followed the game and the ripening of bush food. When food was plentiful, they camped for weeks on end in the same district. This is important to remember, because it shows that the nomadic life would soon give place to settled abode if conditions warranted it. We feel that a lot of the restlessness evidenced amongst Aborigines and mixed-bloods is accentuated by the fact that they have lost their pride of race, their religion, their beliefs, their true home, their ambition or hope — and they have not yet understood or embraced alternatives. The solution lies in teaching them that it is wrong to be ashamed of their dark blood; there is much to admire in the true Aboriginal. There have been deeds of great bravery and self-sacrifice on the part of remembered warriors — not merely the culture heroes of the eternal dream time. True, there are some beliefs and customs that are crude. Our own past history is not free of these, and today we are ashamed of the old witch hunts, trial by ordeal, torture, and so on. The average mixed-blood knows nothing about the better side of Aboriginal life, law, or custom; if he thinks of his dark ancestors, it is usually of some unfortunates living in bark or tin huts on the outskirts of civilisation. He should look beyond these victims of circumstance and, looking back, he can lift up his head, because he comes from a people who are law-abiding, strict, upright, just (according to their light); a shy, sensitive people, fond of fun and laughter; a rhythm-loving, dancing people. What need to be ashamed? It is the old Aboriginal who is ashamed of what his tribe has come to. He has no time for the lawless, disobedient, mocking “know-all” who has hung round the white man’s camp; and being ashamed, he has refrained from passing on the time-honoured laws and myths; the sacred secrets will die with him, rather than be passed on to those who do not deserve and would not appreciate.

**ARE THE ABORIGINES NATURALISTS?** Strange as it may seem, the Aborigines are not very keen students of nature. True, they have an almost uncanny knowledge of the habits of the animals they hunt. They are expert in finding food where the white man would starve, and their knowledge of tracking is proverbial. Against this, they do not realise that plants grow from seeds; nor have they any understanding of the metamorphosis of

insects; nor do they understand the conception of children, believing rather that spirit children, already in existence, enter the mother-to-be at some favourable locality and circumstance.

**HOW LONG HAVE THE ABORIGINES BEEN IN AUSTRALIA?** We do not know. It may have been one, or many thousands of years. It is assumed they came originally from Southern India, by way of Ceylon, the Malay Peninsula, and the East Indies. It is estimated that there were about 300,000 when the white man came to Australia. These were divided into about 500 tribes — some say 300 — but it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between true tribes and sub-tribes, or divisions, especially after the lapse of time. Most tribes had their own language. Usually they could understand, but not speak, the language of an adjoining tribe.

**IS THEIR RELIGION GOOD ENOUGH FOR THEM?** Quite apart from the Christian belief in salvation by faith and the revelation of God in His Book, it is sometimes suggested that the Aborigines could have been allowed to retain their own "religion" — laws, customs, beliefs. Even non-professing Christians who suggest this have several hurdles to overcome. As the Aborigines do not believe in death from disease caused by germs or virus, or any "natural" means, they assume that an enemy has used magic to cause the death. The "guilty" person has to be discovered and punished (usually killed). This means the execution (to us, the murder) of an innocent man, following a death in the tribe. Is that "good enough" to retain?

Cannibalism is sometimes practised during some ceremonies. Could we agree to retain this?

The forced prostitution of a sometimes terrified woman takes place in some ceremonies where, for a time, she becomes the property of the many men taking part. Can we consent to retain this?

The obvious answer is that some, at least, of the customs of the Aborigines have to be changed. If we discover the reason why these things take place, and the motive behind it, we usually find that it is not the motive that is wrong, but the way it is expressed. Generosity and the desire to please or honour a guest may be expressed by wife-lending. It could also be expressed by other means less obnoxious to our way of life that would be just as pleasing to the hospitality of the Aboriginal and considerably more pleasing to the wife in question. A little understanding and sympathetic guidance and advice would have done far more good than to denounce the Aboriginal as a depraved and immoral creature, which, in fact, he is not.

(We do not use the term *depraved* in the Theological sense).

**THE DARK CHILDREN:** What is the future of these dark children? First, we must see that they do not grow up bitter, frustrated, hateful of the dark colour. We could tell them perfectly true stories showing the best that is in their dark ancestors. We could at least show them that there is no basis in fact for the shame they sometimes express of their dark ancestry. They know nothing of old laws or customs; they have grown up amongst white people, and will eventually be absorbed in the white population. We can see that they have the prospect of normal employment, marriage and family life. There is a danger in dark communities isolated from contact with the whites; there is danger, also, in thinking that "assimilation" can be accomplished merely by scattering them amongst a white community, with little prospect of marriage or family life. Extra-marital associations with white men only lead to unwanted, or neglected children, and true happiness does not lie in this direction.

Each dark child should grow up with a sense of security and a reasonable hope of independence and a home of his own in the future. There is no reason why this should not be. There will be some failures, of course, as there are amongst whites, but these children of mixed blood could take their place in the community without upsetting our established order in any way. (Numerically, they are insignificant.) But handled wrongly, they will feel social outcasts and will tend to become, as some have already become, degraded cadgers and "hangers-on", a frustrated people, bitter, resentful, without ambition, and without hope.

**CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS:** All the dark children will be going away for three weeks' holiday in January. During this period the Mission Farm will be closed. There will only be a caretaker staff here, and we shall be busy with building and other repairs. Please make a note of the dates: Mission Farm closed from 1st to 25th January, 1960. We will be grateful if you will advise your friends of this fact. It is disappointing when friends come from a distance to see the dark children, only to find that they are not here. It will still be possible to leave parcels at the Mission Farm during January, and our other activities will continue as usual. Please remember, also, that this is one of the worst months of the year, as far as finance is concerned, so do not hold back sending your donations just because the children are away. Letters will be acknowledged and receipts sent out, as usual.

**USED POSTAGE STAMPS:** We are always glad to receive used postage stamps, for sale in

aid of the work. Several friends have kindly offered to help sort and bundle these stamps, ready for sale. We are grateful for this offer, but we have many thousands of stamps to handle, and there is room for many more voluntary helpers.

**CHRISTMAS GREETINGS:** In past years we have sent out some hundreds of Christmas cards to our friends and supporters. Owing to the increase in cost and postage, this is no longer possible. Also, our family of friends is growing to such an extent that this personal gesture is no longer practical. We regret the fact; but we would like to take this opportunity of saying that our thoughts are with you all at this Christmas season. May the God of all grace bless and keep you, one and all, making this Christmas a time of happiness and rejoicing. Thank you for your past support, above all for your prayers, and may God's richest blessing be with you through the coming year.

**CLEO:** On one of the programmes seen on T/V, a Basset hound named Cleo appears to talk. The dark children are quite sure that all Bassets can talk, after seeing this very realistic picture. Mrs. Warwick has a Basset, and at present it is under deep suspicion. If any of the children have a secret to tell, they insist on going as far away from "Pixie" as possible, in case she overhears, and repeats the secret. The bush natives believe that the Willie-wag-tail is a teller of secrets; sometimes white people say: "A little bird told me", so why should not a Basset hound speak?

**CHILDREN AT SCHOOL:** All the dark children of school age attend the Public School at Castle Hill. They seem to mix well with the other children, and are wonderfully happy. When, through illness, they are unable to go to school, they are very disappointed indeed. Before they came to us, many of them did not attend school regularly; those who did so were often taken from school to school as the parents moved, in search of accommodation. This has, naturally, affected their schooling. However, they seem to be making good progress — some, excellent progress — and are able, for the most part, to hold their positions with white children of the same age. We cannot speak too highly of the staff at the school. The teachers have taken a personal interest in the children, and have, in many cases, taken considerable trouble to make the children feel at home.

**YOUR CO-OPERATION:** We seek your co-operation in our endeavour to train these children to take a normal place in the community. It must be remembered that some have come from the slum areas of the city where conditions were not favourable for children of any colour. It is important not to

encourage any feeling of inferiority or self-pity; on the other hand, they are easily spoiled and soon learn to "cash-in" on natural sympathy. Begging for money or food is certainly to be discouraged. They are never short of food, and, being brought up on a farm, are able to have many things that are not so plentiful in city homes. For instance, we have been picking strawberries in buckets full lately from several thousand plants. None of these are sold, all are kept for use in the Home. With plenty of cream from our two Jersey cows, these things add to the variety.

One small boy, however, fancied the particular cake a white child had with his lunch. He mournfully announced that the dark children never had cake. There was no truth in this, but the scheme worked. He had so much cake given to him that his lunch was untouched. We even had a 'phone call from a sympathetic friend, who wondered why this boy was denied cake! But a diet of all cake for several days brought its own punishment, and at the Christmas parties it was noticed that he passed by cake in favour of sandwiches.

It sometimes happens that the dark children beg for money for ice creams, etc. Some of the older ones went a stage further and started a house-to-house collection in the district. Fortunately, we heard about it in time, and took the necessary steps to stop it. But, as we mentioned, we need your co-operation. Maybe it is a temptation to give a small dark child a few pence when he begs for it. Please do not look at it in this light. Remember that by giving money in this way you are helping to bring out the worst in the dark child's nature. you are encouraging him in becoming a "cadger". This does not mean that it is wrong to give the children presents at Christmas, even pocket money to spend on ice creams, etc. (though it is better to give the money to one of the staff, who will see that it is properly used for the purpose for which it was given); but it does mean that to encourage begging is having a very harmful effect on the child's character. You may think that all children, no matter the colour, are alike. Maybe so; but the danger is greater with dark children. We want them to grow up, not as beggars, but as normal citizens, willing to work for the security they should have in the community.

**CONCLUSION:** As we come to the end of the old year we have much cause to praise God. The work is growing steadily; our circle of friends and supporters is expanding; the children are well and happy. We look forward to many improvements in the year to come. We are depending on you for prayer support and continued interest in this work for the little dark children who are trusting you.