

SKY PILOT NEWS

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"IS THERE ROOM IN YOUR HEART FOR ME?"

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This is the cry of the little dark children. They are not articulate to plead with you by words. Much as a wistful-eyed puppy in a pet shop window pleads with the passers-by, so is their mute appeal. But in return for love and kindness shown to them, they pour out a wealth of love and devotion that in itself is sufficient reward — if one asked for reward. We who have children of our own fail, sometimes, to realise the great gulf between the privileges of the white child compared with those of the dark child. Before the advent of the white man, the aborigines were not colour conscious. When first we worked amongst the full-bloods of Arnhem Land we were the ones who were pitied for our colour (though sometimes we were associated with mythical, fair-skinned "people" from the dream-times of legend). The aborigines we knew called themselves "blackfellows" (though, really, they were not black), with no sense of inferiority. They waited on us hand and foot, helping us kindly over rough places and through dangerous country. They were a kindly people, a *gentlemanly* people. . . .

That has changed. The few aborigines scattered amongst many white people today are only too conscious of their colour. They long to be white, like us, and to enjoy our freedom and opportunities. But it isn't only a matter of colour. They are now a people "scattered and peeled", as Isaiah puts it: stripped of their past glory, their dignity, their hope. A homeless people. And to the true Aboriginal, home means almost everything. When we speak of "home", we usually think of a house; not so the aboriginal. His country — what we call district — means more than life to him. Every mountain and creek, every outcrop of rock or hidden pool has meaning, significance, importance to him. These are the places, he believes, where dwell the unborn spirit children. Uproot him from these surroundings and he may languish and die mentally, and sometimes physically, like Antaeus, separated from Mother Earth by Hercules' mighty arms.

The aborigines have a secret life, often undreamed of by men who may have lived amongst them for years. It is not all evil, as some ignorant men claim; much of it is good. Understanding the aborigines means more than merely learning their kinship and marriage customs, their beliefs and ceremonies (though this can help). True understanding is of the heart — not the head.

Not every white man is allowed to share this secret life of the aboriginal in his original setting. They are a very sensitive people, intensely jealous lest the wrong man might betray or mock. When, in his early twenties, the

"Sky Pilot" had grey hair and a long, bushy beard. Amongst the Arnhem Land natives, beards are not grown as easily as amongst the Aranda. Grey hair, and a beard, to the aboriginal, meant an old man! And only old men could share some of the secrets. Besides, he was a writer by training and natural instinct, fond of poetry, and extremely sensitive to "atmosphere". Trivial things, maybe, but very important to the aboriginal.

So he was accepted as a trusted friend, an "old" friend of the tribe. As the old men squatted round the sacred tjuringas, it was a sight never to be forgotten. These symbols of the eternal dream time no longer remained pieces of stone worn smooth by the gentle stroke of countless fingers, the soft, whispering chant took on a new meaning. The earth was young again, and mythical heroes and the ancestors of the tribe seemed so close that one could touch them by moving a hand. Deep emotion stirred the men; eyes grown dim and watery by age sparkled with renewed youth. This, to the aboriginal, was the place where soul and spirit were rejuvenated. Here was strength, courage, hope for the future. Here was the place where a Paul could have seen the altar to the Unknown God — and made the most of it.

But there are not many Pauls amongst the missionaries of today, or the yesterday of which we write. . . .

An assistant, 30 years ago, was a zealot by nature. He had a contempt for the "silly myths" of the dark people; he despised their beliefs. When, by an unfortunate accident, he stumbled on a sacred tjuringa, he kicked it about in the dust with his great boots, to show that it was nothing more than a stone — possibly an idol. He was not speared by the warriors, for civilisation had already come to the district; but it was not a piece of stone, but the broken hearts of a dying race that he was kicking into the dust. . . .

"Corroborees," he said, were evil; they should be stamped out at all costs. And he applied the term to every kind of native ceremony, regardless of its object or meaning. By the same logic, an aboriginal could group together a Church service, an army parade, a dance, a theatrical play, a session of Parliament — and call them "corroborees", and think of them as the white man's "religion".

But many years have rolled by. Many of the secret beliefs died with the broken-hearted old men of the tribe, who guarded their trust too faithfully to risk passing them on to a younger, unappreciative generation corrupted by the white man's ways.

Most of the dark children of today know nothing of the glory or the pride of race that



"OFF TO SUNDAY SCHOOL."

once was theirs. They know nothing of the struggle for existence in hard and pitiless desert country — or the way the tribe succeeded where a white race would have failed under similar conditions. They know nothing about their ancestors or the heroes of the eternal dream time. . . . Often they are ashamed of their colour and ancestry, influenced by the first ignorant settlers, who killed what they feared and mocked what they could not understand. How wrong it all is!

And the soft-eyed children of the race we destroyed look at us with wistful eyes, hoping to share, with Lazarus, some of the crumbs from the rich man's table. What is our answer? Are we to reduce the number of children in our care, as some advise, because of shortage of funds? The final answer rests with our readers and supporters.

BUILDING PROGRAMME: It is expected that our four new rooms will be completed early next month. Though originally they were intended for storerooms and offices, it has now been decided to use the one adjoining the now enlarged kitchen as a children's dining room. This will mean added comfort for the children, and a great saving of work. At present all meals are cooked in the Mission House and carried across to the children's quarters. In wet weather this is very inconvenient, and it taxes our limited staff; also, it is difficult to keep meals warm and attractive in winter when they have to be carried some distance across the frosty grass before being served.

THE FETE: Owing to the unusual rains for this time of the year, it was most difficult to prepare the Mission Farm for the Fete early this month. Time that was really needed for completing sheds and shelters had to be spent repairing the driveway! It looked as if our function would be literally, "washed-out". But many people were praying, and we had a hot, sunny day for the 7th. No sooner was the Fete over than the rain came down again in inches. We had about 2,000 people at the Fete, and the net profit was almost £400. This exceeded our expectations, and was much better than the results from Fetes held in the Sydney Town Hall. We wish to thank all those who made this possible. First, our faithful prayer partners; next, all those who donated gifts for the stalls; the many voluntary workers who gave so much of their time and energy; and those who supported us by their presence and by the articles purchased from the stalls.

At the November Meeting, the Council of the Sky Pilot Fellowship passed a special resolution to the effect that it was fully conscious of the splendid work behind the scene carried out so faithfully by the members of the Women's

Auxiliary, and Voluntary Helpers. The Park-field stall, which raised over £60 by its unaided efforts, was specially to be congratulated.

RALLIES, AND SUNDAY SCHOOL PICNICS: Several Churches have availed themselves of our picnic grounds for Sunday School Picnics, etc. Although not all the shelter sheds have been completed, we have sufficient shelter, together with tables, etc., for the average-sized party. There is an electric urn available; also, we have soft drinks and ice cream at the Mission store. About two acres of grassland is available for games, and ten acres of bushland for those who like rambling over the creek. We are glad to make this available to the various Churches and other Organisations, but it is necessary to book it ahead, to avoid clashing with other parties. There is no charge.

THE ARMY TATTOO: Mr. and Mrs. M. Porter took all the dark children to the Army Tattoo, to which they had been kindly invited by the Eastern Command. It was a wonderful evening for the children, and will live in their memories for a long while. The petrol for the trip was donated (at his own suggestion!) by Mr. J. Smith, of the Bull and Bush Service Station, Baulkham Hills. We do appreciate these kindly actions which bring so much pleasure to the children.

KATOOMBA BRANCH: The Katoomba Branch of the Women's Auxiliary of the Sky Pilot Fellowship held their Annual Meeting in October. They have a total of 33 members now, and the "Sky Pilot" was able to show them some coloured slides of the dark children and the Mission Farm. Miss O. Dyer, O.B.E., the President, is to be congratulated on the work of this Branch. They have raised almost £100 in a little over 12 months.

THE DARK CHILDREN: Ralph is still in hospital, where he seems to be making good progress. There is yet some doubt regarding the nature of his illness, but they are taking no chances with him. He is being treated for tuberculosis, but he is putting on weight, and looks very well. He is a great favourite with all who see him. Ever since this work was established it has been our practice to have all the dark children (and staff) checked at regular intervals for T.B., as a precautionary measure. In this way, it is possible to make sure that no new child brings any infection into the Home. As we have our own cows to supply milk for the children, these also are tested. The children are looking forward to the parties that usually take place before Christmas. They do not get as many as city children do, but it looks as if this year it will be difficult to find sufficient free dates for all that friends have in store for them.