

SKY PILOT NEWS

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PEARL MUNRO AND SUZANNE

PALMER'S IBIS: 2CH BROADCAST FROM THE SKY PILOT'S LOG

The wet season had broken some weeks before, and the whole of Arnhem Land was changed to a miracle of green. At night the frogs made such a noise that we could hear them half a mile away. Paddocks that a month before had been burnt and brown with as little vegetation as a busy street, were now like waving fields of wheat. Palmer's peanuts were growing strongly, and the rest of his farm was a picture with cotton plants, milo and sweet potatoes. Only a day or two before he had been telling me it gave promise

of being the best season ever since he had come to the Northern Territory . . . and then came the grasshoppers! Like a great cloud stretching from horizon to horizon, they settled on the ground, and within a few hours had done terrific damage to the young growing crops on Palmer's peanut farm. The peanut farmer came to me in great distress.

"I say, Smithy," he said, "isn't there anything I can do? These grasshoppers have started to clean up my farm, and there won't be a thing

left in a day or two. I can't get poison from the South in time to be of any use. I've used all I had. I borrowed all Jim's ducks — seventeen of them — but they're so full of hoppers they won't eat another one, and you can't see any difference. It's terrible. I'll be ruined again, just when I was getting on my feet."

"What about a flame thrower?" I suggested. "That ought to do some good."

Palmer shook his head. "I tried that," he said. "I used a 44-gallon drum of crude oil, and I killed so many of the beastly things that the place stinks of roast grasshoppers; but there are reinforcements arriving every day to take the place of the others. Please, Smithy, come and give me a hand. Surely there is something I can do?"

"It sounds bad," I replied. "I'll come along if you think there is anything I can do; but you know as much about these pests as I do, and without an army of flame throwers or cartloads of poison, I don't see what we can do."

"Just come along and see for yourself," urged Palmer. "Even if you can't do much to help me, it makes it easier to have someone to talk to. I'm almost out of my mind with worry. Ann's away, and I'm all on my own. Oh, it's cruel to see the crops cleaned up, till there's not a leaf left on the young plants. Please come along, Smithy."

"Right you are. I'll be ready in half an hour."

It was a most discouraging sight to see the thousands of grasshoppers invading Palmer's farm. They came in waves like the flood waters that once had washed away the work of years and brought Silas Palmer to ruin. It was with a feeling of hopelessness that we stood by, unable to stem the tide of ever-flowing insects that left ruin and destruction in their track. Already they had almost cleaned up the young milo that had shown so much promise, and Palmer groaned audibly.

"Another few hours," he complained, "and they'll have finished off that milo. Then they'll start on the sweet potatoes — some of them are in the vines now — and after that the cotton and peanuts. There's no stopping them."

"So far," I told him, "they have only ruined the milo. If you could stop them from spreading now, there wouldn't be a great deal of damage done — except to the milo, of course, and that would probably shoot again. If it doesn't, you could re-plant it without much labour or cost."

"That's true, but they won't stop there, I know they won't. They'll be into the cotton and peanuts in a couple of days, and that's where the ruin will be. I can't afford either the time or the money to re-plant cotton and peanuts;

not at this time of the season. Isn't there anything you can do?"

"We can pray about it," I told him. "That's about all we can do now."

"Pray! I mean something practical. Don't get me wrong, I'm not slinging off at prayer, but this is something that needs more than prayer."

"I thought you had tried everything else you could think of."

"So I have. There's nothing more I can do, nothing at all."

"Well, why not give God a chance to do something?"

Palmer hesitated and spoke almost diffidently: "Well — eh — I don't think — that it — well, hang it all, we must be practical. What can God do in answer to prayer?"

"He can save your crops, or anything else He wants to do."

"It's all very well for you to talk like that; but what can you expect God to do? I mean — well, you wouldn't expect Him to send fire down from heaven to burn the grasshoppers, would you?"

"I wouldn't worry *how* He got rid of the hoppers; that's His business. But we haven't even asked for His help yet. If we ask Him to save your cotton and peanuts, and He does, will that satisfy you?"

"Oh, yes, that would suit me fine. Yes, if the cotton and peanuts were all right, I wouldn't mind about the milo and sweet potatoes. But you must be fair and give God a chance; this is something that seems unreasonable to ask Him to do. What I mean is — well, do you expect Him to strike the grasshoppers dead, or what?"

"There you go again, worrying about God's part of the work. I said we ought to ask Him to save the important crops, and it doesn't matter how He does it. Aren't you satisfied with that?"

"Well," Palmer admitted, "it won't do any harm to pray about it, even if it doesn't do any good. There's nothing else we can do now."

"If that's the way you feel about it, you can hardly expect God to answer your prayer. A condition of prayer is that we have faith. I think this time you had better leave the praying to me. Prayer without faith is a waste of breath."

"Well, if God answers your prayers and saves the cotton and peanuts, I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll give the mission . . ."

"Hold on, Silas! Are you trying to *bribe* God? That won't work, either. God can supply all the needs of the mission without your help. If He lets you help, that is a privilege for you. You speak as if it is a favour of yours

to help God with His work. No, leave it at that for the present. You go away and have a sleep. You're worn out for lack of sleep, and there's nothing you can do, anyhow."

Usually it takes time to have prayer answered, and we have to be patient and await God's time. In this case there was no time to spare. If God failed to answer the prayer within a day or two at the outside there would be no crops left. It was an urgent matter, and I mentioned that fact when I prayed about it. I was hoping that some sudden heavy storm might kill most of the grasshoppers — I couldn't see how otherwise the prayer could be answered. I was as bad as Palmer in wanting to *see* how the prayer could be answered. I realised that a storm heavy enough to destroy the grasshoppers would, in all probability, be severe enough to destroy the crops, too. However, I put the thought from me and prayed simply that God would save the crops that meant so much to my friend. Almost immediately I felt the assurance of answered prayer, and it was with real confidence that I told Palmer that he had no need to worry any more as I was sure the prayer had been answered. He didn't seem very impressed, and said he hoped I was right. Anyhow, we turned in early that night and slept till daylight. In the morning we went out, and the grasshoppers were as thick as ever, and they had moved on to the sweet potatoes. Palmer groaned again.

"This is the end," he wailed. "I knew it would happen. Thanks for trying to help me, Smithy, but . . . well, I don't blame you; it was asking God to work a miracle."

"Miracles don't worry God. But when he works a miracle, it usually looks so natural that we don't recognise it for what it is."

"Well, anyhow, it's too late now even for a miracle. I say! Look at that flock of birds! What on earth are they? They look like geese or something; but they aren't flying in formation."

"They're coming this way, too. I think they look like cranes or something. Wait a minute till they come closer. They're flying slowly, whatever they are. I think they may be . . . yes, that's it, they're ibis."

"Ibis? Good heavens, I've never seen such a mob of them before. I wonder what's bringing them this way?"

"They're coming in answer to prayer. They're the miracle we asked for. They've come to help you get rid of the plague of grasshoppers. I knew something would happen today, but I never thought of ibis. They're better than a heavy storm or anything I could have thought of, as they won't hurt your crops while they're cleaning up the hoppers."

"Why, do they eat grasshoppers?"

"I'll say they do. I was reading in Leach's book that two naturalists came on a flock of ibises in the Riverina. They estimated the flock to contain 240,000 birds. They found that each bird shot contained on the average 2,000 young grasshoppers. Now work that out! It means 480 million grasshoppers a day. Silas, your cotton and peanuts are safe; God sent an army to your help. Isn't that a miracle?"

"A miracle! I'll say it is. I only hope they land here and don't fly past. They don't seem to be slowing down."

"There you go again! still doubting God. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

The ibises did not go past; they settled in great clouds on the paddocks of Palmer's farm, and as systematically as an army on the march they formed lines and marched into the invading grasshoppers. The ground seemed suddenly to have blossomed into blue and white flowers as the birds, with their straw-coloured necks, waded into those grasshoppers, stepping daintily on their long red legs. All day they worked and the next, and when they took their leave on the third day it was because there were not enough hoppers left to feed them. Palmer's crops were safe; not only the peanuts and the cotton, but also the sweet potatoes. What is more, the milo sprouted again and made the best crop Palmer had ever harvested.

And the final entry in today's Log is taken from the 65th chapter of Isaiah: "Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

ANSWERED PRAYER: Prayer has been the foundation of the Sky Pilot's work for over thirty years. In 1928 one of the then secretaries of a large missionary society pleaded with Canon Langford-Smith to try to stop Keith going to the Northern Territory. "It is madness," he said. "I have been to Oenpelli, and I know the conditions. Keith is lame and quite unfit for that rough life. Why, it often means riding on horseback for hundreds of miles through the bush. Why don't you stop him?"

The answer was simple. "If God has called him," said the Canon, "I won't try to stop him going."

And Keith Langford-Smith and his friend, Ken, drove an old car from Sydney to Roper River in 1928. Two or three years later Keith was back in Sydney, talking of learning to fly and taking an aeroplane back to Arnhem Land. Again people said it was madness. Aeroplanes were not plentiful thirty years ago, and anyhow it was the great depression and money was very scarce. But in answer to prayer, the aeroplane

materialised and was named the "Sky Pilot," and Keith flew it back to Arnhem Land, where it logged 3,000 hours before it finally fell to pieces.

When Keith Langford-Smith talked of a home for aboriginal children he was practically unknown, and he had no financial backing. "It is madness," people said. "It would cost £20,000 or £30,000 to provide a home for dark children." Again prayer was made. During the waiting period, the Sky Pilot's Log saw almost 2,000 broadcasts, and people all over New South Wales learned of the need. The £20,000 or £30,000 haven't materialised yet; but Marella Mission Farm is now coming into full swing in answer to prayer. There are about twenty dark children in residence, and, especially during the past few weeks, the work has been going ahead as never before.

SEPTIC TANK: The septic tank, for a long time only a dream, has now been installed, with separate toilets for the children and the staff. This was needed urgently for health reasons; and with the help of friends and in answer to prayer, it has been paid for.

FLY-PROOFING: The ladies from the Beecroft Presbyterian Church have now undertaken to arrange finance to fly-proof the kitchen, as well as the children's dining room. It is understood that this will be completed before the hot weather brings the swarms of flies that are such a menace to the health of the little children and babies. We are most grateful for this help.

EXTRA ACCOMMODATION: In the past few weeks well over fifty dark children in needy circumstances have had to be refused admission because we are already overcrowded. We had planned to add one or two rooms each year to provide extra accommodation over a five-year period. However, the need is urgent NOW. For this reason, we are negotiating with the Housing Commission for the purchase of a ready-built annexe that can be moved bodily, in two sections, to the Mission Farm. If our tender is accepted, we will, God willing, have the 80ft. by 20ft. building in place before the Fete on October 29. Of course, this will only be the beginning; the building will need renovation, painting and partitioning; also fitting with light, water and other fixtures. We have been praying about the accommodation problem for some time, and we feel confident that shortly we will be able to cope with at least the more urgent cases of needy dark children which at present cannot be cared for.

It will cost about £500 to purchase and move the proposed building, and at least another £500 to prepare it for use; but as it will give us at least five or six extra rooms, it will be well worth it. We will know more in a week or two, but in the meantime we do ask for your special prayers that the Fete may be a success, and that, with other donations, we may raise the required £1,000 before Christmas. If anyone would care to share in making this building available for the accommodation of the dark children we would be glad if you would make your donations to the Special Building Appeal, and address them to the Secretary, Marella Mission Farm, Box 29, Post Office, Castle Hill. All donations of £1 and upwards are deductible for income tax purposes. Usually our children have plenty of parties and toys at Christmas time. If you are thinking of making a Christmas gift, please remember the Special Building Appeal. In this way you could help provide a bed and shelter for some needy dark child who otherwise would be forced to go from place to place looking for a home.

ADDRESSOGRAPH: For over a year we have had an addressograph on our urgent list of needs. About 2,000 leaflets have to be addressed by hand each time, and this is growing beyond us. However, we have at last been able to purchase a good reconditioned model which will solve this problem as soon as we have had the plates embossed. This was another answer to prayer.

CONCLUSION: Probably never before in the history of this Mission have we been so conscious of the blessing and care of our Heavenly Father. There have been some very severe setbacks and disappointments; but through it all has been the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit. There has been a marked change for good in the character of many of the dark children. Even amongst the staff we have been conscious of a closer walk with God. The time set apart for family prayers has been doubled; the older children attend prayers in the evenings and are beginning to take a greater interest in spiritual matters. There have been times when it seemed hopeless to try to carry on in face of the unexpected difficulties that arose to crush our hopes and stifle our faith; but once again we have proved that ALL things work together for good to them that love God. Again and again we have proved, as we did that Christmas when all our turkeys were stolen, that God is able to bring good out of evil. This is God's work, conducted for His dark children; to Him be the praise and the glory.