

SKY PILOT NEWS

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Mervyn was granted a scholarship by Trinity Grammar School.

(Photo by N. K. WARWICK)

NO FRESH WATER: From the Sky Pilot's Log, 2CH Broadcast.

George and Palmer were mustering down on the coast, near the salt pans in Arnhem Land. It had been a record wet season and there was plenty of feed for the cattle, but now, as the dry season advanced, the waterholes and rock pools began to dry up and George wanted to complete his muster of the coast while there was still fresh water for the horses. He explained his plan to Silas Palmer.

"You see," he said, "it's this way, Silas; if we don't hurry up with this muster, we'll be forced out of the coastal country for lack of water. I reckon we've only a week or two left before it begins to get dangerous."

"But if there are still cattle here there must be water about somewhere," Palmer protested. "Why can't the horses find water, the same as cattle?"

"A stock horse needs better water than a bullock," George explained. "Some of the bullocks can go a fair time without water if they're on succulent feed; but a horse has to carry a rider and do a lot of gallopin' in the heat of the day. He sweats a lot, too. If he don't get a decent drink he knocks up very quick."

"Oh, all right, I suppose you ought to know. Well, what do you want me to do? Give a hand rounding up some more cattle?"

"No, I want you to stay right here at this water hole and mind the cattle we've got in hand now. I'll go out after the rest of the mobs in this district."

"Why can't you leave a couple of Aboriginal stock boys to mind the cattle? I could go with you, then."

George shook his head. "That wouldn't work at all. We're pressed for time now, and I can't spare the time to be tryin' to teach you cattle work. Up to now I've slowed down my pace to let you keep up. I can't afford to do it any longer."

"All right then, I stop here. What have I got to do while you're away?"

"I want you to look after the cattle we've got now, like I just said. I don't want to lose 'em after the trouble we've had gettin' 'em."

"I'll do my best. But I couldn't tell if there were any missing or not; and I couldn't find them if they were lost."

"The stock boys will see to that, but you've got to keep an eye on the boys. I'm takin' Lefthand with me and there are none of these boys that won't be inclined to get a little careless while I'm away. You keep 'em up to the routine and see that they round up the mob every afternoon."

"How long will you be away?"

"It may be a week, or it may be a bit longer. I don't rightly know till I see how the cattle are."

"How about water? The water hole is drying up fast. If it gets much lower and you're not back, what will I do?"

"Don't do nothin' except obey orders. Keep the cattle from foul'in' the water hole. I'll be back before the water's done. That's my job, and I'll do the worryin'. You just sit here and wait for me, and keep an eye on the boys. Have you got that fixed in your mind?"

"Yes. I'm to see that the stock boys look after the cattle and round them up every afternoon. I'm to see that the cattle don't spoil the water, and I'm to wait here for you. That's the easiest job I've had since I started working for you."

"It's an easy job, Silas; but it's mighty important and I'm dependin' on you."

"That's all right, George. I won't let you down. You can depend on me all right."

George set off on his muster and took with him the best of the stock boys. Palmer, with two stock boys to help him, remained at the water hole, to mind the mob of mixed cattle that had already been won from the scrubs and plains. The days went by and no word came from George. This was not unexpected, but Palmer began to worry about the water in the clay-pan that was drying out rapidly. He marked the level with a series of sticks driven into the mud at the edge of the water and calculated how long it would be before the water hole was dry.

The cattle had drinking water a little further down, in a partly dry creek. The water was slightly brackish and unfit for humans; the horses also refused to drink it. On the eighth day of George's absence the water hole was only a saucer-shaped depression containing muddy water, and Palmer decided to move back to fresh water, further inland. The Aboriginal stock boys made no objection when Palmer told them of his decision, and they offered to lead him to water, where they could await George's return.

Leaving the water hole early one morning, the party travelled slowly with the cattle. At midday they made a dry camp, and Palmer hurried them on after lunch. By nightfall they had failed to find water and the horses were knocked up. The cattle, which Palmer had forced to travel twice the distance that George would have permitted in one day, were bad-tempered and sullen. Palmer did not know

enough about cattle to realise this. He was forced to make another dry camp that evening.

In the morning it was difficult to round up the cattle again. Many of them hid in the light scrub and refused to move until forced out of their hiding-places. About 11 o'clock the party came to a patch of thick wattle scrub. Palmer wanted to ride around it, but the stock boys told him there was no way around — they had to go through the scrub to find the permanent water they were looking for.

Palmer ordered the boys to drive the cattle through the scrub. Ten minutes later the cattle stampeded and disappeared into the scrub, with the stock boys after them. Palmer was left with the pack-horses. It took him a couple of hours to get the packs through the scrub to the permanent water the boys had told him about. He found it a muddy hole no better than the one he had left. A little later the two stock boys came back and joined him. They had about twenty head of cattle with them; the rest had got away.

At noon next day, George rode out of the scrub. He was looking grim.

"See here, Palmer," he demanded. "I thought I told you to wait where I left you till I got back?"

"Well, yes, I know you did; but hang it all, the water was drying up so fast I didn't know what to do. It wouldn't have lasted more than a day or two and it was getting beastly muddy. I thought you'd been held up somewhere and — well, I — thought I'd better push on and try to find water. The boys promised to show me the way to a good permanent water."

"And what have you done with the cattle I left with you?" George asked.

"I — well — we started off with them all right. They seemed quiet enough, and I didn't expect any trouble. But we couldn't find water. Then we had to come through this thick scrub, and — well — something must have gone wrong, for the cattle suddenly started off from all directions and we lost them in the scrub."

"Did you send the stock boys after them?"

"Of course. But they couldn't find them all last night. As a matter of fact they are out looking for the cattle now."

"And how many cattle have you got back so far?"

"I — eh — well — what I mean is, about twenty."

"About twenty out of over two-hundred-and-fifty! Is that all?"

"Yes, that's about all so far. But they may bring the rest back anytime. I'm awfully sorry,

George, really I am. How was I to know the beastly things would stampede as soon as they entered the scrub?"

"I've followed your tracks, Palmer, and I know just what you've done," said George, grimly. "You punched them cattle along till they were knocked up and sullen and cranky and ready for anythin'. Then you take 'em into thick scrub that you couldn't even canter through yourself. It took us three weeks to get them cattle together, and you go and lose them like that!"

"It's not my fault, George, really it isn't. I didn't know what to do when the water kept drying up and you didn't get back. I did what I thought was best under the circumstances."

"It wasn't your place to do what you thought best. I gave you orders to stop right where you were. I thought I could trust you to do what you were told."

"Yes, I know, but hang it all, what about the water?"

"I told you that was my worry and I would get back before the water hole was dry. I got there the day after you left and there was still enough water for us to give the horses a drink afore we came on after you."

"I'm awfully sorry, George, truly I am. What about the cattle we lost? Can you get them back again?"

"Lefthand and the boys is out after them now. We'll get most of 'em back by tomorrow. Those we can't find by then will have to wait till next year. There ain't enough water about these parts now to risk the rest of the cattle for the stragglers we can't pick up right away."

"I know I've made a mess of it again," said Palmer, ruefully. "I'm a fool where cattle are concerned and I know it."

"I ain't blamin' you for not knowin' anythin' about cattle; but I blame you for disobeyin' orders. Next time you do what I say, not what you think is best. Your job is to carry out my orders and the sooner you learn it, the better for us all. I won't say no more now though I can think of a lot more that I might say; but don't let it happen again!"

* * *

When George told me the story of how Palmer came to lose the cattle because he disobeyed orders and left the water hole, I immediately thought of the story of Elijah that is told in the 17th chapter of the First Book of Kings. It says, "And the word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying, Get thee hence and turn thee eastwards and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be that

thou shalt drink of the brook: and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord . . . and it came to pass after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. And the word of the Lord came unto him saying, Arise and get thee to Zerephath and dwell there."

Elijah obeyed orders and stayed where he was sent, even till the brook dried up completely; then — and only then — God sent him elsewhere. Silas Palmer marked the receding water with his sticks stuck in the mud and before the water hole dried out he moved away. How many of us in our spiritual lives are like Elijah and how many like Palmer? Speaking of Elijah F. B. Meyer said: "Most of us would have gotten anxious and worn with planning long before the brook dried up. We should have devised some plan and asking God's blessing on it, would have started off elsewhere."

That's where trouble starts. God calls us to do some definite work and because things seem to be going wrong we work out a plan of our own and ask God's blessing on it, instead of obeying orders and trusting Him to know best. God doesn't expect us to have all knowledge and unlimited ability, but He does expect us to do as we are told. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, it is summed up in these words: "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: The Annual General Meeting of the Sky Pilot Fellowship was held on 9th July. This is not a public meeting but is a meeting of our General Committee Members who elect the Council and other Office Bearers for the ensuing year. This year we had eighteen Committee Members present. All the Office Bearers and Council Members were re-elected unopposed. We are pleased that so many of our committee were able to be present. We need ten for a quorum, and in the early days of our Mission we were sometimes hard-pressed to secure a quorum. We also had four visitors as observers.

STORIES FROM THE SKY PILOT'S LOG:

About twenty years ago a collection of stories from the Sky Pilot's Log was published in book form under the title: "Drake's Drum and Other Stories". This volume contained sixteen stories by Keith Langford-Smith. Unfortunately it is now out of print but we are constantly hearing from friends who have been helped and inspired by these stories. It is encouraging to know

that God is still using them for the glory of His name.

The following letter was received recently from the wife of a Baptist Minister and it is published by kind permission:

"Dear Mr. Langford-Smith,

"I wonder if you recall going to speak at the Bankstown Baptist Ladies' Guild meeting several years ago? Following that my husband, who was the minister there at the time, invited you to speak at a Men's Meeting and then at the Evening Service.

"I suppose you could say that I am one your fans. I love your books.

"Over a year ago we left Bankstown. Mr. Marks is now the minister of the Warilla Baptist Church. When the time came to leave my ladies I wondered what I could give to each by way of a little parting gift. I decided on a copy of your story, "The Garden of the Lord," so one friend typed it out and we ran off — well probably 100 copies. Oh, yes, I certainly acknowledged authorship!

"While we were at Bankstown a number (8) talented ladies formed themselves into a group called the "Joyfuls". They take a theme and build their programme — singing, elocution, etc. round the theme. They are in great demand at Ladies' Meetings.

"About a fortnight ago they came to Warilla. It was the occasion of our Ladies' Guild Anniversary and we had a splendid attendance. They took, as their theme, "A Garden" and to my joy and delight the leader of the Group told your story. She had not memorised it word for word — but she came pretty close to it; and she told it most movingly. It was the climax of the evening. I thought you would like to know how God is using that story, still.

"I gave a few copies to friends outside the Church, at Bankstown — one was our dry cleaning lady! Now a typist in the Church down here is "running me off" more copies. I have in mind some people who will love it as much as I did.

"The ladies in the "Joyfuls" group had all been given a copy by me. One lady said: 'I read it when you gave it to me, and liked it — but then the first time 'Joyce' told it we all cried. I'm sure it was her way of telling me how much she appreciated your story, Mr. Langford-Smith.

"Yours sincerely,

(Signed) "(Mrs.) Elsa Marks.

"P.S. I should add that the "Garden" theme is likely to be used again and again by the "Joyfuls".