

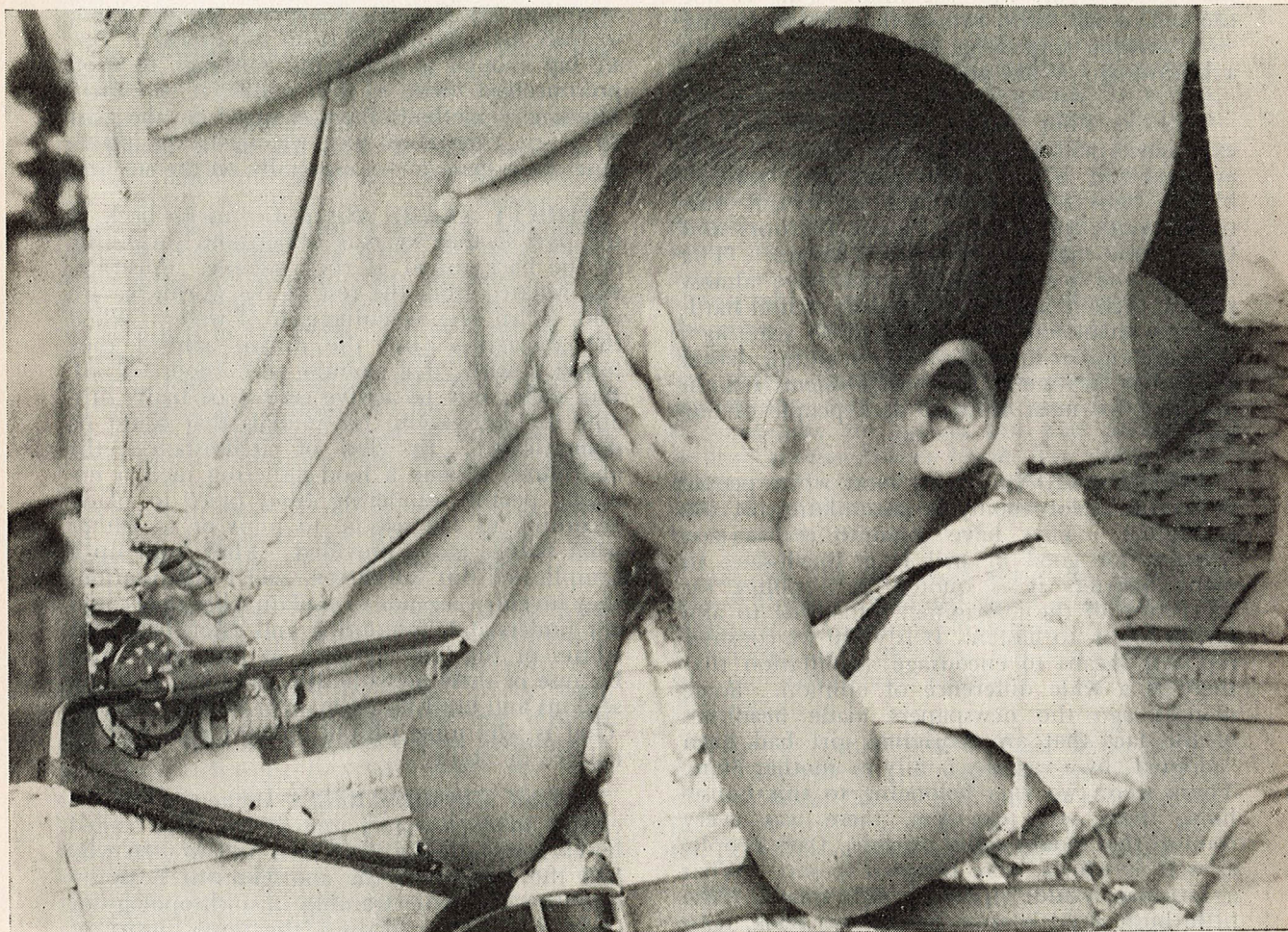
SKY PILOT NEWS

JULY, 1959

Published monthly by the Sky Pilot Fellowship Ltd., Marella Mission Farm, Acres Road, Kellyville, N.S.W. Phone YA 2427.
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SUBSCRIPTION, 2/6 per annum.

Registered at G.P.O., Sydney, for transmission by post as a periodical.



"HE WAS NOT SURE THAT HE WOULD BE WANTED — OR LOVED".

This is a special issue intended to enable thinking people to understand a little more about the aborigines. There is no need to read further if you are too sensitive to face reality.

Some people live very sheltered lives and seldom come against life in the raw. We can possibly deceive ourselves into thinking that all is well with the world because all is well within our own narrow circle. But if we are

to understand the problems of the dark people, and help them to overcome the difficulties, temptations and problems of life, we have to be prepared to face unpleasant facts.

Almost a year ago Brian came to us. He came straight from hospital, where he had spent five months. But this was not his first term in hospital; although he was only 22 months old, he had been in and out of hospital several times in his short lifetime. He

was not at all sure that he would be wanted — or loved — and in his childish way, he tried to escape from further experiences by covering his eyes with baby hands and shrinking back in the shadows of the pram. But he is not like that now. In spite of a bad start in life, accentuated by inherited weakness, he is now a very happy little boy, and he wins the hearts of all who see him. This is not the end of the story; rather, it is the beginning — a delayed beginning, if you will, but it IS a beginning. What about the future?

The Sky Pilot looks back over 30 years of experiences with the aborigines. He has worked amongst full-bloods, half-castes and "mixed" bloods. His recent trip back to Central Australia, South Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland has shown many changes. The days of the pioneer missionaries have almost passed; there is not the physical or mental hardship for missionaries that existed 30 years ago. Most aborigines have far better medical, dental and other treatment; but old problems remain unsolved for most of these dark people of our land.

ASSIMILATION: Today most white people talk quite a lot about the assimilation of the aborigines. They have come to realise that whether for good or evil it is inevitable; in many quarters it is quoted as a policy for the future of the aborigines; something to aim for, to foster, to hasten. It is when we consider the best means to encourage assimilation that there is a wide difference of opinion. Some months ago the newspapers made headlines of the fact that an aboriginal girl had been "adopted" by a wealthy family in another State. There were two cars belonging to this household, there was television, there was every comfort that money could provide. Dark people, as well as whites, were tempted to say: "What a fortunate child!" But it didn't last. The little bush child became homesick. Dark, tear-filled eyes looked unseeing over the tops of the beautiful city buildings to the distant bushlands where the tall growing paper-barks lined the banks of the slowly flowing rivers; to the prickly, tangled growth of the pandanus palms; to the cane-grass, the wild-figs and the mangroves. Sensitive nostrils quivered, unconscious of the fumes of burnt petrol, hot tar or city smoke, but very conscious of the smell of gum leaves burning, the odour of a flying-fox camp, the musty smell of crocodiles, the delicious aroma of possum and kangaroo roasted in the coals of an open fire. Keen, dark ears in fancy heard not the crash of machinery or roar of traffic, but the tap, tap, tap of the boomerangs, the stamp of dancing feet, the boom of the

didgeredoo at the corroboree ground In smaller print, the newspapers mentioned that a little, homesick aboriginal girl had gone back to the Katherine.

This has not happened in every case, but it happens often enough to make one pause and wonder. Do we really want the very best for the aborigines? Do we want them to be happy, as well as fed, clothed, educated? Are we trying to force assimilation on them too quickly? Are we big enough to admit our mistakes, to drop preconceived ideas, to start afresh, if necessary? Missionary methods have changed in the past 30 years; conditions have changed; the aborigines have changed — especially on the surface!

THIRTY YEARS AGO: Let us go back to the past so that we may understand something of the background of these people. Australia was isolated from the rest of the world, we are told, by an ever-widening gulf of water. When the aborigines (and the dingo) arrived they found a wide, free country with room for all. But there were no native cereals or fruits suitable for cultivation; no animals that could be domesticated. By force of circumstances, the aborigines became a food-gathering race, a nomadic people wandering from place to place, according to the season, to hunt or to gather what nature alone provided. They built up a complicated but satisfactory social organisation; they invented legends to explain what they could not understand, interesting and often beautiful stories of the "dream-time" of long ago. But because of their nomadic life, they had few possessions and built no permanent huts or shelters. That is why some people thought they had no culture or ability

EARLY MISSIONARIES: When some of the earlier missions were founded they were staffed by earnest, self-sacrificing men and women who had the interest of the aborigines at heart — but they had little training in anthropology or linguistics. They realised the impossibility of missionaries living on "bush tucker" and following the tribe about from place to place in the search for food. Instead, they established permanent bases, schools, hospitals or first-aid posts. The general idea was to get the young aboriginal children, educate them, convert them to Christianity and later send them back as missionaries to their own people.

Naturally, the school children could not continue to gather their own food; they had to be fed by the mission. When the children grew up several new problems arose. To live in some parts of Australia by hunting and food gathering required a skill that could only be acquired by a lifetime of rigid training in track-

ing and bushcraft. Most children reared softly in mission schools lost the art; they could no longer live as their bush brothers did; they had to be supplied with flour, beef and other "white men's tucker". But the aborigines are socialists. Food did not belong to the hunter, but to the tribe; it had to be shared with all. If the mission-trained aboriginal evangelist kept his supply of foodstuff to himself, he would be despised by the tribe; if he shared it with the others, a month's rations for one man would last perhaps a couple of days at most.

Again, the government of the tribe was in the hands of the old men; a young man had no voice, especially if he were not initiated, in law making or enforcing. The young, uninitiated, mission-trained evangelist had little hope of converting the tribe to Christianity. After many wasted years, some missions realised that they should have tried to work through the old men of the tribe. But civilisation was coming too quickly. Many tribes ceased to exist as such. Even in aboriginal reserves detribalised natives upset the authority of the old men, and the social organisation began to crumble. In some cases well-meaning missionaries and teachers succeeded in destroying the faith of the aborigines in their old social organisation without being able to replace it with a better one. Whole tribes suffered as a consequence.

HALF-CASTES: Then came the growing problem of the half-caste. As well-meaning but untrained men tried to grapple with this problem many difficulties arose — or were created. The superintendent of one mission (who had been an engineer before becoming a missionary) thought he could solve the half-caste problem by isolating them from blacks or whites. His theory was that half-castes could not have children. They soon proved him wrong! These early half-castes were the product of a first cross; in most cases one parent was aboriginal and one white. The children of this union were uniform in colour, and in most cases were very fine people. They soon dispelled a commonly held theory that as "cross-breds" they would inherit the bad points of both parents and the good points of neither. In many cases it was the opposite. Poultry farmers have long realised the value of a "first cross", in which the progeny are in some respects superior to either parent. But they never breed from these cross-breds; they always maintain the two original breeds and only use the first cross, as the progeny of cross-breds is unpredictable in quality. Humans cannot be treated as poultry, however, and it was inevitable that half-castes would intermarry. In the Northern Territory many of the original half-castes turned out to

be men and women of wonderful character and ability. To mention only one, Harry Scott (who called himself the Sky Pilot's mate) was at one time manager of Nutwood Downs cattle station.

MIXED BLOODS: In some areas, especially the city, the half-caste problem was accentuated by the introduction of other blood. At Marella Mission Farm we have had children with Indian, Negro and other blood mixed with aboriginal. Though aborigines can intermarry with whites without "throwing-back" in colour, this does not always apply to those of mixed blood of other dark races. More than one tragedy has resulted owing to this. Two light-coloured aboriginal half-castes may marry, for instance. They have learned that in such a union the children would be as light, or lighter, than the parents. Perhaps the first child is almost white, and they are very pleased. Then the second child comes along, and it is almost black. The husband then claims that it is not his child, though the broken-hearted wife assures him that it is. She cannot prove it; circumstances are against her, and possibly it leads to another broken home. Yet, unknown to the parents, one of them may have negro or other dark blood in their veins, and it could be a genuine "throw-back".

Life can be very hard for these people of mixed blood. There are many problems to be overcome; problems of temperament, as well as colour; the restlessness and occasional urge to "go walkabout" inherited from nomadic ancestors.

When we consider how many white people, with background and opportunities denied to the half-caste, fail to turn out as they should, surely we can be patient and sympathetic with the problems of those of aboriginal descent.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE? Even today we meet a few people who wonder if it is worth while trying to help the aborigines and half-castes. Some visitors to the Mission Farm have said: "The leopard cannot change its spots; you are wasting your time." We, as Christians, believe that the God who made the leopard can change it. Nothing is impossible to God. We have seen too much proof of changed lives to lose faith or hope. Many years ago the Sky Pilot worked amongst a tribe of aborigines who practised cannibalism as a religious rite. These men of Caledon Bay had a terrible reputation for murder and evil of all sort. To look at their fierce, cold eyes; to see them decorated with feathers stuck on with human blood and a splinter of human bone as a decoration carried in a hole bored

beneath the postrils, made one feel that it was hopeless trying to convert them to Christianity. The thought came that maybe their children or grandchildren could be won, but not these men old in heathen sin. But if Christ had no power to help them, what was the use of preaching a Gospel of failure? The Sky Pilot claimed them for God — not merely their children.

And the prayer was answered. A few years later, when he was going on a trip into the interior of Arnhem Land, where it was not safe for a white woman to go, he left his wife in the care of one of these converted ex-cannibals. She was a little nervous in case the man had a relapse, but the Sky Pilot knew that when Christ comes into a man's life He doesn't provide a mere veneer of civilisation, He makes a new creature.

There are hundreds of aborigines and half-castes that we never hear about who are living clean, happy, healthy, useful lives and are bringing up their children in a way that would put some white parents to shame. They are not "news". But if an aboriginal goes wrong, or breaks an imperfectly understood white man's law, that is headline news.

HOW CAN WE HELP? If the aborigines are to be assimilated, what is the best way to encourage it? This is where there is a great difference of opinion. Some think the best way is to allow a dark child to be raised by white foster-parents. One advantage is that the child is well fed, cared for and usually receives a lot of love and affection, as well as security. But it doesn't always work out as intended. Here is one of the dangers: let us suppose that a baby aboriginal girl is "adopted" by white foster-parents. It could be in a wealthy, or at least a comfortably well off home. Aboriginal children are winsome and affectionate and usually a great deal of fuss is made over them. They are a "novelty" to the foster-parents and neighbours, and it is a temptation to spoil them. Suppose our little girl receives all the love and affection that a white child would enjoy. She grows up with white children, enjoys the same opportunities and privileges as a white child. She goes to the same school as the white children. She comes to think of herself as the same as the other children, except for her colour. Young children are not colour conscious, as a rule, and for some years no real problems arise. But as she grows up she sees the other girls with their boy friends, and developing maturity makes her conscious of the natural urge to mix with those of the opposite sex.

Quite possibly she never sees anyone of her own

colour. If she dreams of marriage it is with a white boy, like those she has grown up with. But when she is fully developed and inclined to become serious in her love affairs she suddenly finds there is something wrong. Parents of the boys she has grown up with who have always treated her with the utmost kindness and sympathy seem, quite suddenly, to change in their attitude to her. She was all right as a child play-mate for their son, but not as a wife. In the best case she is kindly but firmly made to understand that marriage with their son is out of the question. In other cases, she is more or less brutally told to look for someone of her own colour.

But, because of her upbringing, she has had little or no opportunity of meeting coloured boys with the same background as she has. Very often she more or less consciously feels superior to other half-castes; she may even look down on them. Only too often she is determined to marry a white boy. In the end she may discover that the only white men willing to marry a coloured girl are not the type she has been brought up with. There are exceptions, of course, but it often happens that the coloured girl brought up amongst better-class white people is desperately lonely. There is a danger that she will feel cheated, deceived, frustrated. She realises that society has fixed a gulf between her and her dreams. In some cases she becomes bitter and resentful; she may even learn to hate those who had been so kind to her when she was little. Sometimes she is tempted to take what she can get from life; to associate with white men outside of marriage. But true and lasting happiness does not lie in this direction. Maybe she is left with a child that she cannot support unaided. Is it to be taken from her? What does life hold for her now? Is she going to drift and drift until she no longer cares?

This is why we feel that coloured girls and boys should have the opportunity of mixing with those of their own colour; of learning to respect and to love others of their race; of making happy homes, where they can bring up their their own children. Assimilation must come, it WILL COME, but there is danger in trying to hasten it unwisely. Assimilation is not merely breeding out the colour as quickly as possible. There is no cause to be ashamed of colour. There is a place in our community for aborigines and mixed bloods; an honourable place, a useful place. And all decent white people (and these form the majority) will hold out a hand of friendship, of respect, of affection to our dark brothers and sisters.