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MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box 29, Castle Hill, N.S.W. 2154. Telephone 629-1555.

Director: K. Langford-Smith, Th.C., F.R.G.S.

Secretary: Mrs. Norma K. Warwick, Th.C.

Residential Address: Acres Road, Kellyville.

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George

Christmas cards depicting the above photo and sized 6" x 4", printed in black and white on art paper are available, with envelopes, at 7 cents each, plus postage, or one dozen for \$1.00 (postage paid.)

LONELY MAN: From the Sky Pilot's Log 2CH Broadcast

It was George who discovered him for me. It usually was George who discovered anything new or unusual. He said to me, one day. "Have you seen the fellow they call the Lazy Man?"

"Is that a riddle?" I asked. "Do you mean the man who's talking to me now, or the man I see when I'm shaving?"

George laughed. "I don't mean neither," he said. "Not this time anyways. No, I mean the fellow they *call* the Lazy Man. Mind you, I don't say he is lazy. Most of us are lazy when it comes to doin' somethin' we don't want to do. But this fellow has come to stay at the empty hut near the Roper Bar. I think his real name is Phil. Not that names matter in this country."

"No I haven't seen him yet," I admitted. "What's the matter with him?"

"You'll have to find that out for yourself. I can only tell you what the fellows say about him."

"And what do the fellows say about him?" I asked.

"They say he's a hermit. He lives to himself, and he don't do no work. Probably he's a remittance man. He always seems to have enough money to pay for stores and things."

"A hermit, is he? Does he warn visitors off with a gun or something?"

"No, nothin' like that at all," George reassured me. "I called to see him and he seemed a real decent sort of a fellow to me; but he's queer, very queer."

"Many people in Arnhem Land here are a bit queer in some way or another. In what way do you mean he's queer?"

"Well," said George, slowly, "He seems to live in a world of his own. Sometimes you can speak to him and he doesn't answer. He reads a lot, and he's eddicated. The mailman says he writes a heck of a lot of letters. The Aborigines say he sits up all night sometimes and writes."

"Writes letters or books or what?"

"I don't know; but they say he don't eat nor sleep when he's got some writin' to do. Then, when it's finished he throws down his pen and loaf about for days, eatin' and sleepin' as if he never done a day's work in his life. They say he's terrible tired lookin' after he's been taken by a bout of writin'. Ha, ha, it sounds like a bout of malaria or somethin', doesn't it?"

"Maybe he's a story writer, or something like that. You've got me interested. I would like to meet him."

"No time like the present," said George. "I'm goin' past that way myself tomorrow. How about comin' with me? I know you're interested in queer people."

"Yes, I find you very interesting, George. Someday I'll write a book and put you in it."

"Who, me? Break it down. Nobody won't be interested in me. But maybe you'll find somethin' in Phil that will be worth puttin' in a book. You'd better come along and see him."

* * *

George and I rode down the slope to the hut that nestled at the foot of a hill surrounded by trees. It was a lonely place. Very few white men went past the hut, as it was off the track. I could not help feeling that it was just the place to hide, if one wished to avoid society. I also wondered what sort of a welcome we would receive. I'd been warned off by more than one hermit in my time, and it wasn't always a pleasant experience — especially when they had guns. George evidently wanted me to make my own introduction, as he strategically fell into the rear as we neared the hut. I had no need to knock. Phil had heard the horses, and he came to the door. He spoke in a cultured voice: "Good morning. Are you looking for someone?"

"I was riding this way with George—I think you've met him before — and I thought I'd drop in and see you. There aren't many neighbours in this country. I'm from the Roper River Mission in Arnhem Land."

"No need to tell me that. I knew you at once from George's description. You're Smithy. My name's Phil. Tie up your horse and come inside, if you have a few minutes to spare."

"Thanks, but I'd better take the saddle off the horse first."

"No," said George. "I'll see to the horses. You go in and have a yarn. We ain't in a hurry, so we might as well camp here for lunch. I'll be in later."

"Thanks, George. Well Phil, how long have you been here?"

"About two months, I think, I'm not sure; I lose count of time. What day is this? What day of the week, I mean?"

"This is Wednesday; why?"

"Oh, nothing; I was just wondering. I thought it was Friday, but it doesn't matter."

"Local rumour has it that you are a hermit. Is that true?"

"A hermit? Ha, ha, no that's not exactly true. Of course I live alone, and I never go out much; but I don't mind visitors — in fact, I welcome them if they can put up with my rather unorthodox habits. They call me the Lazy Man."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"I hear a lot more than people think. News gets about in this country. In a way it's true. I hate work."

"Don't we all? It's more a matter of what we call work."

"That's true enough. Doing what we like is not really work. I've known some people to work harder at some hobby than they would if they were earning their living. If a man can make a living by his hobby, there is a danger that he will lose his pleasure in it, and it becomes merely work."

"Your hobby is writing — or is it your work?" I asked.

"In a way, both," Phil answered. "By that, I mean I write because I like doing it. I make a little money at it, though I don't actually need the money; but it's work, because I always write with a purpose."

"If that purpose is not to make money, what is it? A desire for fame?"

"Good heavens, no. I'll never be famous. I'm not particularly good at writing, but I see things that — well — that other people don't always see, and I write about them."

"I'm asking a lot of questions," I apologised, "but you needn't answer unless you like."

"You go right ahead; I don't mind how many questions you ask. But keep them simple. I'm not an encyclopaedia."

"You are a strange hermit," I went on. "It's funny how bushmen get an idea in their heads and it spreads. What do you write?"

"Stories, mostly. Sometimes a bit of verse — not very good I'm afraid. But it's mostly stories."

"You didn't tell me the purpose you had in writing."

"Well, that's rather difficult to define. Perhaps I could put it this way: life has become so complicated today that I feel the only hope of the world is to get back to simplicity. There are so many clever writers, and I think that many people read their works more because it is the correct or popular thing to do than because they really like that type of work. I like to write about simple things of every-day life; things that everyone can understand. Most people are not interested or very concerned about the thoughts or impulses behind a murderer, for example. They are simple folk, and their problems are the little things they meet in every-day life. I want them to be made to feel their problems and thoughts are important. I like them to know that God is interested in them as much as He is in someone who, maybe, is — well, famous — to use your own word."

"You are a Christian, then?"

"I think I am. But I doubt if many others would share my view. I am not orthodox. I don't go to Church even when I have the opportunity, and I don't belong to any denomination. But I've learned to love God. He shares my life, and I feel He is with me all the time. I talk to Him as I would to a friend, and — you may not believe me — He answers me."

"I do believe you," I hastened to say. "I think God likes honesty and simplicity more than anything else. If people would get back to a simple faith in God it would be a lot better world."

"That's what I feel; and that's what I try to make clear in my stories. If you mention God today, people immediately think you are — well, religious or pious. By pious, I mean in the generally accepted meaning of the word. True piety is simple love and reverence of God. I have nothing against that. Can I put it this way: if I had to make some decision that was of vital importance and had to give an answer, I could say that I would like to have time to talk it over with a friend. Everyone would understand that. But if I say I would like to ask God about it, they would immediately think I was either a hypocrite or a religious crank. I don't claim to be either. Why can't people talk as simply and naturally about God as they can about the weather, or the political outlook?"

"I see what you mean, and I agree with you."

"In the same way, why can't people realise that God is as reasonable and logical as a human being? To listen to some prayers, you would think

that God was either a fool or an ungracious autocrat who reluctantly gave people what they needed for every-day life. Or, you might think that He was like a cruel judge who was just waiting for some poor fool to do something wrong, so that He could pounce on him and punish him to the limit."

"And how do you think of God?" I asked.

"I believe that God is love — not that He's just loving or like a weak and indulgent parent — but that He is love in the full sense of the word."

"That's true. And in Christ we were shown how that love works out in practice. If only people could be brought to know and love God through Christ; if only they would take Him at His word and talk to Him as if He were standing there as a visible friend, what a difference there would be."

"Yes," Phil agreed, "I think that's the whole secret. Praying has become too complicated these days. But if God was standing beside me now as visible as you are, do you think I would talk to Him in the extravagant language of some prayers that are offered up in public? Not a bit of it. I would feel humbled and reverent, but I would tell Him my problem in a simple, straightforward way, a reasonable way. I wouldn't try to impress Him with rhetorical language. I'd say simply: I'm sorry, Lord, but I've made an awful mess of things, and I don't know how to put things right; will you tell me what's the best thing for me to do now? And I'd expect Him to answer as clearly and directly."

"That's true. And in your writing you try to make people understand things the way you see them? It's a great work. And how do you feel about it?"

"I feel lonely, terribly lonely. I feel as if no-one understands what I'm trying to tell them, except God. And when I put my story into form I — well, I seem to put something of myself into it, and when I've finished I'm absolutely exhausted. To write from the heart takes more out of me than a hard day's work with pick and shovel. Ha, ha, it's terribly funny, you know, to think that they call me the Lazy Man. To write a story is an act of creation, and I feel as worn out as a mother who has just given birth to her first child. Nobody understands that. I think that's why I feel so lonely. They think that to write a story all I have to do is to sit down and string the words

together, like turning sausages out of a machine. They don't know anything about the sweat and agony of *living* the story myself. But I mustn't keep you talking here all day; here's George back again. Let's have something to eat. George can understand that, and after all that's what I'm striving for — simplicity."

And the final entry in today's Log is taken from the 18th chapter of Matthew. Jesus said: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

HELPING MIGRANTS: One of our supporters asks for help in entertaining migrants. She needs someone living on the North Shore (up to Berowra) who would make her home available once a year for a dinner for migrants. They would bring their own food and no expenses are involved. Transport is also urgently needed to bring migrants to the dinner. This is a worthwhile Christian work and further particulars may be obtained from the Secretary, Marella Mission Farm, Box 29 Post Office, Castle Hill, 2154.

CHRISTMAS CARDS: As well as the black and white cards advertised on the front cover of this leaflet we still have a few coloured ones the same as we used in past years. These depict two Aborigines by a waterhole. They are priced at 10 cents each, including envelope, plus postage. Stocks are limited.

RALPH: Following treatment extending over several years and including a number of operations, Ralph is doing well. He does not have to see the doctor again for six months, which is a long break for him. We thank God for his recovery.

CHILDREN'S HOLIDAYS: The children will be going away on Boxing Day for holidays lasting three weeks and three days. As usual they will be staying in the homes of various friends. Though we seldom have enough small children to supply all requests, we usually have difficulty in placing all the older ones. If you can help we will be obliged if you will contact the Secretary (629 1555).

CONCLUSION: Though we have many problems we have much cause to praise God for His care and provision for us. To Him be all the honour, the praise and the glory.