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The Farm Manager's Cottage arrives at Marella.

Photo: Mrs. N. Warwick.

THE DEAD MOTHER: From the Sky Pilot's Log, 2CH Broadcast

Lily, the little Quadroon girl who lived at the Mission in Arnhem Land, was very interested in the Torres Straits Pigeons, or the Nutmeg Pigeons, as they are sometimes called. These are beautiful white birds that at one time were in thousands in the far North, but now, unfortunately, they are rapidly becoming extinct. We did not often see them near the Mission Station in Arnhem Land, even in the early days, and so, being rare, they were always a matter of interest. Usually these birds built their nests on the coral islands off the coast, and so, when George found a nest of them not far from his hut, Lily was wildly excited. I was there when George first told Lily about them.

"Lily," he said, "I have a bit of a surprise for you back at my hut. I wonder if you could guess what it is?"

Lily pondered. "Is it something to eat?" she asked.

"No," George replied. "It's nothin' to eat — leastwise I hope it ain't. You must guess again."

But in spite of all Lily's attempts, she could not guess correctly. On walkabout day, George took Johnny and me to show Lily the surprise he had. It was back of his hut on a sandridge where, in a low tree, was the crudely made nest of sticks, on which a beautiful white pigeon was sitting. Lily was thrilled.

"Isn't it pretty!" she exclaimed. "I've never seen one of these white pigeons so close before. May I touch it it?"

"No," George told her. "You mustn't touch it or you will frighten it away from its nest. What do you think of it, Smithy?"

"I've seen thousands of them," I replied, "but I never knew of one nesting in these parts before. I am fond of all kinds of birds — especially pigeons. Thanks for showing it to me."

George turned to the black boy. "Well, Johnny, you ain't sayin' much. Aren't you interested in it, too?"

Johnny licked his lips. "Him properly good fella tucker," was all he said.

"You cannibal," said George. "Surely you wouldn't eat a beautiful bird like that!"

"No more now," Johnny replied. "By an' by maybe we eat little ones, too."

"Johnny!" Lily exclaimed, "if you ever ate the young ones, I . . . well, I'd never speak to you again. Poor little things! Have the eggs hatched out yet?"

"I can answer that," I replied. "They haven't hatched yet. A pigeon sits quite differently on eggs than when she is on young ones. This bird is sitting tight. When the youngsters hatch out you will see it sitting very loosely — so as to give them a chance to breathe."

"I had a peep this morning," George admitted. "There are two eggs there, but I don't know when they'll hatch. The mother never leaves them for more than a few moments. I wonder how she feeds! She can't get much time for huntin' about for food."

"George," I told him, "that isn't the mother on the nest now, that's the father. The mother sits at night. The father takes over from her about 10 o'clock in the morning and sits until about five in the afternoon. The hen has all day to feed. That's what I like about pigeons, they share the family duties."

"What I like about pigeons," Johnny put in, "they make 'im good fella tucker."

George rounded on him. "See here, Johnny," he said, "if I catch you so much as lookin' at those pigeons with hungry eyes, I'll tan the hide off you. This is my pigeon, and I'll give the young ones to Lily when they're big enough."

And so the days went by, and the parent birds were allowed to carry on their family duties without interruption. Lily paid a visit to the nest on every available occasion and kept me posted with the news. One day she hurried back with a couple of empty shells in her hands.

"Look, Moningna!" she exclaimed. "Look what I found today. These shells were on the ground. Do you think the eggs have hatched?"

"Yes, Lily, that's what it is. You had better make a note of the date. In four weeks from now the young ones will be ready to come out of the nest."

"Moningna, those white pigeons live on the nutmegs, don' tthey?"

"They eat other things too, but mostly they feed on the so-called nutmegs. Why did you ask?"

"They must be very greedy," said Lily. "They go away and eat too many nutmegs, and they

come home and . . . well, they are sick, and they lose a lot of them."

"You've got it all wrong. The pigeons eat the nutmegs, but they can only digest the fleshy outer part of the seed, and the hard kernel is expelled from the crop. It is not that they have eaten too much, but simply that they only retain the part that is digestible and they get rid of the inner part."

"And do they feed the babies on what is left?"

"No, they feed the babies on what we call 'pigeon's milk'. The milk is formed in their crops after they have been sitting for about 17 or 18 days and both the father and mother feed the young on this pigeon's milk."

"It is all very wonderful, Moningna. I didn't know the father pigeon had milk as well as the mother."

"Nature is full of wonders. There is always something more we can learn from nature. God is a wonderful Creator, and He has made many wonderful things."

"Moningna," Lily asked, "when the babies are grown bigger, can I keep them for pets?"

"If you like, you can. But most of my pets here are free to fly away, if they wish to. The reason they stay with me is that they have learned that I love them and feed them, and it is much better for them to stay here than to go away and have to hunt for food."

"It'll look after them, Moningna, and I know they'll never want to leave me."

"I'm sure you will, and you'll find they are very easy to tame."

But the days went by and all our plans went astray. It was George who noticed it first. He didn't say anything to Lily, but came to me, saying something was wrong with the pigeons.

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "since you pointed out the difference between the cock and the hen, I learned to tell which was which. The last few days I've only seen the cock bird about. He sits on the nest at night, as well as in the day time. I wonder if anything has happened to his mate?"

"I'll come down tonight and see," I promised. "You may be making a mistake. The hen looks very much the same as her mate and you may be getting them mixed."

"Maybe I am," George admitted. "But I don't think so."

And that night I walked four miles just to see if two pigeons were all right. George had made no mistake. It was the cock bird that was sitting at night when the hen should have been on duty. A few days went by. We noticed that the father, although he fed the babies, was unsettled. He

seemed to miss his mate, and he was absent from the nest for longer periods than he should. The day came when one of the babies was nearly dead and the other one looked sick, also. Lily noticed it and she came to me in tears.

"Oh Moningna," she cried, "one of my baby pigeons is nearly dead and the other one looks sick, too. I don't know what is wrong. Can't you do something?"

"I'm afraid I can't," I replied. "I think something must have happened to the mother. George hasn't seen her for days. Perhaps a hawk got her. If so, the mate might rear the youngsters on his own, or he may lose heart and desert them. There's nothing I can do about it, I'm afraid."

"Oh, Moningna, it is so sad! My poor little pigeons! Have they got to die?"

"I'm afraid it might come to that. They need the care of a mother and they need pigeon's milk to feed them. If the father loses heart and deserts them, I'm afraid they will die."

"But the mother was so fond of them. Surely she wouldn't go away and leave them to die?"

"She wouldn't leave them, Lily. But if she is dead she can't do any more for them. A dead mother can't help her young, no matter how much she loved them."

"But isn't there anything we can do?"

"I don't think so," I told her. "I might be able to feed other young pigeons that eat grass seeds and food like that, but these Nutmeg pigeons are different. They feed mostly on fruit and berries. I couldn't find any substitute for it. If they had been a little older, I might have managed. As it is, I'm afraid I can't help."

Lily had tears in her eyes. "Poor little pigeons," she said. "It would happen to them when George gave them to me. I wish I could do something for them."

"Lily," I told her, "a mother may love her babies enough to give her life for them, but that is all she can do. A dead mother can't help them any further."

"Jesus loved us enough to die for us, Moningna."

"Yes, Lily. But even though that was a wonderful act, it was not sufficient. A dead Christ could not help us any more than dead mother can help her babies. But Jesus rose from the dead and today He is able to help us because He is a living Saviour. As St. Paul says: 'But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'"

SALE OF WORK: The Sale of Work and our 23rd Anniversary Rally at the end of this month was a great success. God gave us a perfect day in spite of the fact that many of our friends who live in surrounding suburbs reported terrible winds in their areas. There was a good crowd there and a spirit of happy Christian fellowship. Following is a list of the Stall takings:

Boat Rides	12.20	Fancy Work &	
Children's	173.89	Baby	93.22
Friends of Marella	205.00	Jams & Pickles	47.33
Jewellery	95.00	Jumble	512.81
Parkfield	415.15	Paulian	154.66
Pies	85.46	Plain Work	111.26
Plants	55.35	Pony & Donkey	
Produce	392.13	Rides	15.00
Soft Drinks &		Refreshments	137.51
Ice Cream	307.09	Second-hand Toys	30.46
Stamps	90.80	Vandykes'	239.68
White Elephant	130.94	Youth Fellowship	409.01
Blue Mts. Aux.	100.00	Donations	747.59
Donations by Mail	202.60	Christmas Cards	
Books	52.20	(Profit)	18.37

This gives a total of \$4,834.71 less expenses \$681.37 which leaves a net profit of \$4,153.34. This is \$324.96 better than the October 1970 Sale, which was a record, and so this is the best financial result we have ever had. It is the first time that our profit has exceeded \$4,000. With grateful hearts we praise God for this evidence of His continued blessing.

CASTLE HILL HIGH SCHOOL 6th FORM:

This year, instead of holding the usual "end of term rag", the students of Castle Hill High School 6th Form undertook a walk from Parramatta to Castle Hill to raise money for Marella Mission Farm. This was a wonderful gesture and we deeply appreciate their interest and help. They raised the great amount of \$623.00 which will be a tremendous help as we are at present in the midst of a building programme which was urgently needed.

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS: As in previous years the children will all be going away for three weeks, staying in the homes of various friends. This year it will be from 27th December 1971 to 17th January 1972. During this period the Mission Farm will be closed down and the staff will be taking holidays also. There will only be a caretaker at the Mission Farm and so we will be grateful if you will make this as widely known as possible in case friends call expecting to find us here.

LIONS CLUB OF RIVERSTONE: We are badly in need of further storage space in the shed where the clothes and other gifts are sorted and prepared for use or for sale. The Lions Club of Riverstone has very kindly undertaken to build this extra room for us and work has already commenced. We are most grateful for the kindly co-operation of this Service Organisation. Other Lions Clubs have helped us in the past with our building as well as have Apex and other organisations. It is a grand thing that in these days of irresponsible demonstrations and industrial unrest there are men devoted to the work of quietly undertaking to help Charities and other worthy causes.

MR. BRUCE LANGFORD-SMITH: The day following our Sale of Work, Mr. Bruce Langford-Smith was taken ill with an infection in the throat. When x-rays were taken it was shown that this had spread to his lungs and it afterwards affected his heart as pericarditis set in. He was rushed to hospital where he was in the Intensive Care Ward for some time. We thank God that the critical stage soon passed but unfortunately it has left him very far from well and it will be considerable time before he is able to resume his work on the Mission Farm. We would value your prayers for his quick and complete recovery.

THE DARK CHILDREN: The children are all well and happy and looking forward very much to the holidays planned at Christmas time. We finish the year with our full complement of twenty-eight children — fourteen boys and fourteen girls. They range in age from six to about fifteen. Time passes very quickly and young children grow up and one by one find positions in the community. This means that at present we have a younger batch than usual as several of our older ones left here recently.

PRAYER MEETING: Our final Prayer Meeting of the year will be held next month, after which it closes down until February. That is, of course, the Monthly Public Prayer Meeting. This has been the cause of much blessing to those who have taken part and those for whom we prayed. But amongst the children and the staff prayer goes on constantly all the year round. Prayer is the only weapon we have been given to overcome the assaults of the devil and because this is a spiritual work we are very open to attack. Thank God that the victory has already been won by our Lord Jesus Christ and we can go ahead without fear knowing that in His strength we can overcome every difficulty and move mountains.