

SKY PILOT NEWS

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"Rita likes cream and Janet smiles at the Christmas fare."

GEORGE'S SON: A Story from the Sky Pilot's Log (2CH Broadcast).

Arnhem Land, the most northern portion of the Northern Territory, was a very isolated place 25 or 30 years ago. Because of this, no doubt the few white men who lived there preferred to maintain their own ideas of law and justice without seeking the aid of the police, whose nearest representative might be hundreds of miles away. The justice of the bushmen was often rough and crude; they had their unwritten law, and the justice that was meted out to those who broke the law of the bush was, according to their lights, fair, reasonable and inevitable.

Jake had a cattle station on the borders of Arnhem Land. He lived alone, depending on black stockboys to help him with the mustering, branding and other duties. He ruled his little kingdom with a rod of iron, though not without reasonable care for the natives who worked for him. His word was his bond. If he promised a native anything, he was scrupulous in keeping his promise—

no matter if it was a feed or a hiding. He was generous in feeding his native workers and their families; as far as finance permitted, he kept them supplied with clothing, blankets, tobacco and other simple commodities; but he never allowed them to take liberties, and he punished neglect of duty, laziness or theft ruthlessly.

It was Joe who first brought word that everything was not well in Jake's little kingdom. "Do you know," he said, "things are only middling with Jake?"

"What's the matter with him?" asked Dick. "Is he sick, or something?"

"No," replied Joe. "He's not sick, but he's hopping mad. I've never seen him so worked up before."

George chuckled. "It's nothing very unusual for Jake to be hopping mad. He's one of the most impatient fellows I've ever met in the bush. Seems to have a chip on his shoulder most of the time."

"I know that," Joe admitted, "but this time I'm afraid there will be murder done; though Jake wouldn't call it that, of course. Someone has been thieving his stores, and so far he hasn't been able to catch him."

"Jake's a hard man," said George. "Not that he don't treat his blacks well, but he expects too much of them. He can't stand for theft. Most blacks will help themselves to a bit of tea and sugar, or a stick of tobacco, if they have the chance. Even Lefthand ain't perfect. I've had him since he was a lad, and he'd give his life for me, but all the same I wouldn't leave tobacco about and expect him not to help himself when he was short."

Dick looked surprised. "I thought Left-hand was as honest as the day," he remarked.

"So he is," said George, "so he is—in things that really matter. What you might say is that he steals within reason. Now, myself, I don't take no notice of it; but if one of Jake's blacks was so much as to take a half-smoked bumper, Jake would tan the hide off him."

"This time," Joe told us, "it's more serious than that. Someone has been breaking into his store and taking large quantities of stuff and re-selling it to the bush natives and the hoboos camped on the creek. Jake reckons he's lost £50 worth of stores already."

George shook his head. "That don't sound like a blackfellow to me. More likely it's one of the bad whites or a half-caste."

"Whoever it is," said Joe, "Jake's looking for him with a gun. He'll shoot him on sight if he catches him."

"But that would be murder!" Dick exclaimed. "He wouldn't do that, surely?"

"I wouldn't put it past him," George observed. "Jake is hot-headed, and he wouldn't call it murder; he would call it justice."

"But," asked Joe, "isn't there anything we can do about it? We might warn Jake that if he kills anyone it will mean that he'll have to face trial for murder."

"That's only bluff," George replied. "The police are too far off to worry much. If Jake said he shot a blackfellow who was breaking into his store, he'd get off—same as you or I would if we shot a burglar breaking into our house. They might tell him he ought to have aimed a bit lower; that's about all. There's not a thing we can do about it. But I feel sorry for the poor fool who's trying to put one over Jake. He's sure running a risk."

Several weeks went by and we heard nothing further of Jake. The mustering took

us to the northern boundary, and on the way back with cattle we called in at Jake's hut. There was a lot of wailing and shouting in the blacks' camp, and Joe, who had ridden ahead to the hut, came galloping back. "Quick, you fellows," he gasped. "Come as quick as you can. Jake's got the thief and dragged him outside. Says he's going to shoot him. Come on!"

We raced Joe to the hut, where Jake was standing under a coolibah tree. Tied to the tree was a half-caste boy about 16 years of age; surrounding him was a crowd of excited, wailing natives. George took charge. "Now, see here, Jake," he asked, "what's all this about?"

"None of your business," Jake growled. "You keep out of it."

"Well," said George, "I don't want to interfere in another man's business; but seeing I'm here as a witness, I want to know what you aim to do to that lad."

Jake spoke with deadly calm; we could see with what effort he was keeping his temper under control. "I'm going to make an example of him," he told us. "I said I'd shoot the man who's been stealing my stores, and, by heaven, I'll do it. I ain't never broken my word yet. He's had warning; now he's for it." Jake turned to the wretched boy and raised his voice. "Come on, you. Get ready! In one minute I'm going to blow out your brains. You know what it's for."

"Hold on, Jake," Joe called. "You can't do that! If you had caught him in the act of breaking in and had shot him, you might have got away with it. If you shoot him in cold blood like this, you'll be tried for murder."

"That's right," Dick added. "Don't be a fool, Jake; there's enough witnesses here to have you hanged for this."

"Shut up!" yelled Jake. "I don't care if I have 50 witnesses. The more the better. I'm **waiting** for them to round up the rest of the blacks. I **want** witnesses. I want them to know that I mean what I say. If I make an example of this thief there won't be so many to follow his example. Come on, you! When I count ten I'm going to shoot. One, two, three"

"Stop it, Jake," Dick yelled. "You can't do it. I tell you"

George pushed Dick aside and whispered: "Leave this to me." He turned to Jake and raised his voice. "Just a minute, Jake!"

"Four, five, six"

"Hold it, Jake!"

"Seven, eight, nine. . . . Get away, George, you fool! Stand aside, or by heaven I'll

shoot the two of you!"

"Look at George," gasped Dick, grabbing Joe's arm. "He's stepped in front of the lad, and Jake's still pointing the gun! Will we rush him?"

"No, leave it to George," Joe advised. "We wouldn't have a hope. Jake knows how to use a gun, and he's not human when he's in a temper like this. Leave it to George."

George calmly turned his back on Jake and the pointed gun, and, stooping down, spoke to the weeping, terrified half-caste boy. "Say, lad," he asked, "are you guilty, or not? Don't be afraid of me; I'm here to help you, but I want the truth. Did you steal Jake's stores?"

"You eye!" came the trembling reply. "Me steal 'im tucker all right, but me sorry now."

"There you are!" Jake yelled. "He's as guilty as hell. He admits it. Stand aside, George, and see justice done."

George whispered to the lad for a few moments, and a dawning look of wonder came into the terrified, haunted eyes. George calmly drew his knife and cut the cords that bound the boy to the tree. Still standing between the boy and Jake's gun, he turned to face the executioner.

"By heavens!" yelled Jake, in a fury. "You'll be sorry for this! I'm not going to let you interfere with justice. I swore I'd shoot that miserable wretch, and, by heavens, I'll do it. You won't stop me!"

"Take it easy, Jake," said George quietly. "Do you know anything about this half-caste boy? His name, I mean, and where he comes from?"

"His name's Freddie, and I picked him up at Katherine. I'm sorry I did. This is how he repaid my kindness. Well, he had his chance; now he's going to pay the price. Stand aside, George, it's no business of yours."

"It is my business. Now I'll tell you something that may surprise you. **Freddie is my son.** Do you get that?"

There was absolute silence. Jake's jaw dropped. "Your son?" he gasped. "That miserable half-caste is your son? You're kidding!"

"No I ain't," said George. "Freddie is my son, and I'm going to be responsible for him, see! You say you never broke your word—well, neither did I. You'll have to kill me before you touch a hair of Freddie's head."

Jake broke into gusts of ribald laughter. "Ha, ha, ha! Your son! Saint George! So, the skeleton's out of the cupboard at last! Ha, ha, ha! I must say he don't do you much credit!"

"Maybe I've neglected my responsibilities," George told him quietly. "But I'm taking

over now. I'll pay for everything Freddie's stolen, and I'll see he never goes wrong again. I'm taking him with me right now. He's guilty—there's no doubt about that—but I'm asking you to let him off for my sake. You won't lose by it."

"Take him and welcome!" Jake yelled. "Ha, ha, this is going to be the joke of the whole Northern Territory. You're a dark horse, George, I must say! All the same, you'd have been better rid of him. Ha, ha, what a joke!"

George was careful to shield Freddie until he had ridden out of gunshot. We then left Jake and rode slowly back to the cattle. Dick was the first to speak. "If that don't beat the band!" he muttered. "Who would have thought George had a half-caste son? It's going to go against him when this story gets around. Isn't there a law against that sort of thing?"

"Yes," said Joe. "A hundred pounds fine or twelve months in gaol. All the same, I admire George for the way he acted. He might have been a bit late accepting responsibility, but when it came to the point he did his duty. All the same, I wouldn't have believed it of George."

It was evening before I saw George alone. We were in the mustering camp, and Freddie was following George around like a faithful dog. George broke a rather long silence. "Well," he said, "I'll have to muster a lot more bullocks before the wet season. I'll need all the money I can get. This son of mine is going to cost me a pretty penny, but it's worth it. Poor little devil! he ain't had much chance."

"George," I said, "it's strange that Freddie has red hair. Not many half-castes have red hair in this district. **YOUR** hair isn't red."

"Shut up, will you!" said George, glancing hastily around to see if we were alone. "And keep your thoughts to yourself. He's my son now, and I'm going to look after him. I'm taking the responsibility, see? Poor little devil! It was a close go."

And the final entry in to-day's Log is taken from the 1st chapter of John's Gospel: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

DARK CHILDREN. All the dark children are well, and there is a marked improvement in their health. Janet and Marj. commenced school this year, which means that five of our children are now attending the Castle Hill school. There is great excitement each day

as they march up to meet the school 'bus with their school bags, containing lunches and play lunches, hugged tight. During the holidays all the children had an outing to Crosslands, and enjoyed the swimming and picnic lunches. Most of them had other outings; usually two or three children at a time, which is as many as one person can safely manage.

STREET STALL. The Stall set down for 17th January had to be cancelled owing to the repairs at the Council Stall. However, through the courtesy of the Town Clerk, we were given another day, 29th January, and, in spite of the short notice the members of the Auxiliary rallied round, and over £27 was taken. As this is enough to feed all the children for over a week, we are deeply grateful not to have missed out. Another Street Stall will be held in the grounds of the Parramatta Town Hall (D.V.) on Monday, 25th March; we look forward to increased support for this. By the way, please remember the next Rally and Sale of Work in the Sydney Town Hall on Saturday, 1st June. Many friends are already preparing gifts for the Stalls, but we do want extra gifts and helpers this year.

THE "SKY PILOT." We regret having to announce a serious breakdown in the health of Mr. Langford-Smith, who has been overworking for a considerable time. He has not taken even a week's holiday for over twenty years, and when our doctor finally persuaded him to see a Specialist, he was ordered three months' complete change. Finally the doctor agreed to let him off with two months; not a day less! Humanly speaking, this seemed equally impossible, but when faced with the alternative of a complete breakdown, we realised that something had to be done. An emergency meeting of the Council decided that the doctor's orders must be carried out; just how this can be managed is not yet clear.

Unfortunately, it is impossible for Mrs. Langford-Smith to be away at the same time. The Mission work has to be carried on by Mrs. Langford-Smith and Mrs. Warwick, with the help of Isabelle. Christian friends are very willing to help, and one friend has kindly offered to take part of his long-service leave and spend it helping on the farm during Mr.

Langford-Smith's absence. We would value your prayers that God will overrule all arrangements.

Besides the work involved in caring for our large family of dark children, the day for "Shut-ins," the Street Stalls, Women's Auxiliary meetings, the mounting office work, the farm, etc., there is also the problem of finance. The parents of some of the dark children, who had arranged to contribute part of the cost of maintaining them, have not been able to do what they promised, and such arrears amount to over £200. The children could not be allowed to suffer, and so (as often happens in Mission work) the Council has not been able to pay the salaries of the missionaries regularly. While accounts remain unpaid, Mission workers are always reluctant to draw their salaries, and the result is that these are many months in arrears. Please pray that God will provide for all our needs.

It is 29 years since the "Sky Pilot" first went to Arnhem Land as a missionary to the aborigines. There have been great changes in that time, and many of the bushmen have "snapped their hobbles," as George puts it. However, George himself, now a very old man, is still alive. Jim, who recently had a slight stroke, is also living. For years these and other Territorians have begged their "Sky Pilot" to revisit them, but he has been unable to get away. Those who have followed the radio broadcasts through the years will realise that the "Sky Pilot's" heart is with his bushman friends and the aborigines of Arnhem Land. If he has to take several weeks' holiday he would like to return to Central Australia and Arnhem Land. This would also enable him to gather more material for radio broadcasts and further books to add to the three he has already published. As he did in the early days, before he had his aeroplane, he would travel by car. There are proper roads now in place of the bush tracks he travelled alone in the past. Expenses, apart from petrol, would not be high. If any friend could lend a rifle or shotgun for the trip it would be a great boon.

Will you pray that, if it is God's will, the "Sky Pilot" will be able to make this brief trip to the "Never Never"; that he may have a safe return, and, with renewed health and strength, be able to carry on his life's work at Marella Mission Farm.