

CHAPTER XVII.

STIRRING STORIES.

From lonely and widely separated mission stations throughout Australia we receive from time to time interesting sidelights on the intimate work of the missionaries among the native people.

In May, 1933, this unique story was told by one of the missionaries. We repeat it as an illustration of the keen spiritual susceptibility of the aborigines, and the capability of the native mind to appreciate the importance of the supernatural. "One day, an old lubra, called Annie, was brought in a dray for 30 miles to the mission station. She was sick, and had come to me for medicine. They tipped her roughly out of the dray, and I made her a camp where she could rest. I gave her medicine, and then told her about the Lord Jesus. In these districts the natives call the Supreme Being by the name of 'Marmon,' and so, after I had talked to her for some time, and was preparing to leave her, she said, 'Don't go; tell me more about goodfella Marmon.' Next day I went again, giving her medicine, and telling her more about Christ. There were several children ill with pneumonia at the time, and I was too busy to see her for several days, so she came to see me, helped along by two other native women. In my room there is a picture of the Crucifixion. 'There is Marmon,' said old Annie; 'too much prickle on head,' and she began to cry. The next day she came again, but was too ill to come any more. One morning her husband came running down to me, and, bursting into the room, he cried,

'Come quick-fella, Missus; Annie wants to see you.' I ran to Annie's camp, and there I saw her with a transfigured face, full of joy and happiness, and her home beautifully clean and tidy. She had placed a box by her bed for the missionary. 'Sit down on box,' she said; 'you big-fella yabba along me, now me yabba along you. Last night I lie along my bed. Marmon, He come down and get me, and take me right up to Him big-fella church. Him no sorry-fella up there, Him glad-fella. Him all shiny-fella, like big sun. Marmon come sit beside me. 'Annie, you like em this big-fella church?' 'Yes, yes.' 'This church belonga you and your people. You go back and preach to them and tell them about Me.' I said, 'More better I stop here now.' He said, 'No, you go back and preach for ten days, then come back here.' So now I have to tell my people about Marmon for ten days, and then He take me to His big-fella church."

The following seems hard to realise, and yet it is literally true that for nine days Annie took every opportunity to tell her people about the Saviour. Everyone who came near her camp heard the tidings of a Home prepared for all who would accept salvation. Then she said to the missionary, "Sister, promise me you go all over my country, tell my people about Marmon." The promise was given. On the tenth day, Annie gathered around her camp a large company of the native people, and once again told them about Marmon. "Sorry-fella he die on the Cross, glad-fella He up in the sky," she said, and just as the sun was setting she went to meet Marmon in the 'big-fella church.'"

One worker writes of some of the difficulty and incidental excitement connected with transporting goods from the Transcontinental railway to the mission station at Ooldea. With the approach of Christmas time (1933), there was at the siding a miscellaneous accumulation of parcels and articles

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of all sorts. How to get this assortment of goods out to the station over four miles of sand-hills was a problem. There was only one camel available, and for some reason she took exception to the heavy boxes. Finally, however, she was loaded up, and they all started out, everyone with a parcel or bag of some description, and, after hours of weary toiling through the sand in the scorching sun, came to a spot about a mile from home. Here, under the welcome shade of a tree, the camel evidently thought the time opportune to lie down and have a rest. Down she got, but alas, the heavy load overbalanced her, and she fell sprawling amongst the parcels and boxes. They were afraid at first that her neck was broken, and oh, the noise she made! There was only one way to release her, and this was done without delay. They cut the ropes and let her free from the load. It was found to be utterly impossible to replace all the articles, so half the load was left by the tree to be picked up later on. Next morning we had a great time cooking, washing and cleaning, and indeed it was a happy Christmas for these poor native children of the desert, who had dwelt there so long without any knowledge of the Babe of Bethlehem.

A few months later, Miss Lock wrote of the terrible heat-wave that had passed over the interior, causing much sickness and fever both to missionary and native people. She writes of having to rise early in the morning to prepare breakfast for 60 natives, and after that she gave them various commodities, such as cotton, ointments, castor-oil, etc., in larger or smaller quantities, according to their various needs. She had three native girls in training for domestic service. She named them Lorna, Pansy, and Dorothy. Interruptions of all sorts were inevitable, so that it was not strange that in the midst of her task of mixing a damper she had to run and get a horse at the well before he finished drinking;

the horse, by the way, had been absent without leave for an indefinite period, and this was their only chance of recapturing him.

Then came another innovation. A strange-looking affair had been transported from the station, and there was great speculation amongst the natives as to what the new "jigger" might be. It was explained that it was a wheat-crusher for making porridge-meal. After some excitement and experimenting, the new machine was assembled and erected, and it was not long before they had a bag of wheat crushed. Some of the poor old women had been saying, "We cannot chew the wheat, we got no teeth," so now they will be satisfied.

The next great excitement was when a big bath was put off the train. The people at the siding were wondering who it belonged to, and when they found it belonged to the missionary they were envious. No such luxury had ever appeared in Ooldea before. No doubt it would seem strange to some city dwellers, with every convenience and comfort, to see the primitive methods they adopt in these outback places. For instance, the bathroom at Ooldea was an old galvanised tank turned upside down, and the missionary describes it as being "quite nice." Fortunately, it was a rather large tank, so there was room for the new bath. The missionary wrote: "Now we are going to make a wash-stand and use one of the separator bowls for the wash-basin."

The next improvement was the building of a little laundry, with conveniences for washing. "But," writes the missionary, "it was too funny for anything. Some of the women did not know how to wash, and they put the children in, clothes and all, and washed the whole bundle together. One old native woman, putting on a superior air, came up and said, 'Don't you women know how to wash your kids' clothes?' and, driving them all away, she collected all the clothes and washed them, letting the children go

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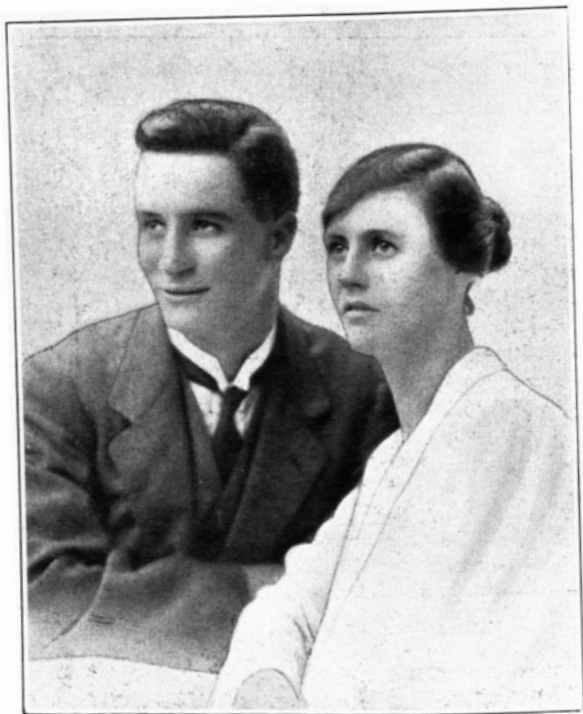
free. It was rather a trial at first to get some of the children to have their bath, but others tried to make them ashamed of their heathen ways by saying, 'You no savvy, you spinifex natives.' Their clothes need a lot of mending, and the missionary organised a band of young native girls to undertake this work.

The natives at Ooldea quite well understood the Scripture references to salt and bitter wells, and to sweet and living waters. The Ooldea Soak, situated among a lot of sandhills, has been used by the natives as a watering and resting place. When the East-West railway line was being put down, the Railway Department made it a pumping station. There are a number of wells, some salt, and some bitter. The natives used to bring their sick folk to the bitter water, which had healing properties. At that time there were great lakes of this salt and bitter water on the plains, but the seven years' drought dried them all up, and now it is only after a heavy rain that any water can be found, except in the wells. When the missionary came to this spot to make a home for the natives, they seemed to be well pleased, and some of the men set to work to erect buildings. They took a great interest in the missionary's plans, and, considering the few tools they had, certainly worked wonders. At this time, the missionary had four rooms, a ration room, a bush church, and the aforesaid bathroom. The missionary wrote: "I think I am getting too comfortable, after having used a kerosene tin for five or six years, to have a real bathroom, but the Lord is good to me to incline His children to give me this little comfort now I am not so young to stand the roughing."

The story reached us in July, 1933, of the passing of an old aboriginal veteran, the last of the old men of Nepabunna. Sydney was a patriarch of his people, the sole survivor of those who knew the old customs, and whose body bore the scars of many



Mr. and Mrs. Street.



Mr. and Mrs. Collier.





Mr. and Mrs. L. J. White.



A Native Family.

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tribal wars. His story contains the following incident:—"In the very early morning, perhaps ninety years ago, a company of aborigines belonging to a hostile tribe, attacked and killed Sydney's father and elder brother. This, in accordance with native tradition and custom, created a great thirst for revenge in the little boy's heart, and from that morning, through all his boyhood and youth, Sydney hoped and planned to avenge the blood of his father. Every year after he reached manhood, he went alone into the mountain country inhabited by the hostile natives, and left behind him a trail of death amongst the members of the enemy tribe. His head and body were scarred with many a deep wound he had received in those terrible days of treachery and bloodshed, for Sydney was a marked man, and the relatives of those he had slain searched far and wide for their mortal enemy. After many years, most of the men of both tribes were either killed in battle with other tribes, or shot by white men, and Sydney's opportunity for revenge ceased. After this long life of hatred, bitterness and revenge, the old man heard of One Who taught the higher rule of life contained in the Sermon on the Mount. The story of the Man of Sorrows touched him deeply, and the hard, revengeful spirit became gentle and sympathetic. Those who saw the passing of this sincere, grand old warrior could scarce restrain their tears as they thought of all he had been through in his long, hard life."

The story of quite a different kind is told by an elderly visitor to Bomaderry Children's Home. It was a cold, raw day in the middle of winter, and all the surroundings tended to make one miserable and depressed. Some of the party were shivering with the cold, and others had wet feet after the walk through the long grass. How cheerless everything was. The clothes wouldn't dry, and the fire wouldn't burn; and the dull clouds held back the warmth of

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the sun. As the visitors neared the Home, they were suddenly startled out of their depression by the sound of a glad and cheerful song, coming in full-throated melody from the girls and boys of Bomaderry—

“Cheer up, cheer up, the sun will shine again on you,
Cheer up, cheer up, the promises of God are true.”

Depression was dispelled, gloom was gone, and the visitors found themselves rejoicing in the thought that many of these little ones, whose tuneful voices echoed through the forest on that bitter morning, had been rescued from worse than death, and were now being lovingly cared for by the kind sisters at the Home.

In May, 1933, we have recorded the building of the church at Swan Reach. Mr. W. Wade, to whom the work of supervising building operations was entrusted, encountered many initial difficulties. After waiting a month to get the timber, he found that what had been supplied was insufficient, and some of it unsuitable. The posts were too small, and many of them too crooked for use. At last enough timber was gathered, and the work commenced. The building is made of pine logs placed vertically and plastered with clay mortar. It took considerable ingenuity to fit together the rough, twisted timber, but at last the building was finished and roofed with iron. To the missionaries this building was a parable of another building, a spiritual house, not made with hands; the building together of men and women with twisted lives, and crooked characters, into a building which would be a temple of God. The twists and the crooks were being straightened out by the power of the Gospel, and only the missionaries realised to the full the wonder of these lives, transformed by the power of Christ. Again in the school we see the building going on. Only a few scholars—is it worth while? A thousand times, Yes. Their characters are being formed, and many

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of these girls and boys are being re-born with a spiritual birth, and their minds are being stored with the eternal truth of the Word of God. It is an inspiration to see these children in the school, all so eager to do their best.

The new church at Swan Reach was opened with great rejoicing, a number of visitors from Adelaide being present. Even though built of rough logs, the building was a grand cathedral in comparison with the previous structure of petrol tins. The old bell, which was used at Munuka Mission forty years before, now sent out its tones of welcome, and the native people flocked to the opening services. The official opening was carried out by the oldest native woman at the mission station. She performed her part with characteristic native dignity. The services were most inspiring, and in the evening quite a number made a definite decision for Christ.

Some time later, news came from Morgans, Western Australia, of the starting of the camel expedition into the interior. The mission natives themselves sometimes bring in those who have never heard the Gospel. On one occasion about 30 were brought in, some of them travelling on foot for over 400 miles. What a privilege to be the first to tell them of the love of Christ, Who came to seek and to save the lost. It is grand to observe the rapt attention with which they listen. We read that at this station the missionaries had the joy of baptising eight additional native converts. We also read of the celebration of a Christian wedding, where, instead of the customary jocular toasts, the bridegroom gave a stirring testimony after the wedding breakfast. He had never testified before, but he told in forceful words of how he was once a very evil man, stealing from white men's camps, and indulging in all kinds of sin. He did not know it was wrong, he said, until he came to the mission and

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heard of Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit convicted him of sin, and he gave his heart to the Lord, and began to walk in the Happy Land way.

There is something very touching about the death of an old native. Somehow they seem to be in such close touch with the other world. Their big, luminous eyes, and the soulful expression on their faces, seem to indicate a deep yearning for a higher and better life beyond the grave. Old Harry Starlight passed away in the Katanning Hospital. Mr. Hedley Wright, the missionary, describes him as a fast friend among the natives of the West. He was always kind, respectful and thoughtful. "When we first came to Gnowangerup," writes the missionary, "we visited a camp of natives fifty miles distant. It had been raining, and the grass and bushes were drenched with water. Dear old Harry acted as guide, taking us from camp to camp. Walking in front with a stick, he swept the grass and knocked the water from the bushes to make a drier path for us to walk.

Grandfather Kickett, an old full-blood native of the south-west, was well known throughout the district as a capable, industrious man. At one time he had his own farm, but that had long since passed into other hands. The local white people say that Grandfather Kickett must have been nearly one hundred years old. At this great age, he found Christ as his Saviour. He was too deaf to understand much that the missionary said, but he took it in bit by bit, and we believe the light dawned on his benighted mind in answer to prayer. After the missionaries had visited him for many months, he one day asked them to pray, and then exclaimed, "I want that Jesus for my Saviour." He put his hand on his heart and said, "I feel it in here." It was soon evident that Jesus was real to him, and the other native Christians had a new topic of conversation, viz., that Grandfather Kickett, a hundred years old, had

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been born over again, and the good news they told from camp to camp must have blended with the rejoicing amongst the angels in the other world.

From a station in South Australia comes another story of a constant war waged between light and darkness. The minds of the old natives are clouded and dark with the superstitions and accumulated beliefs of many centuries of heathenism. Old Nick and his wife, Julia, were well-known identities at the mission. The custom observed amongst the aborigines for generations past demanded that the possessions of a wife should be burnt in the dwelling of her deceased husband. Following the custom of his forefathers, Old Nick died. The older natives on the settlement insisted that Julia's possessions should be burnt with the old man's hut. Among these possessions was a valuable dress the missionary had given her. She had no intention of submitting to the old rites. They might be alright for others, but she declared they were no good to her. She defied those who sought to destroy her possessions, saying, "What's the good of praying to God to help us and send us clothes, when you silly black fellows burn them?" Julia won her case and kept the dress, but that and her Government blanket was all that was left to her. With these meagre possessions she pitched her camp and faced life alone.

"We have some unruly ruffians in the camp," wrote Mr. R. Williams in 1934, "who badly need discipline. Some people advocate physical violence, but I doubt if it would be right to become implicated in brawls. I find it necessary, however, to be present at quarrels to prevent murder. There are several would-be murderers in the camp to-night, who have been stopped in their rage from acts of great violence. One man rushed headlong into the struggle with an axe, and I was only just in time to rush in and swing the axe my way. I have a gun

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here, which I snatched from the hand of a man who had already committed murder, and seems ever ready to repeat the achievement."

Mr. L. H. J. White, coming into the Mission in April, 1930, has seen service at La Perouse, Wellington and Bellbrook, and has proved a good Secretary to the Council, being appointed temporarily in March, 1934, and continuously since September, 1936. With Mrs. White he has done excellent work, though the latter's health has not been good for some time; it is hoped, however, that medical treatment which she has been undergoing will prove of permanent value, and enable them to continue their service for many years.

Lena Bungary has proved a loyal helper, and her outstanding Christian character, together with many an act of self-denial, has indicated her love for the workers among her people, whilst she has also borne splendid witness in public and in private, in Sydney metropolitan area, to the Faith she has embraced.

Mr. Henry Bush has been intimately associated with the work of the Mission since the day of small beginnings at La Perouse. Through all the years he has unstintedly given of his best to assist the cause. His business experience and his literary gifts were always at the disposal of the Mission. He has served as a prominent member of the Council for many years, and filled several offices, including Chairman of the Executive, Treasurer, and Editor of the Mission magazine. This brother has ever been a true friend of the missionaries, and it has always been his desire that more practical support should be sent to the workers in the field, who are bearing the brunt of the battle. As a prominent member of the Christian Endeavour movement, he has done much to interest Endeavourers in the work amongst the aborigines.

Few people living in comfortable homes rea-

lise the conditions under which many of the aborigines are forced to live. Mr. Eaton thus describes his visitation amongst the native camps at Oodnadatta: "They have the idea that they can never rise to become noble or good, but that the rubbish heap is the place for them all. Going around to visit them with medicines, I have to get into their wurlies to attend to them. These places are just ovens, most of them only about three feet high, and no bush on them, but just sheets of old iron, and the burning sun pouring down on them all day." The writer of this article has seen again and again a mother with the babe a few hours old, lying under a single sheet of bark on a mouldy wet blanket, with cockroaches and centipedes and other vermin crawling about her bed. Without the care of doctor or nurse, she has brought her offspring into the world, and sometimes is on the verge of starvation herself as she seeks to nourish her child. We have seen at least twenty aborigines, men, women, boys and girls, sleeping under a filthy shelter less than eight feet square, and on one occasion, while on a missionary journey, received a cordial invitation to share their hospitality. Needless to say, the invitation was not accepted. But as I lay by my camp fire, out under the stars, a mile away from the said camp, I prayed to God that He would stir the Christian people of Australia to a sense of their responsibility with regard to these aborigines. The callousness of so-called Christians cannot be understood or explained.

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