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Settler, Scientist, Missioner—Versus Aboriginal

GOVERNMENT IN REAL DILEMMA

Triangular Barricade Leaves Black Man No Chance To Save Himself

By Colin Beddall

TO be thoroughly disillusioned, anyone who imagines Australia's aboriginal problems can be solved by arm-chair theorising need only travel to Alice Springs by one train and return by the next. As I remember it, there is a fortnight between trains.

TWO weeks in the Alice Springs should convince the most obstinate that the centre, in a matter of theories, is a more than usually unfertile place. Principals in the bitter controversy—the cattleman, the missionary and the scientist—each with an opinion directly opposed to the others, make a seemingly eternal triangle that must barricade the black man from any succor likely to come his way.

THE cattleman's view is a frank one. The sooner the aboriginal disappears the better it will be for the aboriginal and everyone else concerned, he says. The black man could never make anything of this country. We can. So the black man must give way. That's progress.

He judges the aborigines by the tragic remnants he sees drifting, spirit-broken and demoralised, about his cattle run. He knows nothing of the greatness that ancient dark race once had, nor does he wish to. He despises the blacks he sees gambling their own wives away in a frenzy that knows no wages.

Nugget, a typical settler whom I met in Kilgriff's pub, helped me better to understand his attitude towards the aborigines with the following story: Nugget held an extensive run in the wild country out north-west from Alice Springs. He quarrelled with the local tribe. Miles from assistance, it became a matter of his life or theirs.

Tried To Spear Him

THE aborigines began a concerted effort to get Nugget. They tried to spear him. Twice they attempted to catch him unawares at night. One evening, returning after dusk to his shack, his dogs began barking furiously the moment he entered his shack.

Crouched under Nugget's bunk, armed with a murderous nulla nulla, was a naked savage. So this time it was the dogs that saved a white man's life—and lost a black man's.

Shortly afterwards Nugget was dared to enter a patch of no man's land on the outskirts of his run. He took no notice of the taunt until his station boys brought in word that many of his cattle were being speared in this territory. Then, challenge or no challenge, he set out with his dogs.

Each night their barking would warn him that the blacks were about. He made a habit of stuffing grass in his sleeping bag and crawling into a hollow log. But carelessness one night led Nugget into an error that nearly cost him his life.

Lost His Dogs

MAKING camp after dusk, he let his dogs roam out of sight. They did not return.

He was bending over his gear when suddenly like a demon taken shape from thin air a native landed on his back, crushing him a sickening blow on the head with a nulla nulla. Then two more of the blacks came at him. Almost blinded by the blood that streamed down his face, sick and dizzy, he struggled desperately towards his sleeping bag.

He dutched for his rifle but it was not there. Then he had to get to his swag while all the time the three natives beat and tore at him. Somehow Nugget reached his gun. His first shot set every tuft of grass alive, with blacks fleeing for their lives. There were several who got little distance.

Nugget's boys took him a nightmare journey to the Alice where, for weeks, he hovered between life and death in the A.I.M. hospital. He pulled through only because, as the doctor said, Nugget was a lucky man with the strength of ten.

Scientists' View

ACCORDING to the scientists, a story such as that should not be held against the black man. It can be proved that 99 per cent. of native acts of violence against white men are committed under severe provocation. It is their claim, and they have an explanation even for the constant cattle-spearing by natives.

A wholesale slaughter of native game almost always accompanies the white man's entry into new country. That game is the black man's sole on which he depends largely for his subsistence. Can you blame the black man, having lost his own cattle, for turning his attentions to the stock that has replaced his kangaroos, wallabies and wild turkey?

The oldest living race in the world, says the scientist, the aborigines must be preserved. Bitter experience has shown that the only means by which that salvation can be achieved is by finding the black man complete isolation from the ravages of our civilisation.

Reserve—For Science?

FOR many years, maps have carried the words Aboriginal Reserve across a large white space west of Alice Springs. Generally, dingo scalpers are the only white men that break that reserve because only dingo scalpers could wish to.

Set apart a large tract of inhabitable land, not desert, and see to it that into that reserve these steps no white man except the scientist. That is the scientist's proposal for, he says, the study of the homo sapiens of yesterday is of vital importance to the homo sapiens of tomorrow. Only by looking into our past may we find a guide to our future.

And here the scientist gets the missionary bubbling over with fervent indignation. He says the teachings of the missionary, like the rulings of the magistrate, merely confuse the native. The mission stations breed degradation and habits learned, mental, physical and moral ruin. Only with every tissue of its native policy left intact, continues the scientist, can the black race survive.

It is because he is convinced the scientist is almost as great a menace as the settler, that the missionary agrees there should be an unimpeachable reserve for the black man. But the mis-



The Northern type of aboriginal — an old man of a Gulf of Carpentaria tribe.



In contrast, the Southern (Lake Tyers) type of native.

missionary's conception of such a reserve is one into which there should step no white man—except the missionary.

Museum Specimens

TO the scientists the aborigines are merely museum specimens, it is claimed. The anthropologist would have the black men reared like herds of experimental farm cattle. The ethnologist, it is maintained, would revive dangerous old superstitions which the natives, if properly handled, would soon forget.

And, declares the missionary, it is incumbent on us to see that the black man is saved for the next world as well as this. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," the priests and pastors would remind you.

Locked outside the triangle of this bitter wrangling is the Government, at loss to know which side to listen to, and only too well informed of the poor success that has met any of its past efforts to help the aboriginal.