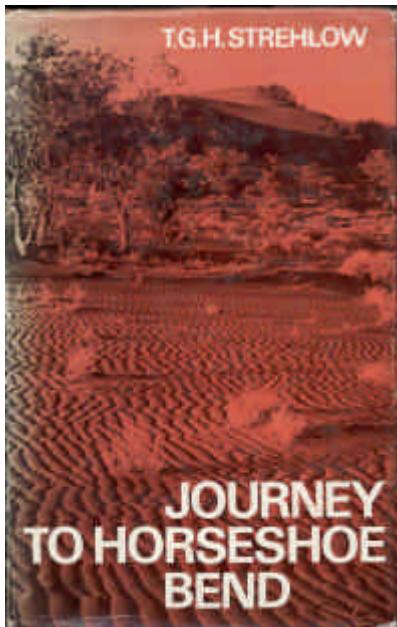


Journey to Horseshoe Bend

Strehlow Research Centre



The story of Carl Strehlow's fateful trip to obtain medical help for dropsy in the 20s. It is a classic Australian tale that incorporates TGH Strehlow's love and respect for the traditional Arrernte landscape and people.

An SRC e-book



Professor TGH Strehlow

SYNOPSIS

Carl Strehlow, a Lutheran missionary at Hermannsburg, had become gravely ill with 'dropsy' and attempts were made to transport him by buggy to the railhead at Oodnadatta and then on by train to Adelaide and medical relief. The party, which included Carl's wife Frieda, their son Ted, the schoolteacher Heinrich, and Arrernte friends Hesekiel, Jakobus and Titus, set off on Tuesday 10 October 1922 but only got as far as Horseshoe Bend on the Finke River before Carl died.

Woven into the narrative are stories of the stations and the people who established them. A deeper and older strand of history is present in the Aboriginal stories that colour the country through which the party travels.

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Journey to Horseshoe Bend

by TGH Strehlow (first published 1969)

IT WAS Tuesday, the tenth day of October, 1922.

The last morning at Hermannsburg had arrived, and the bright horizon fringe of the eastern sky was beginning to turn into a rich, deep red. Already the great broad-fronted dome of Lalkintinerama, the highest point of the Pota Uruna or "Range of Doom" south of Hermannsburg, was being lit up by the subdued glow of the sun that was on the point of emerging; and twenty five miles to the north-west the magnificent bluffs of rugged Rutjubma were towering up in almost unearthly beauty, their deep-scarred purple faces softened by a rich tracery of pink veins which had spread through their sharply serrated edges. To the east of Rutjubma, and almost due north of the station, the long line of bold bluffs which culminated in the lofty peak of Ltarkalibaka shone in a blaze of bluish-purple, tipped by delicate pink embroidery. It was from the sudden slopes of Rutjubma and Ltarkalibaka that the two source streams of the Finke River, on whose banks Hermannsburg was standing, rushed down in foaming fury during flood times; and once they had passed the station buildings, these swirling floodwaters penetrated into the broad southern range and dashed themselves against the immovable base of Lalkintinerama before they were forced into the thirty-five-mile gorge that ended only at the gap between the Ilaltitalta and Lalkitnama ridges, a short distance below the ever-running springs of Irbmangkara. The hushed morning air was filled with the calls of birds - miners, willy wagtails, and crows - , all of which provided a shrill and somewhat discordant tonal background to the flute-like notes of a pair of butcher

birds that were expressing their joy at the break of a new day in carefree songs of jubilation. When the sun's rays began to emerge like slim spears of fire over the eastern sandhills, other sounds burst upon the scene - the sounds of men and women who were hurrying to complete the final morning tasks necessary to enable their sick ingkata to set out on his difficult journey south to seek medical help. Dark milkmaids were milking the bailed cows in the small yard east of the station buildings, while the hungry calves were bleating at them impatiently from their separate enclosure of split gum palings. Dark men were vigorously chopping up with ringing blows on a stout wooden meat bench in front of the station store the carcass of the bullock slaughtered the night before to provide meat for the travellers on the first part of their long journey. Some of this meat was bagged up fresh; the rest was dry-salted, and placed into large flour bags, which soon began to run freely with the copious red meat juices forced out by the rock salt. Over the plain north-east of the station a pair of dark stockmen galloped bare-back on their mounts, driving before them the buggy horses that had been newly mustered for the road. They took them down to the Finke bend at Ntjirakapa for their morning drink, and then put them up in a separate section of the yard, next to the part reserved for the milking cows. Restless and full of grass-fed arrogance after being "spelled out bush" for many months, these horses whinnied and pranced up and down in their enclosure, often throwing playful bites and kicks at one another. From time to time they sniffed and thrust with their noses at

the sturdy yard gate to ascertain whether it could not be pushed open; for none of these half-wild horses relished the prospect of being forced into harness and put to work on the station or taken on a long road journey.

Excitement was riding in the air; and few of the dark folk waiting in the camp north-west of the solid whitewashed station buildings had slept much during the previous night. Ever since that Sunday in September when their ingkata, for the first time in his twenty eight years of managing Hermannsburg, had failed to emerge for conducting the church service because his treacherous illness had finally overcome his rugged physical strength and iron determination, a vague but deep-seated fear had been oppressing their thoughts. This fear had deepened with each week during which the familiar figure of their ingkata had not emerged from the front entrance of his stone residence. So intolerable had the suspense become that at least two of Strehlow's dark friends had written letters to him in Aranda, asking after his health, assuring him of their constant prayers on his behalf, and informing him that the whole dark population was sick with grief for their one and only teacher and leader, and that the women were crying many tears for him as well. And then, about a fortnight ago, the dreaded blow had fallen: a public announcement had at last been made by Mr H. A. Heinrich, the Hermannsburg native-school teacher, that their ingkata was now so weak and ill that he would have to seek medical aid in Adelaide, and that both the buggy and the van would have to be got ready for the three-hundred-and-eighty-mile journey south to

the railhead at Oodnadatta.

The first plan had been for the party to go from Hermannsburg to Alice Springs, to contact a doctor for road medical advice either at Marree or at Port Augusta by the telephone facilities available on the Overland Telegraph Line, and then to follow the normal line-party track down to Owen Springs, and from there south along the Hugh valley to Horseshoe Bend. This would have occasioned only a slight change from the customary route which had been used by all wheeled Hermannsburg vehicles ever since the establishment of the station: this route had gone from Hermannsburg past the Long Water Hole on the Ellery Creek over a ridge of high ground to the Rarangintjita point of the Waterhouse Range, and thence along the northern edge of this range to Owen Springs, where it linked up with the normal North-South Route which skirted the Overland Telegraph Line. Sergeant and Mrs Robert Stott had already sent their invitation to Hermannsburg for the Strehlow family to stay at their home during their short stay at Alice Springs. But Strehlow's condition had deteriorated so rapidly after the middle of September that this first plan had had to be dropped, and a completely new and untried, but rather shorter, route selected. The time-saving proposal finally adopted by the Hermannsburg party was that they were to drive to Pmokoputa on the Ellery Creek, follow the Ellery from here to its junction with the Finke at Rubula, and then proceed down the Finke valley for the next hundred and thirty miles to Horseshoe Bend Station.

"It is necessary to get Mr Strehlow down to the

doctor as quickly as possible," Heinrich had explained to the dark men; and a number of the latter had quickly volunteered to go to Pmokoputa and clear a track for the vehicles through some of the dense ti-tree thickets and young gum stands which had sprouted up between Pmokoputa and Rubula after the heavy floods of the previous years. When some of the stockmen pointed out that some of the boulders on the banks of the Finke near Alitera would also need to be moved from the track, a second working party had gone out on horses, loaded up with crowbars and shovels, to clear a track over this dangerous portion of the road. No vehicle had attempted to negotiate this camel and horse trail during the past thirty years or even longer; and Strehlow himself had never gone further south into this long Finke gorge than Alitera. He had consequently never visited Henbury or Idracowra Stations, and he was looking forward to seeing these places after what he knew would be his final departure from Hermannsburg.

During the past week the conversations of the dark folk had been full of reminiscences relating to the sick man; for Strehlow - who was universally known among them as the "ajua" (old man of importance) or "ingkata" (ceremonial chief) - had long since become for them one of those men of supreme authority who are invested with legendary traits in their own lifetime. Twenty eight years had elapsed since that October day when he had first burst in upon the uncaring and derelict community which was all that had remained at Hermannsburg after its first group of missionaries had been withdrawn. A big,

heavily bearded man, with a shock of stubborn hair, he had quickly moved with forceful strides over the tumbledown settlement, and his keen amber eyes with their slightly greenish tinge had missed nothing. Within a few weeks most of the unreliable white station hands engaged during the caretaking period had been sacked, and a stern regime of strict discipline restored. All dark men and women able and willing to work had been given some employment in return for food and clothing, and Strehlow had personally supervised the labours of the majority of the station workers. During its pre-Strehlow era Hermannsburg had been fairly liberally staffed with white mission workers sent out from the Hermannsburg Mission Institute in Germany; but after the take-over by the small Immanuel Synod of South Australia in 1894, the meagre funds available from the South Australian congregations had never been sufficient to allow more than a skeleton staff to man the station. Strehlow himself had had to deal out personally all meals three times a day to the dark folk living on the station. Whenever the white head stockman was mustering or yard-building out on the run, or was driving cattle or horses down to the railhead at Oodnadatta, Strehlow had also been compelled to supervise the slaughtering of the cattle for station consumption. Yet he had found time as well for a careful study of the Aranda language, and for writing a monumental tome on the myths, songs, and social organization of the Western Aranda group and the Kukatja people. Initially hostile to all paganism, Strehlow had, when he first arrived, done his best to carry on the stern missionary traditions

of his predecessors by suppressing all "heathen" ceremonies and folk-dances in the mission area, and had thereby aroused a great deal of antagonism towards his rule; but after six years he had become intensely and sympathetically interested in aboriginal mythology and folklore. For Strehlow this was a natural development, since he had been a great lover of Classic and Germanic mythology before coming to Australia. He had fortunately studied theology under Dr Johannes Deinzer, a liberal, University-educated seminary head, who had been in the habit of telling his students, "Hold on to Classical literature, or barbarism will come, and to the Bible, or paganism will come".

A new and exciting world of the mind had opened up for Strehlow after he had begun his work of collecting the sacred Western Aranda myths and songs. Whatever time during the day he could take off from his missionary and station duties during the ensuing ten years, he had spent on his detailed and very thorough ethnological and social studies. Each evening he had retired to his study, where he had then sat up till midnight, writing up, in neat and beautifully shaped characters, his researches from the rough notes he had made during the day. He had also amassed a large amount of information on these matters in the neighbouring Kukatja area from a grateful Kukatja ceremonial chief called Wapiti, who had been brought to him at Hermannsburg after police bullets had smashed one of his thigh bones and severely gashed a part of his abdomen. Strehlow had dressed his seemingly fatal wounds and patiently nursed him back to health. During the months of his

convalescence Wapiti - whose daughter Ilkalita was later on to marry Albert Namatjira - had repaid his white benefactor with a wealth of important and secret information. Nor had Wapiti been Strehlow's only dark patient: the tireless missionary had acted as doctor for the whole aboriginal community of Hermannsburg during his twenty-eight-year term at the station. While working on his Aranda and Kukatja researches Strehlow had gained a deep respect both for aboriginal culture and for the creative aboriginal mind. His clerical conscience would not permit him to reverse openly the uncompromising stand that he, following his predecessors, had initially taken against "paganism"; but he no longer preached against the old religion from the pulpit, and the sacred cave of Mananganga, two miles from Hermannsburg, was never permitted by him to be violated by any white intruders.

When he visited it himself, he came as an honoured guest, at the invitation of its famed ceremonial chief, Loatjira, the headman of the local group of Ntarea.

It was only natural that Strehlow should have come to be not only respected but also loved by the dark community that had been entrusted to his care. He was, in fact, at that time the only white man at Hermannsburg who could walk unarmed into any of the bloody camp quarrels fought with spears, boomerangs, and butcher knives, that sometimes disrupted the peace of the community, and bring the fighting to an end by a few sternly shouted commands. For he was regarded, not only as a white missionary, but also as a Western Aranda ingkata, to whom the

old ceremonial chiefs had entrusted rich portions of their treasures of sacred lore. However, the greatest asset that had enabled Strehlow to rule the dark community of Hermannsburg with such a firm hand was the reputation of fairness and justice that he had built up during his long term of office-in particular, the reputation of fearlessly upholding justice for the aboriginal population against unprincipled white men, irrespective of whether these were white mission workers or white police officers. The stories of his courage in standing up for the rights of the dark man were numerous and varied, and some of them could well have become embroidered with legendary trappings during the passage of the years. But they were firmly believed, and helped to confirm the Aranda folk in their unshakeable conviction that all would be well at Hermannsburg as long as Strehlow was their ingkata. One of these stories concerned his alleged encounter with Mounted Constable Erwin Wurmbrand, during Strehlow's first months at Hermannsburg. Wurmbrand had been the chief mate and principal offsider of Mounted Constable Willshire, who had been despatched by the South Australian Government to Central Australia in 1881 in order to pacify the Aranda territory and make it safe for cattle-raising. To achieve these ends both constables used to go out on horseback, attended by large numbers of black trackers brought in from the areas of more southerly tribes, and shoot dark nomads who were roaming about on station properties from which reports had come in of cattle-killing. There were no legal trials of the alleged offenders, not even any "kangaroo courts". Willshire

and Wurmbrand regarded themselves as living incarnations of British Justice, and exercised their power over life and death without any reference to magistrates or courts. Of these two men it was Wurmbrand who had been the chief executioner in the Western Aranda and Kukatja areas; and in Strehlow's time there were still many families living at Hermannsburg who mourned the loss of relatives shot by Wurmbrand and his ruthless trackers. The chief monument to his memory in Central Australia was a place known as Wurmbrand's Rockhole - a large, deep rockhole on the side of a hill situated close to the north-eastern shore of the Iloara saltlake. Here Wurmbrand had come upon a peaceful camp of men, women, and children; and he and his party had shot all those who had not been fast enough to escape from their bullets. At Hermannsburg it was claimed that soon after Strehlow's arrival Wurmbrand had paid his last visit to the station. He had rounded up a group of men, women, and children in the station camp, and then got ready to take them away and shoot them some miles out in the bush. Their terrified relatives had run screaming for help to Strehlow, and the latter had rushed in blazing fury to Wurmbrand's camp, where the police party were still saddling their horses. Strehlow had allegedly shouted angrily at Wurmbrand, and told him to release his prisoners and get out of the place himself. "And don't ever let me catch you hunting people again at Hermannsburg," he had added, in menacing tones. To everyone's amazement, Wurmbrand had been so taken aback by Strehlow's fury that he had released his prisoners, kicked his own

tins, billies, and buckets in all directions, yelled at his trackers to hurry on with the saddling and the packing of the horses, and finally ridden off like a madman, cracking his whip and digging his spurs into his mount till it reared and plunged madly with pain. Nor had he and his trackers ever returned to Hermannsburg. It was more than likely that the police officer thus checked had not been Wurmbrand at all, but one of Willshire's successors, and that the image of the latter had become confused in later aboriginal memory with that of his hated and dreaded predecessor. However, whether authentic or not, this story fitted in excellently with Strehlow's character. He had been a powerfully built, large-boned man, who knew no fear once he was aroused. In a frontier land where station owners, police officers, and most other white men were accustomed to act with the arrogance of feudal barons who did whatever seemed right in their own eyes, and where the normal processes of the law tended to be invoked mainly in order to protect white law-breakers from the consequences of their own misdeeds, even missionaries had to be tough; and Strehlow could be as tough as any other man, as long as he felt that he was acting in the interests of law, order, and justice, and in accord with the ordinances of the Almighty. Few men cared to stand up to him once his anger had been fully aroused. One of the men who had been among the boys saved on that occasion had repaid a part of his old debt to Strehlow a few weeks earlier, when he had carried an urgent telegram on foot to Alice Springs, the nearest telegraph station, eighty miles

away, in the space of a day and a half. He had waited one night in Alice Springs for the reply, and then carried it back to Hermannsburg at the same rate of speed. This amazing walking feat of one hundred and fifty miles in three days had been undertaken in order to save vital time. To have mustered some saddle horses would have delayed the departure of the message by at least a day, and these grass-fed horses would not have covered the distance any faster than the lone message-bearer. The same man - he had been christened Hesekiel by one of Strehlow's predecessors - was waiting that very morning to begin his new assignment: to act as the driver of the buggy on which his sick master was to be taken south.

On this final morning the dark folk, after coming from the camp to eat their breakfast in the community messroom, went outside again and sat under the gums of the mission compound, talking in subdued voices and watching the double doors of Strehlow's house, in order to await the exit of some message-bearer who would announce that the time had arrived for harnessing the horses to the buggy. These double doors opened on to a wide front verandah, furnished with a table, a garden settee, and some bird-cages. In addition, there were two large boxes, one on either side of the settee. Each box held a huge bracken fern which had been brought down a few years earlier from Udepata, and which had always required valuable rainwater from the house tanks to keep it alive. This front verandah was now piled high with the twenty-odd boxes which contained all the books, the household linen, and the remaining personal

possessions of the Strehlow family. These boxes had been packed within the previous fortnight by Strehlow's son Theo, a boy of fourteen; for Mrs Strehlow had been fully occupied during the past three weeks with the task of nursing her sick husband. The boxes had been stacked for easy covering in case of rain. For the verandahs of all the mission residences had been roofed only with slim desert oak saplings which supported a top layer, some three inches thick, of lime concrete. While these verandah roofs ensured extra coolness on hot days, they were by no means waterproof. Heavy rains soaked the lime concrete till it became water-logged and dripped profusely. Hence even the large bird-cages standing on the verandah had required to be protected by their own roofs of galvanized iron. Efficient stacking of the newly packed boxes on the verandah ensured that they could be adequately protected in a heavy downpour by one of the large-sized tarpaulins stocked on the station for long-distance travelling parties. While the dark population was quietly and patiently waiting outside, the final preparations for the journey were going on within the house. The sick man inside was obviously both distressed and anxious about the journey. Moreover, he was battling desperately to preserve his trust in that God whom he had believed all his life with a rock-like faith. Strehlow had always been supported during his twenty eight years at Hermannsburg by the unshakeable conviction that was God Himself Who had chosen him to build up Hermannsburg and to establish it as a Christian home for all those Aranda men and women who had been dispossessed of their tribal lands.

Ironically, he had been the only missionary out of the three who had been stationed at Killalpaninna on Cooper's Creek in 1894 who had voted again his Synod's plan to take over Hermannsburg, on the grounds that the Immanuel Synod did not possess sufficient staff or money to run even Killalpaninna satisfactorily. But when his Synod had taken the decision to purchase Hermannsburg from the trustees of the rival Lutheran body, and he had been asked to go to Hermannsburg as its first new superintendent, Strehlow had chosen to regard this call as an appointment ordained by God; and after that he had never wavered in his determination to see the struggling settlement on the Finke River through all the difficulties that threatened to crush it from time to time. The majority of the large, solid stone buildings at Hermannsburg - the church, the school, his own residence, the community kitchen, the wagon shed, and some additions to the station store - had a been put up during his regime: the derelict settlement of 1894, which had come in for unfavourable comments in the Horn Party's Report written in that year, had by 1922 grown into the largest "village" of Central Australia outside the telegraph station and governmental administrative centre of Alice Springs. He had accepted a totally inadequate salary all his life - it was only in the closing period of his regime that he had been paid as high a figure as £120 a year, and this sum had had to support him, his wife, and his son Theo. It had compared rather poorly with the £100 a year that Heinrich, the unmarried school teacher, had been receiving. He had done miracles with the meagre mission funds

received from a few devoted congregations down south. Many others had largely remained aloof, or had been niggardly in their financial support. He had been bitterly hurt when the rival Lutheran Synod, from which Hermannsburg had been acquired in 1894, had expelled the two Pastors Heidenreich, father and son, whose congregations had continued sending occasional funds to help aboriginal welfare at Hermannsburg; for this expulsion had been forced through on the ground that any material support of this nature enabled the new Hermannsburg missionary to spread "spiritual poison" among his flock. Since these congregations had followed their pastors into Synodical exile, no further financial assistance for Hermannsburg could be expected from them after that. Even from his own Mission Board and the members of his mission staff Strehlow had not always received wholehearted support. In 1904 his Aranda re-translation of the Lutheran catechism - a work undertaken in order to improve its grammar and eliminate the many unnecessary European loan-words introduced by his predecessors - had been hotly challenged by his associate missionary, the Reverend N. Wettengel; and the latter had dropped his charges of doctrinal falsification against the new book only after a decision on this dispute had been given against him by a South Australian conference of ministers. When Strehlow had gone on long leave in 1910 to visit the land of his birth, the chairman of the Mission Board, Pastor L. Kaibel, had brought a new missionary, the Reverend O. Liebler, to Hermannsburg. Kaibel had later informed Strehlow in an exuberant letter of all the improvements effected at

the station by the new management: within a matter of weeks the long-standing defects of the old order had been miraculously remedied by the new man and himself. However, Kaibel's triumph was short-lived.

Neither he nor Liebler was able to control the forces of dissent which they had released among the aboriginal population. Liebler, a born comedian who lacked all sense of humour, had quickly become a laughing-stock to his dark congregation, and had won for himself the derisive appellation of "the poor, mad missionary" among the hard-headed cattlemen of the neighbouring stations. Upon his return to Tanunda after a four months' stay, Kaibel had unwisely published a series of articles about his trip to the Centre. Kaibel a quiet minister accustomed to the stolid and submissive attitudes of the German-Australian settlers of the Barossa Valley, had shown no understanding of the special social problems of the interior in his writings; and some of his remarks had deeply offended the Central Australian population. Thus he had described Horseshoe Bend Station in the Barossa News as "one of the minor hells on God's earth where "all the sins against the decalogue are committed as no guardian of the law is near"; and he had painted an almost libellous pen picture of its hotel proprietor, Ted Sargeant: "I asked the hotelkeeper, if he did not think it was time that he should reform seeing that he is 67 years of age, but he said, he did not think he ever would reform. Blasphemy, mocking, and scoffing is the daily diet, until the fumes of the whisky have fuzzled the brain and the tongue becomes heavy." As was to be ex-

pected, a strong counter attack had quickly been mounted against Hermannsburg by its many antagonists. With the cession of the Northern Territory by South Australia to the Commonwealth Government on 1st January, 1911, the station had passed under the control of a new civil administration. Adverse reports on Hermannsburg sent in during Strehlow's absence by Captain Barclay, Police-Corporal (later Sergeant) Stott, and Professor Baldwin Spencer, had forced an urgent visit by Kaibel to the Minister for Home and Territories in Melbourne; and these talks had ended with Kaibel's assurance that the urgently recalled Strehlow would take full charge of Hermannsburg once more. However, an ugly climate of distrust had been created between the Lutheran Church and the new departmental officials of the Commonwealth Government.

But the biggest test had come during the 1914-18 war Strehlow had been compelled by the German Government to sign a declaration giving up his German citizenship when he left Germany in 1892; and he had thereafter acquired South Australian citizenship as soon as he legally could. Long before this date he had been appointed, in 1893, a Justice of the Peace in the State of South Australia. Believing that, as an Australian citizen, he should give his undivided loyalty to his new country, he had always striven to live up to the Christian injunction, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's". The sudden flood of hatred released in Australia after August, 1914, had amazed and shocked him beyond words. He had suddenly found him-

self looked upon as an enemy alien, and by some even as a potential spy and traitor. In defiance of his naturalisation certificate, he had been compelled to fill out an alien's registration certificate in 1917, and Hermannsburg itself had almost become submerged by a flood of vituperation, particularly in certain super-patriotic South Australian circles. A proposal had been made that Hermannsburg should be taken away from the Lutheran Church, turned into a Government Station, and used as a training school for aborigines generally, and for the raising of stock. Fortunately for the mission settlement, the Northern Territory had been handed over by South Australia to the Commonwealth Government three years before the outbreak of the war, and even the most virulent South Australian hate campaigns had not been able to overwhelm Hermannsburg during the war.

Strehlow's personal honesty of purpose had become so generally accepted in Central Australia by this time that the leading governmental officials of the Northern Territory had refused to yield to the irresponsible campaigns waged in Adelaide to close Hermannsburg and to intern its superintendent. The dour, Scottish-born Administrator of the Northern Territory, Dr J. A. Gilruth, had formed a high opinion of Strehlow during his only visit to Hermannsburg in 1913. Above all, Sergeant Robert Stott, of Alice Springs, the most powerful man in the Centre, who was known everywhere as "the uncrowned king of Central Australia", both respected and liked Strehlow, whose honest and forceful personality was so closely akin to his own. Stott, a rugged, tough, plain-spoken Scot from the Ab-

erdeen area, was a British patriot who refused to allow war hysteria to divert him from what he believed to be his main duty - to uphold at all costs the principles of British justice and fair play as he understood them. Anti-German feelings had reached their height in 1917. This had been the year when hysterical patriotism in South Australia - a State in which parliamentary passions were being fanned at that time by various fanatics, chief of whom was a former Premier who had originally been a semi-literate Moonta copper miner and Methodist lay preacher - had led to the scrapping of all German place names, and the placing of a veto on all public uses of the German language.

Strehlow, however, had continued to resist Kaibel's panic-stricken urgings to sell as much stock, including breeders, as possible before the station could be taken away from the Lutheran Church. If the worst had happened, Strehlow's plan would have been that Hermannsburg should be offered as a going concern to the Anglican Church; for he had always felt great admiration for Bishop Gilbert White, the former first Bishop of Carpentaria who had recently become the first Bishop of Willochra. Strehlow's faith had been justified by the events. The Mission lease had been renewed from year to year, and so had its annual Government subsidy of £300. For during the most critical years Hermannsburg had enjoyed the protection of a liberal Commonwealth Minister for Home and Territories - Patrick McMahon Glynn, who was an Irishman and a devout Roman Catholic. And so Hermannsburg had survived its desperate struggle for existence, and kept the name

given to it by its original missionary founders. The strong esteem in which Strehlow had come to be held in Central Australia even during these hysterical war years had been highlighted sharply when an official enquiry on the running of Hermannsburg had been ordered in December, 1917, because of pressure brought to bear on the Northern Territory Administration officials by southern enemies of the Lutheran Mission. The Administrator of the Northern Territory, Dr J. A. Gilruth, had sent a telegram to Strehlow, asking him to come to Alice Springs for personal discussions on "an important matter" with Mr Justice Bevan, the Judge of the Northern Territory Supreme Court. Strehlow had not only been given a sympathetic hearing by the Judge when he was defending the affairs of the mission: he had also stayed at the home of Sergeant Stott himself, who thereby publicly proclaimed his faith in Strehlow's integrity and loyalty. During all these disturbances and trials Strehlow had carried on his duties with outward unconcern, confident that God would protect him because Hermannsburg depended on his labours. Only a few months before his illness he had silenced the doubts expressed by his wife about their uncertain future by saying to her bluntly, "Frieda, we have God's own promises of help to depend on; and as long as we have complete faith in Him, He will, nay He must, answer our prayers. For He has promised this Himself. And if God should fail to honour His own promises, we should have the right to throw the Bible down at His feet." His shocked wife had begged him not to speak with such blunt vehemence.

But Strehlow had replied with

passionate conviction, "No, Frieda, I mean every word of that. If God will not carry out His own freely given promises, then there is no point in believing in the Bible. "

But the past ten years of uninterrupted toil, stress, and strain, without a single holiday break, had finally convinced Strehlow that it was time for him to go back to Germany, now that the war was over. He had merely been holding on to his position for the past couple of years in order to make it easier for the mission committee to find his successor. And it had been at the beginning of July of the present year, while he was waiting to be relieved and preparing himself for his new parish duties in Germany by re-studying his theological textbooks, that illness had suddenly struck him down - a man who had never before in the fifty years of his life known from personal experience what a serious illness was. He had been afflicted by what he believed to be an unusually heavy attack of influenza, but he had refused to go to bed even when severe fits of fever had begun to set in.

There had been too much work to be done on the station, and he had believed that, as long as he refused to give in, his granite constitution would, with the assistance of homoeopathic medicines, overcome his temporary state of illness.

But for the first time in his life neither his physical strength nor his iron determination had been able to overcome his condition.

At the end of July Mr F. C. Urquhart, the former Police Commissioner of Brisbane, who had been appointed Administrator of the Northern Territory in 1921, had visited Hermannsburg. Urqu-

hart, like Gilruth, had been born in Scotland, and had, as a young police officer, acquired a reputation for toughness when leading a punitive expedition against the "warlike" Kalkadoon tribe in 1884. It was largely because of his reputation of fearlessness that he had been chosen to become Gilruth's successor, when the latter's rule had come to an end after the Vestey's meatworks riots of December 1918. Strehlow had shown Urquhart over the mission settlement only with considerable personal distress: he had been getting worried over the persistent stabbing pains in his sides, and had been forced to conserve his strength for attending to his visitor by permitting Heinrich to take over the church services on the Sunday of the Administrator's visit.

None of the white men at the station had given any thought to relieving Strehlow of his exacting physical tasks during the months of July and August. Mr W. Mattner, a member of the Finke River Mission Board, had come to Hermannsburg at the beginning of July to help Charlie Paschke, the recently engaged "newchum" stockman, with the mustering of the cattle and with the building of new yards; and Heinrich had taken this opportunity of going out on the run to help Mattner throughout the month of August, leaving Strehlow behind on his own, and expecting him to look after the dark school children as well. For Hermannsburg had run into considerable debts, and the Board had insisted that quick sales of stock were necessary to provide funds for keeping the mission going. As the weeks of sickness continued, Strehlow had begun to peruse with ever-increasing con-

cern the various home medical books contained in his library. The trouble had been that his symptoms had seemed to fit several different diseases. It had not been until the first week of September that he had succeeded in diagnosing his real trouble. There could no longer be any doubts about it at this stage: he had originally suffered an attack of pleurisy and, because of long neglect, dropsy had now begun to set in. His swelling lower limbs and his constantly weakening condition, a little later also his increasing shortness of breath, had made him fully aware of the urgent necessity for seeking out medical help without delay. A message had been sent out recalling Heinrich to the station to resume charge of the school children, and Heinrich, thoroughly alarmed, had arrived back on the station on 5th September.

The problems of a rushed journey to the south had been seriously discussed as soon as Heinrich returned. The nearest railhead was Oodnadatta, four weeks' travel from Hermannsburg; and Oodnadatta was also the nearest place to which a doctor could be asked to come in order to give medical treatment to a patient from Central Australia. But was Strehlow able, in his weakened condition, to stand a journey by horse and buggy to Oodnadatta? Finally the decision had been reached to appeal to the Mission Board to send a car to Hermannsburg in order to take Strehlow down to Oodnadatta. It was true that none of the Central Australian stations north of the Territory border owned any cars or trucks at that time. But the three parties of visitors who had safely reached Hermannsburg in cars within the past two years had proved that

the mission settlement was accessible by this new mode of transport. The Mission Board had consulted Mr Murray Aunger, the head of an Adelaide car firm, who had replied that because of the extremely poor roads and the sandy creek crossings of the interior at least two cars would have to be sent, and that the cost could well be in the vicinity of £500. In consequence, the Board, through its new chairman, Pastor J. Stoltz, had sent a message to Strehlow advising him to come down by buggy as best as he could and to place his trust in God to help him over his journey. When Strehlow had received that unexpected message, he had broken down for the first time during his illness. "For twenty eight years," he protested bitterly, "I have held out at my post, and now my own clerical colleagues are dumping me. Undoubtedly they think that I will be of no further use to them, and that they are not going to waste any money on giving me a chance to live. For them to advise me to put my trust in God while they do nothing themselves to help me is merely sanctimonious claptrap. All my life I have believed in the power of religion, but now I am beginning to see how a religion without love and human kindness corrupts men. That is what Christ said about the Pharisees, and I am beginning to suspect that this is true also of too many of us who are Lutheran ministers. We attack sin so harshly that we forget that Christ came into the world for the sake of sinners, and that he told the self-righteous Pharisees that the publicans and the harlots would have a better chance of entering heaven than they themselves, despite all their outward show of hypocritical piety. "

Mattner, who had returned to Hermannsburg from the western part of the mission run about ten days after Heinrich, had been deeply shocked by the decline in Strehlow's condition. From then on till the end of September Heinrich and Mattner, both of them probably afflicted by feelings of guilt for their earlier disregard of Strehlow's serious illness had spared no efforts to bring the sick man in touch with medical aid. Like the rest of the people who had known Strehlow, they had not believed it possible that a man who had complained so little about his pains and who had so resolutely continued attending to his chores could have been so desperately ill. Aboriginal messengers were sent to Alice Springs with further telegraphic requests for help to be brought from the south; and Mattner himself had spent the last week of September at the Alice Springs hotel, sending wires both to the Board and to Oodnadatta for help in obtaining a car to come up to Hermannsburg and convey Strehlow to the south. When Mr Joe Breaden of Todmorden Station, the closest South Australian car owner, had felt unable to risk his vehicle on a journey into the sandy tract north of the Territory border, Heinrich, as a last desperate gesture, had sent a message to Stott, asking the latter to send appeals for help to the Reverend John Flynn, of the Presbyterian Inland Mission, to Sir Henry Barwell, the South Australian Premier, and to the Federal Works Committee.

This message had not yielded any practical results. However a few days before the date set for Strehlow's departure from Hermannsburg a message had arrived from Pastor Stoltz stating

that he would set out on his long-planned journey from Light's Pass to Hermannsburg on the eleventh of October and that he had accepted the offer of a car from a member of the Appila Lutheran congregation, Mr Gotthold Wurst. Stoltz and Wurst would, upon arrival at Oodnadatta, attempt to travel by car as far north as the road would permit them, in order to meet Strehlow, who would have to go south by buggy, possibly as far as the South Australian border.

These belated arrangements had done little to cheer up Strehlow, who by this time had begun to feel desperately ill. The Board's failure to clinch a deal with Murray Aunger had been a shattering blow for him, and Strehlow had never completely recovered his confidence in his fellow clerics or in good church people. But he clung to his faith in God with redoubled determination.

Old prayer-books, of which Starck's Taegliche Handbuch was the most treasured one, had been taken off their shelves, and young Theo had been forced to overhear the impassioned supplications of his parents as they were being poured out night after night with fervour, faith, and whole-hearted devotion. For Theo's bedroom adjoined that of his parents; and since the weather was already turning decidedly warm, the door between the two bedrooms had normally been left open, a curtain only being drawn to ensure privacy.

It was soon after the Board's decision had been received that the order had been given to the head stockman to get the buggy and the van ready for the road, and to repair all the harness needed by the eight horses drawing the two ve-

hicles.

And on this morning Strehlow knew that he was about to take the irrevocable step of leaving Hermannsburg on a journey which might end with his own death long before Oodnadatta had been reached. His physical condition had kept on deteriorating each day. His lower limbs were already so swollen that his trousers had had to be let out considerably to enable him to wear them at all; and for the past week he had no longer been able to sleep in his bed. He had been forced to use an upholstered chair at night, so that he could sit upright without pressing too heavily with his back against any supports: for as soon as he lay down on his bed, the resulting compression of the fluids in his body made his breathing both difficult and painful. He had also been forced to push his trusted homoeopathic medicines aside and to use the strong drugs from the official medicine chest supplied to the station by the governmental health service. During the past week he had needed a full dose of laudanum every night in order to gain any sleep at all.

Such was the situation within the Superintendent's house on that final morning, when scores of eyes were watching its double front doors patiently, eagerly, longingly, devotedly. The dark folk had not seen their ingkata for four weeks. The man on whose iron strength and determination they had always relied had suddenly been stricken down by an illness which the God in Whom he believed had refused to cure, or even to alleviate. For twenty eight years he had been the great rockplate on which their whole settlement had been securely based. Like the ancient

rockplates of Pmolanginja in Palm Valley, their ingkata had seemed to be both immovable and indestructible. Certainly he had always been immune against the ailments of the body that assailed common men and women. And now he had been stricken down, still in his very best years, at the very height of his strength. What would he look like when he came out? What would happen to Hermannsburg, to the station from which he was departing without leaving a successor behind? Suddenly the front doors opened. The watching multitude started to rise from the ground; but it was only Heinrich who emerged and told the waiting men to harness up the horses. The two teams of horses that were to pull the buggy and the van on the first day had already been harnessed up on the previous afternoon so that the two vehicles could be tested on trial runs. This had been a necessary precaution.

The snorting, whinnying, wild-eyed buggy horses had not been worked for many months previously. They had raced around in the yard in high-spirited arrogance, with streaming manes and tails, till the stockmen had caught them, put the winkers on them, and led them to the vehicles. It had taken two men to put the harness on each plunging horse, often rearing high on its hind legs, while other men linked the traces to the vehicles. The drivers had sat on their vehicles in a state of readiness while the stockmen were harnessing up the horses, four to each vehicle; for as soon as the reins had been fixed to the bits, and the rearing horses released, the half-wild creatures had leapt forward and galloped madly past the stockyard to-

wards the plain north-east of the station. The drivers had permitted them to rush about at full pace once or twice around the edges of the plain till a furious two-mile run had steadied them. Then the vehicles had been driven back to the station. The buggy had been left in front of Strehlow's house, with the van standing some distance in the rear. The horses had been unharnessed and hobbled out for the night, so that they could have ample time to feed on whatever grass remained close to the station. All harness had then been carefully inspected for broken seams and other signs of damage. Most of it had stood up well to the stresses of the initial plunges; but several of the stockmen had still had to spend an hour or two on restitching seams that had begun to come apart, and on fixing up minor tears in the less well-greased parts of the harness.

When Heinrich gave the order that morning for harnessing up the horses, only the four buggy horses were at first brought down from the yard. After their mad escapade of the previous day the animals were much more docile and rather easier to handle; but they were still allowed to take the empty buggy for another quick gallop over the plain before any of the passengers were called on to take their seats. For no one wished to subject Strehlow to any unnecessary sickening jerks. When the panting horses had brought the buggy back to the front fence gate, they were unhitched from the buggy, and the word was passed to those inside the house that all was ready. The whole population which had waited so patiently for so long now began to surge towards Strehlow's resi-

dence, More than a hundred and seventy men, women, and children rushed forward and pressed hard against the front picket fence. In addition, the few people that had remained behind in the camp up to that moment now left their huts and came running to join the waiting assembly. Scores of campdogs, suddenly deserted by their masters and mistresses, set up the usual loud howls and wails that used to greet the beginning of the church services at Hermannsburg every Sunday morning. Only this time the barking, the yapping, and the howling of the dogs were much more harrowing; for not a soul had remained behind in the camp.

And now the double doors opened once more, and Strehlow himself at last emerged into view. He was supported by the strong arms of Mattner on one side and of Heinrich on the other. By summoning up all his strength, he managed to shuffle his feet forward by slow degrees, though the deep red flush on his face showed what anguish each step was costing him. "Jakai, ingkata nunaka!" ("Alas, our chief!") was the first shout that greeted him. Men and women burst into tears upon seeing him looking so unexpectedly ill and weak. But there were no noisy outbreaks of wild grief, for voices were soon raised everywhere in the crowd, counselling respectful silence in the presence of the sick man. Strehlow reached the buggy with slow steps. Heinrich climbed up and joined the waiting Paschke. Some of the stronger native stockmen came forward and helped to lift the sick man's feet on to the iron steps at the side of the buggy, while Heinrich and Paschke pulled him up from above. The greatest care had to be used during this lift-

ing procedure; for Strehlow, with his bloated and swollen body, could not bear to be pressed vigorously. Once he had safely reached the top, he sat down on an upholstered chair which had been secured firmly by means of twisted strands of wire to the floor of the buggy, immediately behind the front seat. Mrs Strehlow now climbed up and sat down on the skewed rear seat, close to her husband. Heinrich moved over into the front seat and took his place next to the dark driver Hesekiel, who was already clutching the reins firmly in his hands. The four horses were hitched once more to the buggy, and the vehicle was driven a couple of chains away to the two gums that carried the bell in front of the church building. It was now possible for the van to be pulled by willing helpers to the front fence gate so that all cases and swags, also the meat and vegetable supplies, could be loaded up on it. While the buggy was standing in front of the church, the stockmen once more grasped the winkers and reins of the horses firmly. The crowd surged forward to say goodbye to their departing ingkata, who had not yet spoken any words to them. "Sing a farewell hymn for Mr and Mrs Strehlow," urged Heinrich. At this request a voice in the crowd struck up the hymn Karerai, wolambarinjai, which was the Aranda translation of the grand Lutheran chorale Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme:

"Wake, awake!", proclaim with power
The watchmen's voices from the tower,
"Awake, Jerusalem, arise!"
Midnight's solemn hour has sounded;
The criers call with joy unbounded,
"Where are you waiting, virgins wise?"

The Bridegroom draweth nigh,
Lift up your lamps on high,
Hallelujah!

Go forth to greet,
Prepare to meet

The Bridegroom at the wedding feast!"

As soon as the first familiar words had been struck up, the whole congregation joined in with that deep fervour that had always characterised their singing of this hymn at the services. It had been one of Strehlow's favourites; and the congregation had sung it scores of times before on quiet Sunday evenings at the conclusion of the supper devotions. The sick man sat and listened in silence. Tears were running down from his red and pain-worn, tired eyes. Most of his people, too, had begun to sob long before the end of the third verse had been reached. For the hymn which celebrated the going out of the ten virgins of Christ's parable at midnight to meet the Bridegroom had suddenly come to seem like a prophecy of doom - their ingkata, too, was leaving on his last journey: he was setting out, not to recover his health, but to meet the Master in Whom he had believed so strongly all his life. Suddenly Death seemed to have revealed his dark presence; and many of the singers sensed that Death would accompany their ingkata as he left Hermannsburg for ever. There was a last fervent surge forward as the older men and women came to touch with their hands Strehlow's legs and feet in token of their deep affection; for he did not have the strength to shake more than a few hands. "May God bless you all, my friends," he said in a strangely toneless, tear-choked voice. And then the people

slowly fell back, the stockmen released their hold on the winkers and reins of the horses, and the proud, fresh, wild-eyed animals leaped forward and moved off briskly. The buggy rapidly sped eastward over the plain and came into unobscured view once more as the track ascended the eastern sandhills. Within minutes it had moved past a tall ironwood tree into a stand of mulga, and then a cloud of dust showed that it had disappeared over the crest of the first eastern sandridge. The population turned sadly to their camp, feeling an incredible sense of loss and bereavement: the man who had been the great rockplate on which their community had been founded securely for a whole generation had left them forever.

Strehlow had departed without leaving behind a fitting and acceptable successor. The dark population that walked back to the camp had no feeling of confidence in Mattner who, being a member of the Finke River Mission Board, had nominally been left in charge of the station after Strehlow's departure. Nor did the Aranda folk have any high regard for the leadership qualities of either Heinrich or Paschke as supervisors of station work. During the months of July and August, when Mattner, Heinrich, and Paschke were supervising the mustering and yard-building work carried out on the western run, they had been unable to maintain any appreciable measure of control over their dark employees. Their disputes had come time and again before the ailing Strehlow, whom all parties had continued to wear out with their constant complaints and counter-complaints. Mattner's presence had not succeeded in establishing decent working

relationships out in the stock camps; for the dark stockmen privately jeered at Mattner and Heinrich for being white cowards. Mattner had been sent up four years before to inspect Hermannsburg on behalf of the Mission Board; and he had on that occasion been introduced to the dark population by Heinrich as one of the "big bosses from down south".

However, some weeks after Mattner's arrival a large party of Kukatja tribesmen had arrived from the west in order to take back with them one of their young women who had run away from Munyeroo, Billy McNamara's station, situated in the ranges west of Hermannsburg. This woman, whose name was Kekimana, had been given - illegally and in the face of tribal opposition - by Billy McNamara to one of his trusted dark stockmen called Fred. Fred was a man from one of the northern tribes, whom McNamara had brought down with him some years earlier. The Kukatja men, after much preliminary wild shouting, had gathered up their spears in order to kill Fred. Mattner and Heinrich had gone out towards the Kukatja camp to see what the commotion and shouting were about. When they were still a few chains away, Fred had come running towards them, pursued by the angry Kukatja men. Spears had begun to fly in the direction of both Fred and the two white men. Mattner and Heinrich, knowing that they had no authoritative standing in the aboriginal community, had quickly turned their backs on the attackers and run back towards the Aranda camp area as fast as their untrained legs would carry them, with Fred now racing for his life in front of them so as to place the two white men between

him and the spears of the pursuers. Although Mattner was a rather portly farmer and Heinrich a semi-invalid, half-incapacitated by a rupture, both men had shown a surprising turn of speed in the face of danger, and neither of them had paused for breath till both had reached the safety of Heinrich's house. Here they had locked themselves in while Fred had raced on to the verandah of Strehlow's house - the only place of refuge open to him where he could be safe from the spears of his angry pursuers, who came to a sudden halt several chains away. In response to his frenzied knocks, Strehlow had come out and taken the shivering, shaking Fred into his protection. He had angrily turned the Kukatja men back to their camp; and although his hands had carried no weapons, he had been promptly obeyed. All the Aranda men would have come out on his side if there had been any hesitation by the Kukatja party to obey the ingkata. But there had been none. For as the man who had nursed back to health Wapiti, the honoured ceremonial chief of the great Kukatja centre of Merini, Strehlow had since that time enjoyed a position of honour among the Kukatja as well. In the Aranda camp men, women, and children had subsequently guffawed for weeks about Mattner's and Heinrich's hurried flight; and the whole ludicrous scene of two white "bosses" fleeing from the spears of desert nomads had often been re-enacted by them to the accompaniment of screams of laughter. Hence it was not surprising that the elevation of Mattner to take Strehlow's place gave no sense of security to the Hermannsburg population, which suddenly felt itself left unprotected and leaderless.

The loading of the van now proceeded with great speed. The name "van" was really a misnomer; and the old vehicle was, in fact, often referred to as a "buckboard". Its manufacture was of the simplest and crudest nature possible. Its body had been constructed by linking the front and back axles by means of a series of sturdy long boards to form a kind of floor or platform. A wide wooden seat had been mounted on top of this floor, close to the front axle. This seat was divided by a central backrest so that two or three persons could sit forward, facing the horses, while a similar number faced the rear of the vehicle. The seats and the backrest had been covered by hard leather cushions, stuffed with horse-hair.

This extremely uncomfortable upholstery gave the only protection afforded to the passengers against any severe road bumps; for the van did not boast of any springs in its sturdy, rugged frame. It did, however, possess a canvass canopy, which protected the passengers at least against the fierce overhead rays of the midday sun. In this respect the van was superior to the buggy which, though fitted with springs, carried no canopy at all: the sick man could be protected from the sun only by an old umbrella tied to the back of his upholstered chair.

Theo watched the loading of the van with much interest; for he was travelling on the second vehicle. A number of dark boys and girls who had been his childhood companions stood around him. Theo, who had never known any white playmates, had had a number of special friends among the Hermannsburg children. He had always got on splendidly with them till he had

reached the age of ten. Even so, it had always been he who had been compelled to adopt the behaviour patterns of his dark playmates. Once he had passed the age of ten, the bonds of friendship had slowly been loosened; and after turning fourteen, he had become keenly aware of the very considerable differences that existed between himself and his former playmates in point of the opinions they held on the problems of adolescence. More and more he had come to realise that his friends belonged, in most of their attitudes towards preparation for full adulthood, to the dark community, and that he, by reason of his European education, had come to develop entirely new interests. His father, anxious to give him a flying start for his proposed secondary education in Germany, had not only made him learn history, botany, and zoology from German high school textbooks, but had also introduced him to Latin at the age of ten and to Greek at the age of twelve. These studies were interests that Theo could not share with his dark school friends. And the latter, in their turn, upon reaching the age of puberty, had become more and more interested in the traditional Aranda world of culture. Fourteen- and fifteen-year-old Aranda girls were already regarded, like Shakespeare's Juliet, as young women who were ripe for marriage; and in the old days they would, in fact, have been handed over to their rightful husbands at this age. Their brothers in the same age group were looked on as novices ready to be put through a tough series of tribal initiation rites which, in the Aranda area, used to be stretched out over a period of several years. Though these Aranda rites had been severely

curtailed within the preceding decades by European settlers and missionaries, all Hermannsburg teenage boys were still forced to pass through circumcision and certain other physical ordeals; and their thoughts naturally tended to be occupied with their impending manhood tests, to the exclusion of most other interests. In spite of their many growing and inevitable feelings of estrangement, Theo and his former playmates on the morning of his departure were genuinely sorry that they had to say goodbye to each other, and they chatted together animatedly in Aranda for the last time. But it was a group of women who were most regretful in their expressions of leave-taking from the white boy whom they had "mothered" for so many years. One of them was Christina who, as a fifteen-year-old halfcaste girl, had carried the day-old premature infant, whom nobody had then expected to survive, to the christening font in the Hermannsburg church. "Don't forget that I am also one of your mothers," she said in deep sadness, as she shook his hand and cried quietly. "Remember me, and write to me sometimes, and don't be like all those other white boys and girls who were born at Hermannsburg and who were reared by us, and who then went south and never again wrote to us or sent us anything." Another woman, old Margaret, the mother of Lucas, who had been one of Theo's main playmates, expressed herself rather more forcefully when giving her advice. "You are not just a white boy," she said with passionate conviction, "you are one of us. You belong to our people. You belong to the totem of the Twins of Ntarea, and you are a true Aranda. Go south

and learn in the white men's schools, but then come back to us. No other white child born here has ever returned to us, but you must come back to us, to your own people. "

By now the van had been fully loaded. The four horses that were to pull it on the first day were quickly harnessed up and hitched to the vehicle. Theo climbed up on the front leather seat and perched himself alongside Titus, the pleasant young driver chosen for the van; and several of his mother's kitchen women climbed up on the other seat which faced to the rear. These women were coming along for the first day's ride, prepared to walk back to the station on foot next day. For age-old aboriginal custom in Central Australia insisted that visitors from other groups and tribes, upon their departure to their own homes, should be escorted to the edge of the local group area by at least some of their hosts in token of a friendly parting and as a sign of respect and courtesy. The van pulled out from the station about half an hour after the buggy had left. It was followed by an additional ten loose buggy horses driven by Jakobus, one of the most reliable and experienced of the Hermannsburg stockmen. "Loose horses" was the normal term given to spare horses in Central Australia at that time. Jakobus was proud and overjoyed at having been selected to accompany his sick master and friend. He had been one of the men who had written a letter to Strehlow during his illness.

The van, like the buggy, set off from Hermannsburg at a good pace. It did not take the travellers long to reach the little Tjamangkura water-course, three miles east of Hermannsburg, with

its line of tall bloodwood trees that marked part of the eastern boundary of the Purula-Kamara local group area of Ntarea - this being the area that was regarded as the home of Theo and of most of the other boys and girls at Hermannsburg. East of Tjamangkura began the territory of the Panangka-Bangata, and a few miles further, at Tokurura, began the local group area of those Ellery Creek men and women who belonged to the honey-ant totem. When the van reached Pmokoputa, eight miles from Hermannsburg, it halted alongside the buggy. An early midday meal had already been prepared from the contents of the tucker-box that had been carried under the front seat of the buggy. Its main item was fresh steak, roasted on hot coals; and soon all travellers sat down to a tasty meal in the shade of some fine, mottle-barked, river gums.

Theo walked some chains back to the ruins of the Old Station homestead building, once an outstation of Henbury, which had gone up in flames forty two years earlier, when Charlie Walker was living here. From the ruined stone-house Theo looked back for the last time at the magnificent distant blue mass of Rutjubma in the north-west and reflected that, after the mid-day meal, he would be entering into new territory for the first time in his life that he could remember clearly. So far the northern horizon had always been bounded for him by the Western MacDonells, the southern by the Krichauffs, the western by the Gosse's Range, and the eastern by sandhill ridges and stonehills. But at Pmokoputa the party was entering into the Ellery Creek gorge, which formed a natural

highway through the Krichauffs as far as the junction of the Ellery with the Finke at Rubula; and once this gorge had been entered, the whole familiar environment would vanish from his sight - perhaps for ever. A new landscape would open before him; and at the end of a long journey by road and rail he would find himself in a country peopled wholly by white folk - a land he had heard of and read about for many years. The greatest adventure of his young life was about to unfold itself to his vision.

The journey southward was resumed with the sun still standing at high noon. The last wagon tracks ceased at Pmokoputa: from here on only the narrow pad remained along which the mail used to be brought by camels from Horseshoe Bend to Hermannsburg. Since this camel pad had left a trail no wider than three feet at the most where it passed through the dense ti-tree thickets that studded the Ellery Gorge, the advance road party from the station had been forced to deviate from it in many places, so that the course of the vehicles could be kept as much as possible on the open sandy expanses and crunching gravel banks. Wherever the ti-tree thickets could not be avoided, a track had

been chopped through them of sufficient width to permit the vehicles to pass through without any difficulties. By midday the horses had steadied down considerably since their wild gallops of the previous day; and whenever the sandy stretches were reached, all passengers voluntarily jumped from the van so as to lighten its weight. The drivers of both vehicles had to keep on cracking their coachwhips hard alongside the sweating, panting, snorting horses, to ensure that they would not come to a halt in the heavy white creek sand. Any horse which showed signs of not throwing its full weight into its harness was smartly flicked with the whip-lash; for there was no greater nightmare during the buggy-travel era of Central Australia than a jibbing horse which had brought a vehicle to a sudden halt in the middle of a long, sandy pull. And so the afternoon waned, and the tips of the shadows of the river gums lengthened eastward, and the sharp cracks of the coachwhips echoed back from the red sandstone sides of the gorge.

Some twelve miles of heavy going brought the party to Rubula, where a large waterhole in the Finke, fringed with high bulrushes, indicated an ideal camping spot for the first night. Both vehicles were halted on a broad gravel bank; and a multitude of willing hands had soon unloaded the swags from the van, helped the sick man down from the buggy, and unwired and lifted down his upholstered chair. For the advance road party had been waiting for the arrival of the vehicles for several days at Rubula. Theo, who was watching a tall, straight gum sapling being cut down so that its top portion could be

used as the main tent pole, was almost hit by the sapling when it finally crashed down. A sharp chorus of anxious voices rebuked him from all sides for his carelessness; for the falling sapling could have injured him badly, perhaps even killed him, had it hit him. With a disdainful look to disguise his own shock the boy strode back haughtily to his parents' camp and watched the workers who were putting up the tent, gathering the dry wood for the campfires, and spreading out the food supplies for the greater convenience of the cooks. The sun was already setting when the evening meal had been prepared. Strehlow was tired, but very satisfied with the first day's journey: it had been a much more tolerable experience than he had feared in the morning. Soon the dark sky was spangled with myriads of bright stars. A welcome fresh night breeze began to cool the air in the gorge which had become uncomfortably hot during the afternoon. The party broke up into small groups for their night's sleep. Each group was warmed by its own small fires, since the dark folk had not brought many blankets with them. The sick man and his wife retired into the tent, and Theo fell asleep in his swag beside the van, still listening to the noise of the ducks landing on and rising up from the waterhole.

forced to deviate from it in many places, so that the course of the vehicles could be kept as much as possible on the open sandy expanses and crunching gravel banks. Wherever the ti-tree thickets could not be avoided, a track had been chopped through them of sufficient width to permit the vehicles to pass through without any difficulties, By midday the horses had

steadied down considerably since their wild gallops of the previous day; and whenever the sandy stretches were reached, all passengers voluntarily jumped from the van so as to lighten its weight. The drivers of both vehicles had to keep on cracking their coachwhips hard alongside the sweating, panting, snorting horses, to ensure that they would not come to a halt in the heavy white creek sand. Any horse which showed signs of not throwing its full weight into its harness was smartly flicked with the whip-lash; for there was no greater nightmare during the buggy-travel era of Central Australia than a jibbing horse which had brought a vehicle to a sudden halt in the middle of a long, sandy pull. And so the afternoon waned, and the tips of the shadows of the river gums lengthened eastward, and the sharp cracks of the coachwhips echoed back from the red sandstone sides of the gorge.

Some twelve miles of heavy going brought the party to Rubula, where a large waterhole in the Finke, fringed with high bulrushes, indicated an ideal camping spot for the first night. Both vehicles were halted on a broad gravel bank; and a multitude of willing hands had soon unloaded the swags from the van, helped the sick man down from the buggy, and unwired and lifted down his upholstered chair. For the advance road party had been waiting for the arrival of the vehicles for several days at Rubula. Theo, who was watching a tall, straight gum sapling being cut down so that its top portion could be used as the main tent pole, was almost hit by the sapling when it finally crashed down. A sharp chorus of anxious voices rebuked him

from all sides for his carelessness; for the falling sapling could have injured him badly, perhaps even killed him, had it hit him. With a disdainful look to disguise his own shock the boy strode back haughtily to his parents' camp and watched the workers who were putting up the tent, gathering the dry wood for the campfires, and spreading out the food supplies for the greater convenience of the cooks. The sun was already setting when the evening meal had been prepared. Strehlow was tired, but very satisfied with the first day's journey: it had been a much more tolerable experience than he had feared in the morning. Soon the dark sky was spangled with myriads of bright stars. A welcome fresh night breeze began to cool the air in the gorge which had become uncomfortably hot during the afternoon. The party broke up into small groups for their night's sleep. Each group was warmed by its own small fires, since the dark folk had not brought many blankets with them. The sick man and his wife retired into the tent, and Theo fell asleep in his swag beside the van, still listening to the noise of the ducks landing on and rising up from the waterhole.

Wednesday, the eleventh day of October, 1922

WHEN THE young dawn approached next day, the fresh morning air was quickly filled with the twittering and chirping of birds. The miners were already sounding their delightful and merry music when the eastern sky showed the first glimmering of light; and when the sun began to shed a rosy glow upon the crests of the western gorge walls, the black-and-white butcher birds awakened from their sleep and proceeded to give out their beautiful flute notes from the projecting branches of gums and whitewood trees. A little later came the discordant and cynical caws of the cheeky crows, who keenly watched the morning campers from the closest proximity that safety permitted, ever hopeful of picking up any unguarded scraps. The morning air had been bracing in its cold freshness, and there had even been some light dew on the ground; but as soon as the sun began to peer over the crests of the range, the sudden new sting of its morning rays foretold that the day would soon turn oppressively hot: The hobbled horses had been brought in long before breakfast by Hesekiel, Jakobus, and Titus. The horse teams drawing both vehicles were changed in order to give the previous day's working horses a spell. Loading proceeded with great speed. Then the vehicles moved off slowly from the gravel bank to continue their journey down the Finke Valley: At about ten o'clock in the morning the long, reed-fringed waterhole of Alitera was reached. This name celebrated the fact that, according to Aranda mythology, the two ancestral ilumbalitnana or white ghost-gum

serpents who had camped here together with their uncle, a wallaby ancestor, had originally come from the Lira Alitera or Hale River in distant Eastern Aranda territory. The two beady-eyed, baleful serpents had slithered on westward while their uncle was sleeping; and the wails of the deserted wallaby ancestor had filled, the Finke valley at Alitera after he had wakened from his sleep. Unable to follow his faithless nephews, the wallaby ancestor had wandered off into the nearby Ilkitjeramanta gully, and turned into a huge boulder. The two venomous ilumbalitnana serpents who had deserted him were believed to have composed the secret songs and instituted the secret rites used during the ceremonial induction of the Western Aranda medicine men into their occult craft. The much more prosaic white name for Alitera was Boggy Hole. It had been used as a police camp for some years a long time ago but few traces remained of the former police days. It had been abandoned in the middle of 1891, after its police officer Mounted Constable W. H. Willshire, had been taken south for trial on a murder charge. Careful driving was called for, both in crossing the Finke at Alitera and in negotiating the next half-mile or so of the rock-strewn flat along the river bend. It was the existence of this rough and difficult expanse that had caused the greatest worry to Strehlow and his advisers when the journey down the Finke was first being planned; and a closer look at rocks, laid bare even more menacingly by the huge Finke floods of early 1921, revealed that these fears had been only too well-founded. The Finke had, in fact, come down in flood, time and again, from November,

1920, onward; and it was only in March, 1922, that the dying streamlets between the pools had ceased to pattern the sandy river bed with their intricate lacework. But at the beginning of May a further flood had ripped out again all newly restored horse-paddock fences south of Her-mannsburg, and more weeks had elapsed before the flow of water had dried up finally. The advance road party had worked hard to produce a passable buggy track at Alitera by moving the smaller rocks with crowbars and by clearing new deviations wherever the terrain permitted. But only dynamite and the giant earth-moving equipment invented by a later generation could have fashioned a reasonable vehicle track. In spite of the hard toil of the advance working party, both vehicles still had to get over the larger rocks by straddling them with their axles; and some of the huge, deeply embedded rocks stuck out so much from the ground that the axles barely cleared them. The sick man was jolted about unmercifully, and was forced to hang on with both hands to the front seat of the buggy. But after some anxious moments both vehicles completed this part of the horror track without breaking either their wheels or their axles. When more level ground had at last been regained, the buggy was halted under a gum tree for some minutes to enable Strehlow to recover from his ordeal. Every bump of his heavy, swollen body against his upholstered chair had made him catch his breath and wince with pain; and he looked very ill and utterly exhausted when this grim half-mile stretch at last lay behind him.

The road party workers and the kitchen women,

who had escorted on foot the two vehicles on their slow journey from Rubula to Alitera, said their last goodbyes to their master and mistress at this point. Many tears were shed by the women; and not a single person started back on the long walk to Hermannsburg till both mission vehicles had moved on once more and passed out of sight completely. Hardly had the vehicles turned round the next corner of the winding valley, when they encountered the camel-mail string from Horseshoe Bend. Old Jack Fountain, the gaunt, white-bearded mailman, stopped his team and unloaded the Hermannsburg mailbags from one of his camel boxes. They were quickly opened, and Heinrich and Mrs Strehlow took out the mail addressed to Strehlow and to themselves. After a brief exchange of news Jack Fountain continued on his way to Hermannsburg. According to the mail contract let out to Gus Elliot, his employer, Fountain had to cover the one-hundred-and-fifty-mile run from Horseshoe Bend to Hermannsburg in five days; and he was due at Hermannsburg on the forenoon of the following day.

After this short interruption the vehicles moved on once more; and at noon the party had reached Irbmangkara or, as the white folk called it, Running Waters. Irbmangkara was situated about halfway between Hermannsburg and Henbury, being about thirty miles distant from either station.

The party made a two-hour midday halt at Irbmangkara to enable Mrs Strehlow to read the letters out to her husband; for no reading was possible in the dim light of the kerosene storm lantern at night. Theo meanwhile chatted with

the drivers while they sat on the edge of the long expanse of clear water that marked the beginning of the four-mile stretch of shallow, fish-filled pools known as Running Waters. These pools and the running streams that linked them were fed by springs bubbling out of the river bed of the Finke. As was to be expected, Irbmangkara had always been a natural home for wildfowl and for game. The pools were fringed by luxuriant stands of bulrushes and ti-tree bushes and by a forest of young gums, the bigger trees having been washed out of the river bed by the unprecedented floods of the previous year. The lush vegetation in a way reminded Theo of that in Palm Valley, except for the fact that there were no palms growing at Irbmangkara - a strange fact, seeing that the Palm Valley Creek continually washed palm seeds down into the bed of the Finke River. For centuries, or perhaps for thousands of years, before the white man's coming Irbmangkara had been an important Aranda ceremonial centre. Its sacred cave was located only about a mile away from the upper pools, and no women or children had ever been allowed to enter these forbidden precincts. Even the fully initiated men could do so only on ceremonial occasions; and at such times no weapons were allowed to be carried. No game or wildfowl could be killed by hunters within a radius of about two miles from the hill containing the sacred cave. Irbmangkara had hence been, according to the ancient traditions, a game and wildfowl sanctuary "since the beginning of time". Its ti-tree and bullrush thickets afforded magnificent breeding grounds for several varieties of ducks, for cormorants,

pelicans, and spoonbills, and for all other water-fowl found in Central Australia; and these birds found ample food in the shallow parts of the pools, since these were richly stocked with several varieties of fish, ranging from the flat and bony ntapitnja (known among the whites as "bony bream"), which attained a maximum length of about eleven inches, to the shorter and rather fatter ntamintana and longulbura, whose rich white flesh was much freer of small bones. Irbmangkara looked a place of peace and undisturbed serene beauty; but, like many other seeming Edens on earth, it had known its full share of man's cruelty and viciousness.

Irbmangkara had always been an important ceremonial meeting ground for several Aranda groups; for it was linked by sacred myths with many other totemic centres. According to the local myths, Irbmangkara at the beginning of time had been the home of duck ancestors - of immortal beings that could take on the shape either of ducks or of humans. One large group of these duck ancestors had followed an ancestral leader called Remalarinja north-west through Western Aranda territory to Kularata, a place situated in the floodout swamps of the Dashwood River, north of Ulaterka. Another group of duck ancestors had been taken south by a local cormorant ancestor called Ankebera to Tnaautatara, on the southern bank of the middle Palmer River, in the Upper Southern Aranda area. Another cormorant ancestor from Irbmangkara, who had travelled west through the Matuntara area to a place west of Tempe Downs called Walbmara in order to steal some of the local ancestors' pile of mulga seeds, had by this theft

linked Irbmangkara with Walbmara; and the Walbmara snake ancestor, who had pursued the thief back to Irbmangkara, had decided to stay there forever.

Travelling fish ancestors, who had come south in a flood created by themselves from Anku-rowunga, in Unmatjera territory, to Uratanga, on the middle Finke River, had also passed through Irbmangkara, and broken through a fish-weir erected against them eight miles further on. This fish-weir had later on turned into a section of the Krichauff Ranges, and the gap through which the fish had escaped was called Iltjanmalitnjaka ("Where the Crayfish had dug") or, in white terminology, Parke's Pass. That well-known hunting pair of Upper Southern Aranda mythology, the Two Young Men (Nditja Tara) had hunted kangaroos with success in the open country east of Irbmangkara; and the Northern Aranda curlew ancestors of Ilkakngara had fled wailing to Irbmangkara after one of their number, who had died and was attempting to rise again from his grave, had been stamped back into the ground by the angry magpie ancestor of Urburakana, situated in the Central Aranda area. The human guardians of all the totemic centres that were linked by myths with Irbmangkara had the right to come as visitors to the Irbmangkara ceremonial festivals; and hence the members of the local Aranda group which owned the songs, myths, and ceremonies of Irbmangkara had always been well known to many Western Aranda, Northern Aranda, Central Aranda, Upper Southern Aranda, and Matuntara folk.

About 1815, just before the establishment of

the earliest stations on the Finke River, a sudden catastrophe overwhelmed the local Aranda group of Irbmangkara. A middle-aged man, called Kalejika, who belonged to a Central Aranda local group, paid a visit to Irbmangkara, and then told some Upper Southern Aranda men that Ltjabakuka, the aged and highly respected ceremonial chief of Irbmangkara, together with some of his assistant elders, had committed sacrilege by giving uninitiated boys men's blood to drink from a shield into which it had been poured for ritual purposes. According to an old Aranda custom, fully initiated young novices, at a certain point of their manhood ritual, used to be given blood to drink which had been drawn from the veins of their elders. This was done during a special rite which was spoken of only in whispers of fearful secrecy. To offer any of this blood to uninitiated boys would have been a particularly detestable form of sacrilege. In Christian terms, it would have been equivalent to the action of a priest who had poured consecrated communion wine from a chalice into the drinking mugs of children attending a carefree birthday party. It seems incredible that Ltjabakuka and his elders would even have considered indulging in such a frivolous perversion of one of the most sacred Aranda rites; but Kalejika was an esteemed elder in his own region, and a number of Upper Southern Aranda men believed his story, or perhaps pretended to believe it in order to satisfy some private grudges that they might have held against Ltjabakuka. For sacrilege was an offence always punished by death. In the pre-white days capital punishment was easy enough to inflict when the offender was a

young man. But when the ceremonial chief of an important centre and his chief elders had been accused of sacrilege, the only persons who could be called upon to punish them were men who came from totemic centres linked by myths with the home of the offenders. Though Tnauutatara lay in Upper Southern Aranda territory, few of the Tnauutatara clansmen were keen to undertake a raid on Irbmangkara: too many of them were linked by personal kinship ties with the Irbmangkara group, and no man could be compelled against his wish to kill his own kinsfolk. Similar kinship considerations affected the Western Aranda groups living along the mythical trail linking Irbmangkara and Kularata; indeed, these groups dismissed Kalejika's story with indignation as an empty fabrication of malicious lies. It was rather easier to stir up to action some of the Matuntara men who lived on the trail linking Walbmara and Irbmangkara. In the end a band of avengers was organised, consisting of perhaps fifty to sixty warriors. Most of these were Matuntara men, but there were a few Upper Southern Aranda men to be found among them.

The latter, as was to be expected, came mainly from places in the Horseshoe Bend area, situated more than a hundred miles away from Irbmangkara. However, at least two Upper Southern Aranda men from closer sites - Kangkia, who came from the eagle centre of Pmoierka, and Kaminnga, who came from the emu centre of Erpalka - were persuaded to join the avenging party. The leader of the combined band was a Matuntara man called Tjinawariti, who came from the region south of Tempe

Downs. The name "Tjinawariti", which meant literally "eagle's foot", was the term given to the Southern Cross in the Matuntara area. Tjinawariti, who belonged to the eagle totem, was a man renowned both for his height and for his prowess with spear and boomerang. Another important man in the avenging band was Kopaluru, a native cat totem ceremonial chief from Akaua, on the Palmer River. His influence was directly responsible for the addition of several more young warriors to Tjinawariti's band.

And so, late one afternoon in 1875, three parties of warriors, hidden among the bushes of the nearby mountain slopes and in the undergrowth in the river bed at their foot, were watching the men and women of Irbmangkara returning to their camp at Urualbukara, laden with the game and the vegetable foods which they had gathered during the day, for since the upper pools of Irbmangkara constituted closed territory to all except the initiated males on ceremonial occasions, the normal camping grounds of the Irbmangkara folk were located at Urualbukara, the southernmost pool, four miles below the source of the springs. The avengers were numerous enough to form a group of tnengka - this term being the name given to a body of men who could overwhelm a whole camp of victims by means of an open attack made in broad daylight. The only reason for this party's going into hiding was to ensure that every member of the Irbmangkara population had returned to the camp before the murderous assault was undertaken. These fifty or sixty tnengka had accordingly been split into three parties upon arrival at Urualbukara - two parties took up positions on

the hill slopes of Ilaltilalta and Lalkitnama respectively, while the third hid in the thick under-growth that covered the river bed south of the camps. This arrangement was intended to frustrate any attempts of escape on the part of the victims.

The sun had sunk very low in the western sky before the waiting warriors could be reasonably certain that all members of the Irbmangkara camp had returned. Keeping under the cover of bushes and trees, the armed men crept forward with the relentless and uncanny skill of hunters used to stalking suspicious game animals. As soon as the clearing around the camp had been reached, they rushed in, like swift dingoes upon a flock of unsuspecting emus. Spears and boomerangs flew with deadly aim. Within a matter of minutes Ltjabakuka and his men were lying lifeless in their blood at their brush shelters.

Then the warriors turned their murderous attention to the women and older children, and either speared or clubbed them to death. Finally, according to the grim custom of warriors and avengers, they broke the limbs of the infants, leaving them to die "natural deaths". The final number of the dead could well have reached the high figure of from eighty to a hundred men, women, and children. Before leaving the stricken camp, the bodies of all clubbed victims were prodded with spears to make certain that there was no life left in them. For the warriors had to be sure beyond all doubt that no eyewitnesses had survived who could later on incite reprisals against them. Satisfied that they had carried out their grim task with flawless precision, the warriors now left the Urualbukara

camp. But they had made one fatal mistake. Laparintja, one of Ltjabakuka's wives, though severely clubbed, had merely shammed death, and had succeeded in stifling her urge to scream while being prodded by a spear point. She had in addition successfully covered her blood-stained baby son Kaltjirbuka under her own prostrate body. As soon as the avengers had departed, she raised herself cautiously; and, taking her child with her, she had slowly wriggled towards the bulrush thickets that grew on the edges of the closest pool. Once she had reached the bulrushes, it was an easy matter for her to make good her escape northward to Irbmangkara, and beyond the uppermost pools towards Arbanta, where another camp of Irbmangkara folk was located.

As the warriors were about to return home, an unpleasant surprise awaited them: Nameia, a middle-aged Irbmangkara man, who was very late in returning from the hunt, suddenly burst into view. He was accompanied by a second man called Ilbalta who belonged, like himself, to the Paltara class. Suddenly fearful of having their grim deed betrayed to avengers, the warriors rushed at both hunters and hurled their spears and boomerangs at them in a frenzy of alarm. Ilbalta was handicapped by an old cut in the leg, and was quickly brought down and speared to death. But Nameia, though hurt by a spear-thrust in one leg, proved unexpectedly fleetfooted. When his pursuers drew uncomfortably close to him, he stopped, picked up some of the spears that had missed him, and threw them back at his attackers. The latter paused for a few moments, and the break en-

abled Nameia to continue his flight. Since rising clouds of smoke in the distance showed that there were other camps of people located upstream from Irbmangkara, the warriors did not dare to pursue him too far, lest they should encounter additional late-returning hunters. Tjina-wariti called off the chase, and then dismissed from further service those Southern Aranda men who had assisted him, so that they could return to their homes. After that he set off for Akaua with his Matuntara followers. Over the whole band of tnengka warriors there now hung the fear of terrible retribution: Nameia had seen most of them, and had recognised all those that he had seen; for every man in the band had been a visitor to Irbmangkara in former years. Moreover, though Nameia's conception site was situated at Tnotitja, on the Finke River upstream from Pantjindama, his parents had both been Matuntara people. His father Kurubila had been an important ceremonial chief from the great Matuntara native cat centre of Akaua. Many of the warriors who had raided Irbmangkara had hence been his personal relatives.

Nameia, like Laparintja, made his way up the Finke valley to Arbanta. Like Laparintja, Nameia was completely overwhelmed by grief. His Western Aranda wife Tjakiljika, who came from Kaporilja Springs near Hermannsburg, and his two younger sons Pmatupatuna and Unkuarintana, had died in the general slaughter at Irbmangkara. Both Nameia and Laparintja quickly spread the grim story of the massacre at Arbanta and at other camps nearby; and soon the gorge walls above Irbmangkara were echoing with the wails of men, women and children, who

were mourning their dead kinsfolk. Some days later several members of the Irbmangkara group who had been away on visits to other camps returned to Urualbukara, and buried the dead victims. The maimed infants had all perished in the meantime.

The next step taken by the survivors was the selection and the ceremonial dedication and fitting out of a revenge party, who would be commissioned to go out as *Ieltja* and kill all of the men responsible for the massacre, down to the last guilty participant. Messengers went out as far as Njenkuguna in Central Aranda territory, Ulamba and Jamba in Northern Aranda territory, and the Ellery Creek and Upper Finke valley portions of Western Aranda territory; and everywhere mourning rites took place for the dead during which moral support was enlisted for the punishment of the Irbmangkara raiders. Finally a small party of avengers, chosen for their special prowess with weapons and their special skills in bushcraft, was assembled near Manta on the Finke River, some miles upstream from Irbmangkara. Here the men were put through the special ritual which was believed to endow avengers with the ability to creep upon their unsuspecting victims in safety and to evade without difficulty the spears of their enemies. For, unlike a band of *Tnengka* warriors capable of destroying a whole camp in broad daylight, the *Ieltja* were avengers who had to move stealthily through hostile territory in order to kill isolated individuals who had left the security of their main group camps. After passing through their special ritual, the members of this *Ieltja* party made their way down the Finke valley. Their

leader was Nameia, who had by now fully recovered from his wounds.

The party included at least two of Ltjabakuka's sons, also several of his close relatives. But the numbers of the avengers had to be kept to the lowest possible limits commensurate with safety. Possibly no more than ten men went out on this revenge expedition. They knew that it would take them at least a couple of years to achieve their retaliatory errand. For they were moving into the well-populated country of enemies who were expecting a reprisal visit, and who were therefore on their guard. They would have to pick their victims off, perhaps one man, and certainly no more than three men, at a time, preferably when they were out hunting; and after each kill the avengers would have to lie low for weeks till their victims' relatives had given up looking for them. They would have to live off the land in hostile territory, and often move about singly so that any persons sighted from a distance accidentally could not raise an alarm about a travelling band of warriors. But with their own lives continually at stake, these Ieltja avengers killed - and waited between kills - with the determination and the patience of highly intelligent beasts of prey. Sometimes the killing of a man might involve also the killing of his wife and children in order to wipe out all danger of eyewitness evidence. But slowly they achieved their purpose. One of the few Irbmangkara raiders who escaped retribution was Kangkia. He was cornered, but succeeded in convincing the avengers that he had been compelled by force to accompany the tnengka band, and that he had hung back during the at-

tack so as not to kill anyone personally.

After they had picked off the guilty Aranda warriors, Nameia's band of avengers moved from the Horseshoe Bend area across the South Australian border as far south as the Hamilton River; for some of the Matuntara men had gone down into this distant region. After that the avengers made their way back in a north-westerly direction into the Palmer valley. In the end even the dreaded and watchful Tjinawariti and the respected Kapaluru succumbed to their spears. After these final successes the avenging party hastened to return to the security of the Krichauff Ranges, probably at some point south of Alitera; and then they made their proud return journey up the Finke River into Western Aranda territory. Here they found that the world which they had left behind over three years earlier had changed completely. It was 1878 by now; and white men had invaded their land during their long and dangerous absence. The first structures built by white men greeted their eyes on the banks of the Finke at Hermannsburg. Their friends and relatives in the native camp were overjoyed to see their courageous kinsmen returning. Their spare and gaunt forms proved how tough life had been for them during the past three years, and how often they had had to endure hungry days and nights because there had been too many enemy hunters waiting for them in the best game country. But they had achieved their object, and there had not been a single casualty among them. They were given a heroes' welcome, and no one ever forgot the amazing achievement of these warriors - an achievement that would bear comparison with

that of any modern guerilla fighters in any other part of the world.

By 1878 stations were being established and cattle were being moved into the valleys of the Finke and the Palmer; and the new era of violence brought on by white settlement ended any chances of counter-reprisals being made, except perhaps against some individual members of the Ieltja party. In any case men and women in all groups affected by the Irbmangkara massacre had become sickened by several years of murder and killing, and longed to return to an era of peace and quiet amity. Only the Matuntara remained unhappy, for in Tjinawariti and Kapaluru they had lost two of their outstanding leader figures and ceremonial chiefs.

In return for their deaths it was decided by their kinsmen that at least one Irbmangkara man should lose his life. The man marked out for the final killing that would close the whole grim episode was, naturally, Nameia. Not only had he been a Matuntara himself, but he had also been the only man capable of identifying all the members of the original band of raiding warriors. He had been the leader of the avengers, and it had been his intimate knowledge of the Matuntara area that had made possible the stalking and the killing of Tjinawariti and of Kapaluru. But having come to the decision of executing Nameia, the Matuntara were willing to wait several years before taking any action: this time no risks were to be incurred that the executioners themselves would once more be detected by unforeseen eyewitnesses.

Some twelve years elapsed before Nameia met his doom. A new police outstation, known as the

Boggy Waterhole police camp, had recently been opened at Alitera, some twenty two miles downstream from Hermannsburg; and its officer-in-charge was none other than the dreaded Mounted Constable W. H. Willshire himself. For several years previously all the "mulga wires" in aboriginal Central Australia had been running hot with never-ending stories of the alleged murderous zeal of this police officer in going out and shooting down tribesmen in any area from which stories of cattle-killing had been sent to him by worried pioneer cattlemen. Aremala, Nameia's eldest son, who had been safely at Arbanta while his two younger brothers had died at Irbmangkara, had been engaged as a native constable by Willshire; and Nameia decided to pay his son a lengthy visit at Alitera. Unfortunately Alitera was not far from the Matuntara border, and the news of Nameia's arrival soon reached his waiting executioners. They decided to move quickly, and to take the calculated risk of killing him in close proximity to the new police camp.

One night in January, a few days after the time of full moon, a number of dark figures stole over the ranges as soon as complete darkness had fallen over the narrow, closed-in Finke valley. They had several hours in which to move into position behind clumps of bushes; for the moon, according to local Central Australian time, was not due to rise till about nine-thirty that night. Although it was summer, the proximity of the great waterhole, whose waves were lapping the black rock walls of the gorge on the left side of the river, soon brought a delicious coolness to the campsite; and all the Aranda men made up

their night fires from substantial logs, in readiness for the chilly midnight air. When the moon rose, sharp eyes began to watch the sleepers in the Alitera camp from behind the nearby bushes - eyes that were eager to identify the campfire of Nameia. The watchers were very tense, but managed to curb their impatience. A mistake had to be avoided at all costs; Nameia had to be killed, not wounded, and no other person harmed. The night grew colder with the passing hours; and, with the increasing chill in the air, one sleeper after the other began to stir and to stoke afresh the fires that were burning at his side. At last the patience of the watchers received its expected reward, Nameia himself sat up, drew the smouldering logs at his side closer together, and heaped small twigs on them. With a loud crackle the flames shot up brightly and revealed his face and body clearly to his enemies. The latter, on the other hand, received added protection from the wall of increased darkness cast up by the bright flames between themselves and their victim. Suddenly and without any warning several spears hissed sharply through the still air, and Nameia fell back mortally wounded. His enemies rose and fled, assisted by the light of the rising eastern moon. The long, opaque shadows of the trees protected them for the first quarter of a mile; and then they rushed forward in bright moonlight, knowing that they had safely outdistanced their would-be pursuers. By keeping to the rocky trail on which they had come, they left few marks behind for any trackers who might be interested in their identity next morning. When the sun rose above Alitera, they had regained

the timbered country south of the Krichauffs, and were back safely in the Matuntara area. The shouting and the general commotion that spread through the Alitera camp after Nameia had fallen down by his fire quickly awakened the white police officer. But there was nothing that he could do that night, and in any case Willshire was not a squeamish man: the "tribal killing" of some "rascally old nigger" would not have interested him normally. He merely noted down next morning in his police journal that "old man Naimi" had been murdered at his camp on the Finke River "at midnight on 9th January, 1890", by a party of "Tempe Downs blacks". Nevertheless, the intelligence that Nameia had been the father of his native constable Aremala was undoubtedly a very welcome discovery to Willshire. Even better, this had been a Matuntara raid executed upon a Southern Aranda camp, and the white officer felt that it would for this very reason deeply offend his other Aranda native constables as well.

However, for the time being Willshire had to hold his hand in this matter, no matter how strongly he might have felt that his authority as a white police officer had been rudely challenged by this "tribal execution". The Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg had not welcomed his setting up of a tough police camp in such relatively close proximity to their mission lease; and a number of reports had been sent down by them to Adelaide concerning the conduct of at least two of the Central Australian mounted troopers, - of Willshire himself and of his main associate Wurmbrand. As a result, an official enquiry was looming in the near future;

and Willshire adopted the prudent course of bidding his time.

The two South Australian Commissioners - H. C. Swan, S.M., and C. E. Taplin - who had been appointed to investigate the charges made as to the treatment of the aborigines living in the southern part of the Northern Territory by the police, the pastoralists, and the missionaries, opened their enquiry in Central Australia in July and presented their Report to the South Australian Parliament late in September, 1890.

Willshire had every reason to be satisfied with this Report; for the Commissioners found that there was "no foundation for any charge of his being guilty of shooting down the blacks", even though they also recommended that his camp should be moved from Boggy Waterhole to a location more distant from Hermannsburg. The pioneer white settlers had risen solidly to the defence of the police. The time seemed ripe for action. Richard J. Thornton, the manager of Tempe Downs Station, had been complaining bitterly for some time, making allegations about the wanton and wholesale spearing of cattle on his run by the local aborigines. The execution of Nameia by a band of Matuntara men early in 1890 hence seemed to afford an excellent excuse for Willshire's punishing the dark cattle-killers in the usual way - by rifle fire. But because of the recent investigation, Willshire decided to be rather more circumspect on the coming occasion: the shooting would be done by his four Aranda native constables, who would be given arms and ammunition and ordered to kill the murderers of Nameia. To Willshire's surprise, none of his Aranda subordinates were in

the least enthusiastic about his well-thought-out plan. To pursue a blood feud according to the age-old tribal norms and to kill the victim by spear and boomerang was one thing; but for dark men to carry out a white police officer's orders in a matter that was no concern of his, and to use the white men's fire-arms against men of their own race, was an entirely different thing. It was an act of treachery against the dark race, designed to advance mainly the cause of the white usurpers of the aboriginal lands. But in the end, the four trackers could not refuse to carry out their orders; for they had good reasons for fearing their white master even more than any of their dark enemies. And so, in February, 1891, Willshire set out from Alitera with his four Aranda native constables. Two of them, Aremala, who had been renamed Larry, and Kwalba, who was now called Jack, came from the Upper Southern Aranda area. The third man was Tekua, who had been christened Thomas in 1887 as one of the first Western Aranda converts at Hermannsburg. The fourth tracker was Archie, who was probably a Central Aranda man. This police party headed swiftly across the Krichauffs into the Palmer River valley, and then moved upstream towards Tempe Downs. On 22nd February, 1891, in the hour of grey dawn - or as one of the official depositions taken down at the subsequent enquiry stated, at "piccaninny daylight" - the four Aranda men swooped down upon the peaceful native camp close to Tempe Downs Station. One unsuspecting Matuntara man was shot by Aremala and Archie while he was lying asleep near his fire. His mate, however, woke up and fled, narrowly escaping the

bullets sent after him. But there was a second victim. The sound of the rifle fire awakened a third man, who had been sleeping some distance away with his wife Naemi Nungalka, who had been baptised at Hermannsburg in 1888. This third man darted up and rushed away from his fire, only to be brought down by bullets fired by Tekua and Kwalba. The wails of the dark women who had been disturbed by the shooting now burst upon the grim scene. It was a morning in the mountains that could not have failed to delight the heart of Willshire, who was later to describe a similar attack on a camp of northern aborigines in the following words: "They scattered in all directions. . . . It's no use mincing matters - the Martini-Henry carbines at this critical moment were talking English in the silent majesty of those great eternal rocks. The mountain was swathed in a regal robe of fiery grandeur, and its ominous roar was close upon us. The weird, awful beauty of the scene held us spell-bound for a few seconds." When the quick burst of shooting was over, Willshire and his four trackers went to the station and enjoyed their breakfast at sunrise. After breakfast Willshire engaged one of the white station hands, William H. Abbott, to assist him in taking the bodies of the two dead Matuntara men away on camels, so that they could be burnt. This was done with the aid of native constables Archie and Kwalba, who also cut the large amount of firewood necessary for the grim job. One body was taken to a spot four hundred yards south of the station and burnt in the sandhills; the other was taken down a creek bed for the same distance north-east of the buildings,

and burnt in the same manner.

But though the bodies had been incinerated till only a few pieces of charred bones remained, Willshire had made one fatal miscalculation. The visit of the two Commissioners from Adelaide six months earlier had given new heart to those few white men in the Centre who believed that the police shootings had gone on long enough. The hour produced the man. Mr Frank J. Gillen, of the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, who was a Justice of the Peace, personally went down to the Boggy Waterhole camp, accompanied by a newly arrived police officer, Mounted Constable William G. South; and from Boggy Waterhole Gillen and South took Willshire and his native constables to Tempe Downs for a searching investigation.

As a result of Gillen's fearless enquiry, Willshire was committed for trial in Port Augusta on a charge of murder. The case aroused intense interest both in Adelaide and in Central Australia. Willshire spent seventeen days in the Port Augusta gaol till northern cattlemen and stock interests had raised the sum of £2000 which had been fixed as his bail money.

Anxiety about the future safety of the cattle stations in the interior induced the same sections of the community to provide the money needed to engage the services of one of the most eminent legal men of the day, Sir John Downer, Q. C., on Willshire's behalf. Sir John Downer, who had been the premier of South Australia from 1885-87, and who was to hold this office again from 1892-93, made a speech at the trial, which was described by at least one correspondent as a "powerful and eloquent defence of an innocent

man". But though Willshire was freed by the verdict of the Port Augusta jury, he was not permitted by his superiors to return to his old haunts. The police shots that rang out through the morning air at Tempe Downs on 22nd February, 1891, had not only concluded the grim chapter whose first blood-stained pages had been written at Irbmangkara one evening sixteen years earlier: they had also brought to an end a decade of uncurbed police violence in Central Australia. Gillen's courage was never forgotten by the Aranda; and some years later their gratitude found its expression in the ceremonial festival held at Alice Springs in 1896, where the secret totemic cycle of Imanda was revealed for the first time before the eyes of white men - to Gillen and to his friend, Baldwin Spencer. Like many other men responsible by their lies for the tragedies of other people, the real culprit who had been responsible for the deaths of well over a hundred men, women, and children, remained unpunished. Kalejika died many years later peacefully in the Western Aranda area, and apparently no man had ever seen fit even to ostracise him. Perhaps his grey and white hairs saved him from that punishment which he had so richly deserved.

This, then, had been the tragic story of Irbmangkara less than fifty years earlier. But Nature does not remember human tears or human suffering. Men may live and men may die, but Nature is indifferent to their fate. And so on that October afternoon, when Mrs Strehlow was busily reading out letters to her sick husband, Theo was conscious only of the peace and beauty of one of the loveliest landscapes he had

ever seen.

Sitting near the edge of a thick fringe of bulrushes, he watched the black-and-yellow butterflies flitting about gracefully among the blue flowers that grew along the damp bank of the quiet pool, over whose calm waters delicate-bodied, red dragon-flies were hovering in quest of water insects. Every now and then the smooth surface of the pool was disturbed by little eddies caused by fish which thrust up their cold, wet mouths to snap at unwary flies and gnats which had flitted down too low for their own safety. A busy black-and-orange wasp with a threadlike waist carefully picked up with its slender legs some of the clay from the wet bank in order to build its many-chambered home at the entrance of a wide cave several chains away. This cave also provided a welcome rain shelter for a number of swallows whose mud nests had been built on its inner red rock walls. Almost lost to view in the sky, a pair of eagles, poised one above the other, surveyed the peaceful scene below with sharp menace in their eyes but the huge birds soon moved eastward in order to circle over more open country: they were too wary to venture into the treacherous thicket of gums and ti-tree bushes below. From time to time the faint whisper of a summer breeze sighed through the rustling stems and sharp leaves of the bulrushes, and then the clear outlines of the trees and the surrounding cliff walls temporarily lost their mirror-like keenness. The twittering of small birds sitting on the tree branches, the cooing of the large-eyed crested rock pigeons on the stony ground below, and the occasional rush of wings as a flight of

long-necked ducks with gleaming green-and-black feathers skimmed low over the water: these were the only sounds that filled the ancient scene with their gentle, age-old music. Here was water, here was beauty, here was peace. It was easy to understand why among the Western Aranda Irbmangkara was believed to have been, like Japalpa, one of the cradles of mankind at the beginning of time.

But the race whose love and imagination had given to Irbmangkara its rich store of songs and myths had gone down sadly in numbers since the advent of the whites. Theo recalled Jack Fountain's remark that until the turn of the century the figures of aboriginal hunters had often been visible in the Finke valley upstream and downstream from Irbmangkara, stalking animals that had left the game sanctuary precincts of the sacred site. But on that afternoon no hunters remained to be spotted; for the numbers of the aboriginal population had slumped dangerously since Fountain's first arrival in the Centre. Irbmangkara had ceased being a home for any of its remaining dark children for more than a decade before the present travellers from Hermannsburg were able to set their eyes on its haunting beauty.

Theo's parents meanwhile had been far too busy with their mail to cast more than a few glances at the pools of Irbmangkara. The message that had brought them most joy was a telegram giving fairly full details about the proposed journey by Mr Gotthold Wurst, the Appila wheat farmer who had accepted the challenge to come to Strehlow's rescue after all other appeals for help had failed. He was going to join at Hawker the

train on which Stoltz was due to go north after leaving Light's Pass. Wurst's car was going to be trucked at Hawker; and if everything went according to plan, Wurst and Stoltz would be leaving Oodnadatta in this car on Saturday - the day on which the Hermannsburg party hoped to reach Idracowra Station. This heartening telegram brought tears of joy into the sick man's eyes: his clerical colleagues had failed him in his hour of need, but here was a man of goodwill and humanity who was prepared to risk his car and to come to his rescue without any expectations of liberal financial recompense. Expressed in different terms, here was a man's man who was ready to help his neighbour in his troubles, not a professional Christian who was content to seek personal favours for himself from the Almighty.

At two o'clock in the afternoon the canteens and water containers on the van were filled at the clear pool, and after that all horses were given a drink: there would be no water for them at the proposed night camp. The Finke Valley had to be left behind for the time being; for the river took a huge bend to the south below Urualbukara.

For the rest of the afternoon the two vehicles moved forward slowly over the rough and stony expanse that led eastward to Iltjanmalitnjaka or Parke's Pass. About an hour before sundown the travellers passed through this gap, and for the first time found themselves outside the rock walls of the Krichauff Ranges. A new landscape came into view - the table mountain country, which was to stay with them for most of the remainder of their journey. Theo in particular was

fascinated by it; for he could not remember having seen table mountains before. Also he had now broken through the range that had bounded his southern horizon so far. His father's tent was put up quickly. The tired horses were unharnessed and hobbled out, and a hot evening meal ended an unexpectedly heartening day.

Journey to Horseshoe Bend

Thursday, the twelfth day of October, 1922

AT DAYBREAK next morning the travellers felt a new sting in the spear shafts of the sun as soon as it peered over the horizon. At Iltjan-malitnjaka, where the fish ancestors from Anku-rowunga had burst through a weir erected by their pursuer, there were no gorge walls to shield the camp; and the few mulgas that grew on the stony soil in the vicinity did not give the travellers much protection. The day promised to be a hot one, and a strong northerly wind which set in shortly after their departure soon raised the temperature to a searing, scorching level. The horses that had drawn the two vehicles on the first day were being used again on the third. Harnessing them was no longer a strenuous task - after two days of travelling they had lost their overfed pride and turned into docile working horses, content to plod along in obedient tiredness. Their drivers no longer had to grip the reins in a tight clutch to restrain them: they could use the ends of the reins for flicking the broad haunches of the horses closest to them. At about ten thirty in the morning the vehicles came again upon the Finke. The river bed had to be crossed here; for the Finke, having completed its wide southern loop below Urualbukara, was now describing a broad sweeping curve in a north-easterly direction. Freed of the restricting gorge walls which had hemmed it in during its thirty-five mile winding course through the Krichauff Ranges, the Finke bed had broadened out by several hundred yards. The

central main channel of heavy white sand had still been kept free of all trees by the bigger floods that came from the upper reaches from time to time. This sandy channel was fringed by beautiful river gums, whose smooth white bark was mottled with reddish-brown patches. On both sides of this central train channel came wide borders of loamy flats which were inundated only by the highest floods, when the river, in local idiom, was "running a banker". The flood flats were covered by flourishing massive box gums, whose rough and sturdy, brown-barked trunks branched out into crooked but smooth-skinned white limbs. Theo, who had never seen the small box gum creek which ran from the eastern mulga plain country into the Ellery some miles above Pmokoputa, enjoyed his first glance of these rough-barked trees with their luxuriant green foliage. He marvelled at the way in which nature had used the soil differences to put a sharp line of demarcation between the habitats of these two kinds of eucalypts: the river gums demanded clean white sand for their roots, and the box gums would grow only in clay soil.

Clouds of choking brown dust rose high into the hot air as the two vehicles wound their way through the box gum flats. A large stockyard stood near the river crossing; and a criss-cross network of donkey wagon trails showed that it had recently been repaired by the Henbury station men. As soon as the vehicles had slid down the northern bank into the heavy white sand of the central river channel, the air began to ring with the encouraging shouts of the drivers and the sharp, loud cracks of their whips. The pull across the channel was a heavy one ; and long

before the southern bank had been reached, the lashes of the whips started falling sharply on the backs of the sweating, panting horses, in order to forestall any attempts at jibbing. After some minutes of noise, fury; and apprehension, both vehicles had safely negotiated the sand and mounted to the top of the southern river bank. The drivers pulled up their foamy-mouthed teams under some shady box gums for the sake of the passengers, and then unharnessed the horses from both the buggy and the van. The bits were taken out from the horses' mouths, and the frothing, sweat-dripping animals were driven down to the nearby waterhole in the river bed. Its name was Pantjindama ("The feather-crests are lying about"). It had received its name from the mythical feather-crests cast down here by a large party of dingo ancestors who had travelled to the Finke from their southern home. At Pantjindama they had been tired out by their journey, and they had gone down to their last rest here. The horses stepped into the pool with their forefeet and took long draughts in rapid gulps from the waterhole; for they were having their first drink since leaving Irbmang-kara. After walking away from the edge of the pool, most of them took sandbaths by rolling over several times in the clean white river sand to dry their sweating backs. They then got up again and shook the sand off vigorously. After that the drivers drove them back to the vehicles. Here fires had already been lit for boiling the tea billies; and the travellers enjoyed a quick meal at their dinner camp. For in Central Australia it was the hurried midday meal that was called "dinner", while the much bigger eve-

ning meal was always referred to as "supper". After the dinner break the horses were put back into their harness, and the vehicles continued on their way, trailing clouds of fine brown dust behind them as they wound and twisted their way forward through the dense forest of box gums.

For the rest of the day this pattern of progress prevailed. The wagon road kept roughly to the southern side of the river valley, but sometimes cut through the edges of some of the bends. It was very heavy going for the horses; for as the party drew nearer to Henbury they found that the donkey wagon wheels had chopped the clay soil of the box gum flats into loose powder.

Thick brown clouds of this talc-like bull-dust enveloped the vehicles for most of the remainder of the day. The sweating horses, snorting loudly to clear their wet and dust-choked nostrils, tired more and more as the burning sun slowly sank lower in the yellow-grey western sky. The hot air reeked with the heavy smell of the bull-dust, and the perspiring faces of the travellers were quickly turned brown by it.

About half an hour before sundown the campsite for the night was reached - a gravel bank in the Finke bed, sheltered by ti-tree bushes and gums, a few hundred yards upstream from Tunga, the Henbury waterhole. A huge reddish-brown sandhill on the northern bank of the Finke hid the Henbury station buildings from view, but wisps of smoke rising up into the air clearly showed its exact location. Strehlow had decided to camp in the Finke bed in order to avoid the heavy pull up the high northern river bank to the station; for his drivers had advised

him that the vehicles would in that case have to cross back again to the southern bank next morning in order to regain the road to the next station, Idracowra.

All of the horses looked very tired as they made their way to the waterhole after they had been hobbled out. Some of those that had been unharnessed stretched themselves out in complete exhaustion near the edge of the pool. The travellers, too, looked sunburnt and worn-out after the heat and the dust of the long and tiring afternoon. The hot north wind had dropped a little before sundown; but there was no sign that a cool wind might set in from the south-east.

The first stage of the long journey south from Hermannsburg had been successfully accomplished. But it had taken the vehicles three days to reach Henbury, though this station was situated only sixty miles from Hermannsburg. The arrival of the two vehicles had been noticed by many keen eyes in the Henbury aboriginal camp, and several men slipped down to the waterhole to meet the Hermannsburg drivers.

Shouts and hand signals quickly conveyed the news to the folk in the camp that "ingkata Strehlow" had arrived.

Since all the Henbury folk had often been on visits to Hermannsburg, it was not long before a large group of men, women, and children came down to the travellers' camp, both to greet Strehlow and to exchange gossip with the Hermannsburg drivers. During the evening meal the two white men who had been home at the station on that day also came down to the camp. They were Robert Buck - universally known as "Bob Buck" - and Alf Butler. Both of them had

been frequent visitors to Hermannsburg. Alf Butler had a halfcaste daughter there, whose name was Elsie Butler. Elsie's mother, Molly Ereakura, had left Alf soon after Elsie's birth and married a halfcaste man at Hermannsburg by the name of Theodore Abbott - a son of that "Billy" Abbott who had, after helping with the burning of the bodies of the two Tempe Downs victims, accompanied Willshire back to Boggy Waterhole.

However, even after Molly's marriage to Theodore, Alf Butler had always maintained an affectionate interest in his daughter Elsie. He had never omitted to bring her money and presents on his visits to Hermannsburg and had never failed to acknowledge her proudly as his daughter. Bob Buck had had a similar reason for his Hermannsburg visits. His halfcaste daughter Ettie had spent a couple of years at Hermannsburg in the home of Mr and Mrs Emil Munchenberg in order to receive private tuition from the latter. Both halfcaste girls had been childhood friends of Theo. During the years when Munchenberg was the Hermannsburg head stockman, Bob Buck had come up several times on lengthy visits, particularly during the Christmas holidays. He had always brought with him Ettie's mother, Molly Tjalameinta, and a large party of Henbury folk. The latter had made their way up to the station, some on foot and some riding on the Henbury donkeys. These Henbury visits had always lasted about three weeks and all the Hermannsburg school children had enjoyed rides on the visitors' donkeys. On one of these occasions Buck had presented a young donkey called "Possum" to Theo; and Possum

had soon become Theo's spoiled pet.

It had been a great wrench for Theo to part from him at the end of September, when Bob Buck and Ettie had arrived on horseback from Henbury to say goodbye to the Strehlow family, having heard about their original plan to travel south to Oodnadatta via Alice Springs. Theo had been persuaded to send Possum back to Henbury with Buck and Ettie since there were no other donkeys at Hermannsburg; for his father had always resolutely refused to permit the purchase of the most useful Central Australian animals - donkeys and camels - for station work at Hermannsburg, claiming that their feeding habits were too destructive for the local vegetation. After Possum's departure, only the two motherless brumby foals remained, whom Theo had acquired several months earlier and reared with cows' milk: these, to his great relief, he had been allowed to keep till the day of his own departure from Hermannsburg.

Bob Buck, who had been expecting the Strehlow family since his last visit to Hermannsburg, brought Ettie and Tjalameinta with him to the travellers' camp. He had always done so whenever he visited the Strehlow home on his Christmas holidays; and though Strehlow had been somewhat puritanical in many of his views, he had always welcomed Ettie and Tjalameinta into his home whenever Buck had brought them. It was no concern of his that Buck and Tjalameinta were not legally married. What did matter to him was that Buck was faithful to Tjalameinta, and that he looked after her and their daughter Ettie like any other family man.

"Well, here's Ettie come to see you, and your

mother Molly too," Buck said with a grin to Theo, who had come forward to greet him. "I'm going on to your old man, to see if I can be of any use to him." At the sound of the familiar voice Mrs Strehlow emerged from the tent, and when she saw Buck and Butler standing outside, she warmly invited them in. As soon as they entered, both visitors were startled to see how ill and tired Strehlow looked, even in the dim light of a kerosene lantern, but they were determined not to show their deep alarm. Buck, always a great teller of humorous bush yarns, immediately began talking in his pleasant, warm bushman's drawl with a convincing air of pretended cheerfulness, leaving his rather taciturn partner few opportunities to add or interpose short remarks of his own.

"I've got a bone to pick with you, Mr Strehlow," Buck began after the initial greetings. "Now why did you camp here instead of coming up to the station? I know our damn blockhouses can't compare with those big, comfortable stone houses of yours at The Mission; but at least you'd 've been camping a lot closer to us. We've never had a chance of returning any of your Mission hospitality before, and now you're spoiling it all by stopping down at the waterhole with the cattle." He grinned cheerfully, and continued, "I'm sure we'd 've been better company for you than the bloody cattle." Strehlow gave his reasons. He explained how tired the horses had grown during the day, and asked Buck not to be offended. "Offended? Of course not," grinned Buck. "I could never be offended with you, Mr Strehlow - you've been far too good to me and my mate here and my whole bloody Henbury

tribe for donkeys' years. Surely you must've realised how much you've meant to us here and to the whole population of this country, when I came to say goodbye to you at The Mission a coupla weeks ago. If you'd arrived here a bit earlier, I'd have got my donks to pull your buggy up to the old place for the night. Great animals for this country, donks! Horses are all right for mustering and saddle work. They're no bloody good for pulling in sand - that's why we use only donks for all our carting and yard-building work. And now, while we're talking about horses and donks, tell me, how many horses have you got with you, and how have they been standing up to that Finke sand this afternoon?"

When Strehlow had given him this information, Buck said with sudden seriousness, "It's not my business to interfere with your plans, Mr Strehlow. But I know what the track's like between here and Idracowra. If you've been finding the going tough this afternoon, then you'll be in a helluva mess if you try going over the Britannia Sandhills. And those last bloody miles along the Finke from Hell's Gates to Idracowra are not a bit better. You've a buggy and a van, and you don't seem to have more than one change of horses left for each. In fact, I may as well tell you that you haven't even got one change left for either of them. I've had a good look at your horses as I came past the water-hole, and there's at least half a dozen of them that look like being buggered-up altogether. You might as well leave your knocked-up horses right here. That old van of yours has a helluva load on it, and those narrow iron tyres of hers

are going to cut into the sand like knives into runny butter. You'll find you'll have to change your team after half a day's pulling, and you'll need all what's left of your good horses just to hitch to the buggy.

There's no water in the Britannia Sandhills, and there's about twenty two miles of them. That's right isn't it, Alf?"

Butler nodded, "Every bit of it." And then, noting the look of alarm on Strehlow's face, Buck quickly added in soothing tones, "But, of course, there's an easy way out of that mess. Only you mustn't be so bloody stubborn this time in accepting a bit o' help from your Henbury friends. Now here's my plan. First, leave all your knocked-up horses at the station with us. They can be picked up when your buggy comes back. Next, hook some of our donks to the van. We've got plenty of 'em here, and we don't need them at the moment. My advice is that you go ahead in the buggy tomorrow morning, and drive through to Idracowra: it's fifty-five miles away, and it'll take you all your time to do it in two days. The van can follow at its own pace. I can supply the donks to pull it, and the donkey harness. Eight donks should manage to get your van through any amount of sand, and I'll send along another eight loose donks. Old Bob and Lornie can drive the team for you: they know how to handle 'em. Now what d'you say to my proposition?"

After a moment's hesitation, Strehlow accepted with obvious relief and gratitude. "You are being very good to us, Mr Buck," he said at last. "And I'd like to do something for you in return. But I don't know what to offer - please tell me what I

could do to show you how grateful I am for your kindness."

"As you know, Mr Strehlow," replied Buck, "us tough bush people in these parts've always had an unwritten law of mateship; and that law says that every man must help everyone else in trouble, never mind whether the poor bugger's been his pal or his enemy. That's the only way us poor bastards up here've been able to survive at all in this tough country. We've no trains, no cars, no doctors, no nurses, and bloody little money. And no man would ever take any money for helping someone that needed his help: he'd only expect to be treated the same way when he needed it himself. Now you're an old friend of the bush people, and you've always been good to Alf and me. There's nothing either of us would accept from you, even if you were in a position to offer us anything."

Strehlow did not reply immediately; for when Buck had told him that he had always been regarded as a friend of the bush people, the unexpected warmth of the personal tribute had threatened to bring the tears to his eyes. For had not the people of the bush always despised clerics, and expressed a particular loathing for missionaries? He was grateful that the dim light of the lantern did not reveal his face very clearly. While he was labouring to control his emotions, Buck, whose sharp eyes had taken in the situation at a glance, added in a low and friendly tone of voice, "But, of course, Mr Strehlow, if you insist on giving us something, then all I'd like to ask for would be something to remind us of you - a sort of keepsake, if you like. What are you going to do with that nice up-

holstered chair you're sitting on? If you're going to send it back with the buggy when you get down to Oodnadatta, then you might tell the boys to drop it in for us at Henbury. But, of course, if you intend taking it down south with you, then just forget about it: the Henbury donks are on loan to you for nothing. What d'you say Alf? Agreed?"

Butler's face beamed with a kindly smile. "Of course, Bob - only wish we'd a car to offer. But nobody owns one in this country - too sandy for cars anyway. And, Mr Strehlow, I'll always remember what Hermannsburg's done for my daughter Elsie."

Buck's and Butler's suggestion, seemingly made on the spur of the moment, took a heavy weight off Strehlow's mind, and he agreed to it with thankful happiness. Mrs Strehlow now made some coffee for supper, and offered Buck and Butler, also Molly Tjalameinta and Ettie, some home-made biscuits with their cups. After supper the visitors left quietly, so as not to tire the sick man unnecessarily. Before shaking hands for the night, Buck said to Strehlow, "Just one more thing, Mr Strehlow. I'm sorry you had to leave Hermannsburg in such a hurry that none of us bush folk had a chance of doing anything much to help you. But I tell you this - you've done a grand job at The Mission. Every white man in the country will tell you that, if you ask him. As you know, none of us poor bastards has much in the way of money; but if we could've had just one month's notice before you left, we'd have tried our bloody best to get the money together somehow to hire a car to take you south. Your flash church cobbers should

never've asked you to go down in a buggy; but then all them nasty Southerners are alike under the skin - they don't know what mateship is. They're only interested in squeezing the last penny and the last ounce of sweat out of whoever works for them; and then they kick him out into the bloody gutter and spit on him, after he's no more use to them. Well, I must get going. I've been talking too much; but we don't often see any visitors at Henbury. The rich folk down south what've squeezed tens of thousands of pounds out of Henbury these last forty years've made sure we'd never have any visitors coming to see us up here: all we have at Henbury is a couple of bloody log-houses for camping in when we're not out on the run."

Buck and Butler now said goodnight to their visitors and departed with Tjalameinta and Ettie. "We'll come down to see you off in the morning," they called out as they briskly strode back to the station over the crunching gravel banks.

A sudden silence fell on the camp of the travellers, and they went to sleep with the bellowing of the cattle in their ears; for it was eleven o'clock at night before the station cattle ceased coming down to the Tunga waterhole. An hour later several hundred half-wild horses began to arrive for their night's drink. But Theo was the only person still awake to hear them - everyone else near him was sleeping soundly.

Friday, the thirteenth day of October, 1922

WHILE EATING his breakfast next morning, Strehlow was still full of happiness about Bob Buck's offer of the previous night and the obvious sincerity of his warm words of personal appreciation. Throughout his twenty eight years of office Strehlow had often passed through moments of deep depression when indulging in reflections on his completely isolated position at Hermannsburg. To the dark people he had always been the ingkata, or chief, and the ajua, or old man, and to his white mission staff he had been the stiff-necked manager and eagle-eyed superintendent; and while he had in a very real sense enjoyed his position of supreme authority in both the spiritual and secular spheres, he had known also that he had been, except for the love and companionship of his devoted wife, a completely isolated and lonely man. His very power, and the duty which it had imposed upon him to make all the final decisions, had constantly served to alienate men's affections from him: he had always been respected and often admired, but he had rarely known men's friendship and just as rarely heard even any guarded expressions of affection.

During the whole of his term at Hermannsburg he had towered above his community in lonely aloofness. He had been keenly conscious of the fact that behind his back many of the white mission workers had criticised him in harsh and resentful terms. Sometimes these criticisms had been relayed back to him by the very persons to whom they had originally been addressed in confidential conversations or in private letters. Thus only two months earlier a former Her-

mannsburg stockman had sent back to him a letter written by Heinrich, in which the latter had bitterly attacked him as the incompetent mission boss who was interested only in seeing the "lazy station blacks watering a few cabbages in his garden", while the hard-working white employees on the run were vainly battling to get their worthless dark stockmen to carry out their all-important station duties. These stockmen had been vilified in the strongest possible terms: "They are like the hammers of hell, and nothing but a bullet will stop them." Strehlow, of course, had been forced to conceal and to swallow his rage, since the letter had been sent back to him under cover of secrecy. But it had been a bitter pill for him to have to continue entertaining Heinrich in his home.

For the bitterly critical man who sat at his table and shared his meals with him continued to address him to his face in terms which would have led outsiders to think that Heinrich was Strehlow's greatest admirer and most trustworthy associate.

The Finke River Mission Board also had, so he felt, been far too prone to take the part of the white mission workers against himself. This had happened on several occasions in the case of the white stockmen. The Lutheran Church had never numbered any big graziers or cattlemen among its members; and the men sent up to take charge of the stockwork involving thousands of half-wild cattle and horses on the Hermannsburg run had never possessed any previous cattle-run experience. The most that any of them had ever done before their arrival at Hermannsburg had been to look after a few tame

dairy cows and draught horses on some southern wheat farm. Their stock musters had hence tended to be rather inefficient, and their droving of the Hermannsburg stock mobs on the long road to the railhead at Oodnadatta had long since come to be regarded as a standing joke among the vastly more experienced cattlemen of the Centre.

When one of these white mission stockmen, on one occasion, had had the audacity to arrange, without Strehlow's knowledge, a sale of several hundred branded young cows as breeders to a neighbouring station, Strehlow had been forced to foil this disastrous deal by having the yard gates opened by the dark stockmen and the cows turned loose once more.

In spite of this lucky escape, the Board had been slow to approve of their superintendent's honesty and foresight; and he had had to put up with his nasty-tempered subordinate for a further seven months before a successor had been sent up. The church people down south had often failed to appreciate the fact that Strehlow, who had grown up in a farming village before he came out to Australia, had always taken a keen interest in all stockwork done on the mission station. He had thereby acquired a much better insight into the stock problems of Hermannsburg than most of the inexperienced wheat and dairy farmers who lived in the Barossa Valley and adjoining areas. Through listening to the experienced cattlemen of the Centre and through watching keenly the methods of the skilled outside drovers hired from time to time to take the mission cattle down to Oodnadatta, Strehlow had also gained a far better apprecia-

tion of efficient stockwork procedures than the so-called southern stock experts among the Mission Board members; but these had, quite naturally, disliked admitting their somewhat pitiful lack of grasp of the unique problems of Central Australia - a country so completely removed from their own spheres of experience.

The financial difficulties encountered by the Hermannsburg Mission had been far too often ascribed without any evidence to Strehlow's alleged lack of business acumen. But any knowledge of the local conditions would have revealed to the Board members the all-important fact that most cattlemen in the Centre who lived on holdings ranging from one thousand to two thousand square miles were rarely well-to-do men, even when all the profits of their runs flowed into their own pockets. Hermannsburg, by contrast, had always had to support from its funds several married white staff members, and a native population of rather more than a hundred people.

Because of the Board's failure to grasp the specifically Central Australian problems, certain re-organizational proposals which, in Strehlow's opinion, were impossible wildcat schemes that could end only in complete financial disaster for the mission, had been urged with strong persistence on him from time to time; and his honest resistance to these so-called "rehabilitation schemes" had been castigated severely as the wilful obstinacy of a man interested far too much in spiritual matters and in the tenure of his own personal power.

What had given Strehlow his deepest sense of hurt during his final years at Hermannsburg was

the fact that, as his knowledge and experience increased, the Mission Board, and in particular its newest members, seemed to place less and less confidence in him. Not only were his critics listened to with surprising readiness, but even the occasional malicious tale-bearer received an attentive hearing if he came from the ranks of the church - an institution never noted for its firm rejection of irresponsible or malicious gossip. This was something that Strehlow could not understand: in his eyes talebearers, calumniators, and spreaders of malicious gossip had always been the lowest kind of vermin in existence. He considered that they were unworthy creatures who had allowed themselves to become, either foolishly or wittingly, agents of the sinister Prince of Darkness - of that mysterious "fallen Morning Star" of the patristic writers, who had turned, as Satan, into the great and privileged Adversary of all mankind. For it was Satan who had been depicted in the Bible as the malicious calumniator whose constant aim it was to spread lies, and as the hateful accuser who spoke the truth before the throne of the Almighty only when it was his purpose to bring about the punishment of sinners. It was this Satan who had been permitted by God in His unfathomable wisdom to bring down upon Job those intolerable trials of pain and suffering that had been devised to break the sufferer's spirit and destroy his faith. And the promised era of eternal peace and joy for mankind in heaven was, according to the last book in the Bible, to be ushered in by the expulsion of Satan from heaven: the final victory over the forces of evil could be expected only after the implacable Ac-

cuser of mankind, who had been accusing even the elect before God unceasingly both "day and night" since the beginning of time, had been evicted and cast down himself. In short, during his final years at Hermannsburg Strehlow had experienced to the full both the envy and the malice of lesser men. He had come to know something of that supreme loneliness which is the normal lot of men of outstanding capacity and the invariable burden of men of genius. All persons of more than average mental stature tend to be envied and disliked by those individuals who, upon entering into their presence, experience feelings of acute inferiority.

Strehlow had always been a logical, clear-headed, and well-informed thinker, and a man with a very forceful personality. He had never put up gladly either with muddled thinkers or with honest, well-meaning fools. But many small-minded men had discovered that they possessed the advantage of superior numbers over him. If they could not defeat him in an open battle of wits, they could at least, by sneers and tales uttered behind his back, damage his image in the eyes of those whose personal knowledge of him was only limited.

Church boards could be used for attacking his policies, and even for delaying or preventing their practical application.

Unsatisfactory subordinates could be supported, at least temporarily, against his complaints and protests. Finally, whispered sneers and masked attacks readily commended themselves to that large number of little men who enjoy the spectacle of seeing outstanding individuals of a greater stature than their own being dragged

down to the rather more commonplace levels of average humanity. Heroes and saints have too often won their tributes of appreciation and praise only in the writings of posterity; and some of them have been unable to avoid persecution, and even death, at the hands of their own envious contemporaries.

Few of the people who knew him had ever realised that there was another side to Strehlow's nature - that this man with the blazing amber eyes, who was universally regarded as a stern and unbending, if completely honest and upright, authoritarian, was one of the most humane of men during his moments of relaxation when he considered himself to be unobserved. His warm, human sympathies had a habit of showing up at the most unexpected times. Thus he had been known to swallow hard and to brush tears from his eyes when reading aloud moving passages from authors such as Fritz Reuter or Sir Walter Scott to his wife and son in the privacy of his home during the long winter nights. Try as he might on such occasions, he had not been able to control his voice; and sometimes he had been compelled to pause for several seconds before he had been able to read on at all. He had not sought out the supreme loneliness of his position either among his white staff or among his dark congregation: circumstances and his own inflexible principles had combined to force it upon him. He had always felt that he had been appointed by God to his position at Hermannsburg; and God had demanded from him that he should always exercise his powers in accordance with what he believed to be God's ordinances. There were many

times when this belief had cut across some of his own inclinations, even some of his personal desires; but he had then told himself that God demanded absolute obedience from His servants in all things.

Brought up in a sternly Lutheran household, he had at times become almost obsessed by a strong sense of sin about many of the things that ordinary men did and thought as a matter of course. One of the results of this inflexible attitude had been his failure to develop strong friendships with any of the members of his dark congregation. He had watched over their behaviour with the eyes of an eagle. Smaller misdemeanours had been rebuked sternly, and major offences punished by dismissal from the station. Church penance before the altar was vigorously enforced for all sex offences.

At the same time, Strehlow refused to keep records of any church offences, and he regarded every case as closed once the offenders had accepted their reprimand or their punishment.

No past misdemeanours were ever raked up a second time.

In addition, Strehlow was too much of a man to stoop to spying tactics in order to keep himself informed on the living habits and morals of his dark congregation. He spoke with scathing contempt about one of his fellow missionaries on a different settlement, who had walked around in the aboriginal camp on dark nights, ineffectually trying to hide his storm lantern behind his overcoat, while snooping around in the hope of catching offenders against the church's moral code. In Strehlow's opinion, a minister might well have to be a stern disciplinarian, since he

was a responsible servant of the Almighty. But God was no friend of spies and snoopers: these were men on the pay-roll of Satan.

Strehlow's fear of God's displeasure had also led him to refuse all invitations to attend the aboriginal folk-dances (or corroborees) or to be present at performances of the Western Aranda sacred ceremonies, even though his study of the Aranda and Loritja sacred songs and myths had evoked in him a great admiration for certain elements of aboriginal religion and culture. To attend any of these performances would have been, for a missionary as conceived by Strehlow, a deliberate act of condoning paganism; and his God would not permit him to do so. Even old Loatjira, the ceremonial chief of Ntarea who had honoured Strehlow not only by giving him most of his store of the Western Aranda sacred traditions but also by revealing to him at least some of the Western Aranda death charms sung for purposes of black magic, had not been able to induce Strehlow to witness one single Western Aranda ceremonial act. Nor had Loatjira ever been able to win any permission for himself - a man who still believed in and clung to the faith of his forefathers firmly and passionately - to practise any of his own aboriginal ritual openly on the Hermannsburg mission run. Strehlow had, of course, been aware that the Western Aranda, the great majority of whom had not yet been converted to Christianity in his days, were sometimes engaging in their sacred acts secretly outside the immediate station precincts; and he had refused to encourage any spying by informers on these activities. Indeed, he had privately often longed to see perform-

ances of the Western Aranda sacred acts. But his personal attendance, he had felt, would have been taken as tacit approval of these things by members of his congregation; and such an act on his part would accordingly have blurred that clear-cut, black-and-white division between activities labelled as sinful and activities permitted by God that he had tried to inculcate into his converts. Unable to win any counter-concessions from Strehlow after revealing to him some of the deepest secrets of the Western Aranda sacred beliefs, the ageing Loatjira had finally left Hermannsburg in despair. He had spent most of his remaining years on the Glen Helen Station run, where the practice of the old religion was not frowned upon as long as the sacred ritual was not being carried out near the main cattle waters. Strehlow had been painfully aware of the breach between Loatjira and himself, and he had personally regretted it deeply. He had also been aware that even his most loyal converts were unhappy at the long absences of the venerated ceremonial chief of Ntarea from his own conception site, and he had known that Loatjira had always been greeted like a loved ruler returning from exile by everyone at Hermannsburg whenever he had come back on his infrequent visits. Strehlow and Loatjira had always met on such occasions. Loatjira had brought him some tjurunga objects, and Strehlow had given him liberal supplies of rations which were debited to his private account. But their later meetings had been characterised by politeness rather than by friendship: there had been no real warmth in the relationship between the two most important men at Her-

mannsburg. Their long estrangement had continued till the day of Strehlow's departure; and Loatjira had not been present at the mission when Strehlow left. But Strehlow's God was a jealous God, who brooked no whittling down of His holy commandments; and Strehlow had felt that any other course of action would have been both wrong and sinful in the eyes of his Master. It was the same fear of giving offence to God that had made Strehlow so uncompromising in his stern attitudes towards the unconventional morals and the general way of life of the Central Australian white station folk and stockmen; and he had rarely failed to attack sin vigorously from his pulpit on the occasions when any of these white visitors had been staying at Hermannsburg for any length of time. Strehlow's sermons were, of course, always given in Aranda; but a fair proportion of the white station folk understood many of the remarks that had some special application for them.

Some of them were perfectly well aware of the Aranda words for the particular sins that were being castigated so uncompromisingly from the pulpit. Among the more knowledgeable white listeners on several of these occasions had been men like Alf Butler and Bob Buck; and these men had been sufficiently interested in the sermons to ask their dark women after the services for more detailed explanations of Strehlow's warnings and castigatory remarks.

On the other hand, Strehlow's personal position towards the white population on the surrounding stations had been a much easier one than that which he had felt obliged to maintain towards his aboriginal congregation. The station people

who came on visits to Hermannsburg were not church members entrusted to his care, and he was hence not directly responsible to God for the welfare of their souls. Nor was he a spiritual blackmailer who strove to frighten people into the fold of his flock by threats of God's wrath and by hellfire sermons. Once he had fulfilled his duty by making it clear in his sermons that God hated all manner of sins among both the dark and the white sections of the population, he had been able to relax in his private conversations with the white folk who had come to visit him in his home. He was surprisingly well-informed about their private lives: everyone in Central Australia knew the personal business of most people with whom he was acquainted.

Strehlow was a hospitable man who enjoyed the company and the conversation of visitors. All persons who came on business matters, too, were made welcome. In addition, the Horseshoe Bend mailman used to eat at Strehlow's table unless there happened to be a married white stockman at Hermannsburg who was willing to take him in. Station men passing through Hermannsburg were similarly afforded unstinting hospitality. Strehlow had even possessed enough consideration for the Moslem susceptibilities of the Afghans to allow them, after they had brought up the mission loading from Oodnadatta on their camel teams, to go up to the Hermannsburg stockyard, and to be present at the butchering of bullocks for their own meat supply. Moslems were not permitted to eat the meat of animals unless these had been slaughtered according to the instructions given in their Holy Koran; and so at Hermannsburg the Af-

ghan would leap into the killing pen as soon as the beast had been felled by a bullet, in order to cut its jugular veins and pronounce over the dying animal the traditional words - "Bismillah Al-lahu Akbar" - "In the name of Allah, Allah is the Greatest of all".

Always keenly aware of his isolation, loneliness, and remoteness in the human world of Central Australia, Strehlow had been affected almost as much by Bob Buck's totally unexpected tribute as he had been by the parting from his dark congregation on his last morning at Hermannsburg. He had now become a man who needed human sympathy more than ever before; for his physical condition was rapidly worsening with each day of travel. He had always been aware of the kindness of bush folk towards persons in trouble. But it was the rich warmth and the complete sincerity of Buck's tribute that had come as a most gratifying surprise to him.

Strehlow could not help comparing Buck's practical attitude, and his generosity in helping him out, unasked, with the station donkey team and an experienced donkey driver, with that useless message he had received from the Mission Board a few weeks ago. His fellow churchmen had provided him with no practical help whatever. They had only told him to apply for help to the Almighty; and he certainly had not stood in need of any advice of that kind.

"Frieda," said the sick man to his wife over the breakfast meal, "I'm afraid that I have far too often thought in the past that we who call ourselves Christians were a superior folk to those who neither pray nor read the Bible, nor bother their heads about God and the life to come. I

have always striven to educate my flock to walk in what I believed to be the Christian way of life. But during these past weeks I have come to reassess some of my beliefs. It is when you are down and out that you begin to think most clearly about the ways of men and the ways of God. It was the publican who dared not lift up his eyes to God in the temple who went down to his house justified, not the pious Pharisee who had given thanks to God so arrogantly for being infinitely superior to all people whose lives were not as blameless as his own. Christ himself dined with the publicans and the sinners and the harlots, with men and women who were regarded as renegades and outcasts by the pious sections of the community of his own day. I am beginning to understand why he condemned the Pharisees, the most upright and fiery fundamentalists of his own day, as a bunch of arrogant hypocrites and as whitened sepulchres, full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness, and why he said to the chief priests and the elders of the people at Jerusalem, 'The publicans and the harlots go in to the kingdom of God before you'. Piety without love is useless; for God is love; and these hard-s swearing, hard-drinking bush folk, living with lubras whom they have not married, are the people who are always ready to show love towards their neighbours when it is most needed. Again, it was the priest and the Levite that hurried away and left a badly-injured fellow countryman lying in his blood; and it was the outcast Samaritan who picked him up and took him to an inn for medical help, even though the injured man was his national enemy."

As soon as the horses arrived, the van was pulled up to the station buildings. Here its horses were taken out, and their harness was loaded on the back of the vehicle. The four un-harnessed horses were driven back to the buggy. While this was being done, Bob Buck, Alf Butler, and most of the population of Henbury walked down to the buggy to say farewell to Mr and Mrs Strehlow. It was a warm-hearted farewell, and a very sad one; for all those who were present knew that they would never see each other again. Then the whip cracked, the horses began to move, and the buggy climbed to the southern river bank. After that it turned east and hit the wagon road to Irkngalalitnama. Jakobus as usual followed on with the loose horses. He had left six of them behind at the camp since they were unfit for any further travelling. These horses remained standing in the shade of a big gum tree, hanging their weary heads, and looking after their receding mates with sad and tired eyes. Two of them moved till they stood head to tail - a stance that made it easier for both of them to combat the cruel flies which were forming thick rings around their eyes and lining both edges of their mouths. These horses had already reached their journey's end. They were to stay at Henbury and await the return of their mates from Oodnadatta.

After the departure of the buggy Theo went up to the station buildings with Bob Buck and Alf Butler. He was accompanied by Ettie and by two or three dark Henbury lads, all of whom were talking to him in animated Aranda.

He had secretly felt relieved at the prospect of

travelling to Idracowra separately. For a month or more he had been an unwilling listener-in to far too many of his parents' conversations. These had ranged from discussions on God's purposes in sending down sicknesses and disasters on those that loved Him to harrowing examinations of the whole nature and meaning of human pain and suffering. His father's sudden desperate plight had come as a terrible shock to him. He had been roused to deep resentment, indeed to quick youthful hatred, by the failure of the Mission Board to help the father whom he had secretly admired in his pleasant moments as much as he had feared him in his dark fits of anger. The boy had been involved far too intimately in his parents' agonising problems; and the spiritual and bodily troubles that were testing his parents to the very limits of their endurance were matters from which Theo was only too glad to have a chance of escaping for a while, even if it should only be a matter of two days. For the first time since his father had gone to bed the boy could move about again with a cheerful spirit.

He had about an hour to look over Henbury Station while the gear of the two donkeys that were to be harnessed to either side of the steering pole of the van was being adjusted, and while all the chains and collars of the other six donkeys were being inspected and quickly repaired where necessary.

The scenery around Henbury could not be described as beautiful. The station had been put up at this site only because the fine permanent waterhole of Tunga provided an ample water supply both for the local stock and for all station

needs. This waterhole marked the last resting place of a tjonba or giant goanna ancestor, who had gone down into the ground at this spot in order to escape from an ancestral hunter. The latter had, however, grabbed the goanna's tail and broken it off, in a vain attempt to dislodge the gigantic creature. A particularly high river gum which grew close to the waterhole symbolised the broken tail. The waterhole was overlooked by a cluster of great boulders, called Aril-intara, which had seemingly grown out of a high sandhill crest rising several hundred yards north of the waterhole. These boulders marked the spot where a group of ancestral tjonba had raised themselves upright on their hind legs while they peered north-westward at smoke rising high into the air from another tjonba campsite called Utjoalindama, which was situated in the Finke gorge between Alitera and Irbmang-kara. Henbury Station itself stood in heavy ground between two great sand-dunes. The dune crest west of the buildings was as high as a low hill and bore the name of Ilbirbeia. With cattle and goats stripping these dunes of their spinifex cover, the soil had begun drifting years ago; and the station area had long since turned into a light orange-brown sea of soft and very heavy sand.

While the donkeys' harness was being got ready, Bob Buck took Theo for a short walk and showed him over the few buildings that constituted Henbury. Like Hermannsburg, Henbury had been founded in the late 1870s. Two of its earliest founding pioneers had been the two Parke brothers, Edmund William and Walter. These two men had belonged to the landed Eng-

lish gentry, and they had come to Australia for the sake of colonial adventure. Edmund Parke had arrived some years ahead of his brother, and had taken up his first blocks in the Finke Valley in partnership with a young stockholder called Charles Harry Walker. But it was the elder Parke who had been the main driving force in the establishment of this huge cattle property. A man respected by all, he had, unlike the other cattlemen of the Centre, never been called by his Christian name but had always been addressed, and referred to, by both his dark and white contemporaries, as "Mr Parke". According to the older aboriginal stockmen at Henbury, he had been a very fair-minded boss who had had considerable regard for the human rights of the local Upper Southern Aranda group. After spending almost two decades at Henbury, the elder Parke brother had decided to return to his English estate, and had taken his younger brother with him. It was believed locally that "Henbury" had been either the name of the English family estate of the Parke brothers or that of some village nearby.

When Edmund William Parke and Charlie Walker had first taken up the Henbury cattle property, they had established their station rather higher on the Finke River, at a place called Nobmintangara, about three miles south of the exit from Parke's Pass, where there were then, as at Irbmangkara, running springs in the Finke bed. A number of years later the present location had been chosen. There had also been an early out-station at Pmokoputa on the Ellery Creek, eight miles east of Hermannsburg. Walker had built a solid one-roomed stone-house with a thatched

roof here for his residence - a rare thing at the beginning of white settlement in the Centre. This house had accidentally gone up in flames one Sunday night in April, 1880. Pmokoputa had then ceased being used as a Henbury outstation, and the Ellery Creek block north of the Krichauff Ranges had subsequently been sublet to Hermannsburg for sheep grazing. Early in 1882 Walker, who was now living with Parke at Henbury, had gone out on a lengthy trip with Dr Charles Chewings into the country west and south-west of Hermannsburg, and had been rewarded by having three geographical features Walker's Pass, Walker Plain, and the Walker (the main tributary of the Palmer River) - named after him. Soon afterwards Walker had taken ill and gone south to seek medical aid. He had died at the Wakefield Street Private Hospital in Adelaide on 21st July, 1885, of a painful kidney and bladder complaint, aged a mere thirty one years. His name had been kept alive in the population of the Centre by his half-caste son Charlie, whose mother had been the Henbury woman Ilkalita.

Among the other names of the early Henbury pioneers those of the two Breadens, Allan and Joe, stood out; and these two men had been associated with this property for more than forty years. Bob Buck himself had come to Henbury around the beginning of the new century because he was a nephew to the Breadens. The present owner of the station was Joe Breaden, who had - upon the elder Parke's death in England - bought Henbury, Idracowra, and Todmorden from the Parke estate in 1902. At that time the Parke estate was heavily weighed down with

debts; and Walter Parke had been obliged to accept for these three stations an amount considerably less than their real value. Breaden had, in fact, apologised for the modest sum he had offered; but he had not been able to obtain a larger advance from financial interests in Adelaide. The total amount involved in the deal was, naturally, not divulged to the general public: even the official document relating to the change in ownership of Todmorden station, for instance, merely stated that its pastoral leases had been transferred to J. A. Breaden "in consideration" of a sum of £50. The actual final amount paid over by Joe Breaden was, however, rumoured to have been about £9,000. Breaden's strong financial backer had been Mr John Barker, a member of the well-known pastoral agency conducted under the name of Barker Brothers.

Under the Breaden regime, Henbury and Idracowra had continued to serve mainly as breeding stations for cattle and horses. Whenever any stock was ready for the market, it was driven to Todmorden, if the season permitted it. Here the animals were fattened, and then taken the final short distance of sixty miles (or less) to Oodnadatta for trucking to Adelaide: the eastern boundary of Todmorden abutted on the western boundary of the town common, only about a mile from the railhead. It was the use of Todmorden as a fattening station which had enabled the owners of Henbury and Idracowra to earn considerably higher profits than most other Central Australian cattlemen. For the latter had been compelled to drive their stock over distances of up to three or four hundred miles to

the Oodnadatta railhead, and then to truck them immediately, no matter in how poor a condition they might have been at the end of their road journey.

Even in the best seasons there was rarely much feed to be found for the travelling mobs of cattle and horses over the last hundred and fifty miles of the distance before they reached Oodnadatta; for the country south of the Northern Territory border consisted mainly of barren, stone-strewn gibber country.

How great the potential wealth of the Henbury-Idracowra run had always been could be gauged from the stock figures alone. According to a Report made by T. E. Day, former Chief Surveyor of the Northern Territory, in 1916, the Henbury-Idracowra run had at the end of 1914 carried 5,786 head of cattle and 1,211 horses. Since it was possible even for stockowners living up to three hundred miles away from the railhead to receive an average price of up to £12 per head in the case of cattle, and at least £10 to £15 per horse, the total potential wealth of these two stations far exceeded £80,000. The Todmorden figures were additional to this total: the latter station went in for breeding horses of a particularly fine stamp, many of which brought prices ranging from £20 to £50 each at a sale without even having been broken-in. Hence it was not surprising that the three stations together had been regarded for at least three decades as constituting one of the richest stock properties in the Centre. By 1922, however, a dark shadow had fallen on this property, as on all others that were situated in the interior: with the mechanisation of all army transport and all cavalry regi-

ments, and the rapidly increasing use of motor vehicles in civilian life, horse breeding had become a doomed industry.

The Indian Army no longer required the thousands of remounts that it had always taken from Australia; and the next few years were to witness the shooting of horses by their thousands on all horse-breeding stations of the inland. Yet in spite of the wealth that the various station owners and financial backers had extracted from the huge Henbury run since the 1870s, there had never been any attempt made by them either to develop the property fully or to share its profits fairly with the dark and white stockmen whose toil had brought such riches to them. In the case of Joe Breaden, rumour had it that the heavy financial obligations he had undertaken in the "plucky purchase" that made him one of the biggest cattlemen in the Centre had proved a greater burden than he had anticipated. In good seasons the profits from the stock sales had run into many thousands of pounds; but there had been a number of poor years as well. Moreover Todmorden, the key cattle-fattening station, was situated in a particularly low rainfall area. Its pastures depended to a large extent on heavy floods in the Alberga and the Neales which then inundated the low-lying country along their banks. During normal years the stock had to depend mainly on deep artesian bores sunk at considerable cost. Whether it was the cost of the improvements on Todmorden - it possessed not only good bores but perhaps the finest homestead in the country - or the demands of the southern financiers, the fact remained that Henbury and Idracowra, the two

stations where most of the stock was bred, had signally failed to share in the profits made from the sales of their cattle and horses.

Consequently Henbury, during dry seasons, had always depended completely on the natural open waterholes of the Finke: there was not a single well or dam to be found in the rich grass country along the middle Palmer River which wound its course through the Henbury run. The only station well on the property was the shallow one at Titra, some twenty one miles south of Henbury; but this had been an easy well to sink since it had been dug on the site of an old aboriginal soak. Consequently the six thousand head of cattle and the large herds of half-wild horses that grazed on the Henbury run were dependent in dry times on the relatively sparse feed that grew along the sandhill banks of the Finke and the hard plains that bordered upon them. This six-mile-wide ribbon of country through which the Finke flowed was as a result always grossly overstocked; and if drought conditions persisted longer than usual, the rapidly mounting stock losses soon assumed serious proportions; for the Henbury stock could not be moved to the much richer grass flats in the Palmer valley, since the surface waters in the latter dried up completely during the longer dry spells. The same parsimony could be seen in the failure of the owners to put up anything better than a few blockhouses for the staff and stockmen at Henbury Station. There were only three of these structures, and their walls consisted of huge, straight gum trunks piled horizontally one on top of the other. Mud plaster had been used for blocking the wind from whistling through the

wide spaces between these piled logs. The floors of these houses, as usual, consisted of flagstones. Bathrooms and other kinds of conveniences were completely unknown at Henbury. But this was true also of most other stations in the Centre. When the Henbury stockmen wanted to take a bath, they sat in the galvanized iron washtubs normally used for laundry purposes. The water for all ablutions, and also for all kitchen purposes, had to be carried in buckets by dark women for a distance of several hundred yards from the Tunga waterhole up a steep and sandy river bank. Nor had the owners ever shown much liberality in the issue of the rations supplied to their employees. For the white employees these rations represented the major part of their wages. For the dark stockmen they constituted virtually the whole of their remuneration, except for some occasional hand-outs of small sums of money which enabled them to buy for themselves and their families from the station store such "luxury" items as jam, tomato sauce, lollies, large coloured handkerchiefs, and dresses. On these items - needless to add - the management made very useful profits: all of these supplies and stores were virtually impossible to obtain except from the station store. All Central Australian stations, including Hermannsburg, had to depend for the cartage of their supplies on camel teams which brought up their loads on the average only twice each year. Hence the only arrangement possible for the supply of food and rations was that the station should issue to each of its employees a fixed amount of flour, tea, sugar, meat, and jam (or treacle) each week or fortnight, and then

count these items as the major portion of the wages paid to them. But some stations were sufficiently mean to depress the quality of the stores supplied to their employees. When the unprecedentedly heavy rains of the 1920-21 season had disrupted all camel transport in the Centre for some six months, and Hermannsburg too had been obliged to borrow rations from the neighbouring cattle stations, Strehlow had been startled to discover how many of these stations were supplying second-grade white flour, and brown, or even grey, sugar to their employees in order to prune down the cost of their wages to the station management. Henbury had been one of the stations run on these miserly lines. The stations with the worst reputations, however, had been those owned by Australia's Cattle King. It was claimed throughout the Centre, whether truthfully or not, that Kidman's managers received relatively good pay cheques on the condition that they kept down the remuneration of their dark and white stockmen and station workers to the lowest possible levels. For, as the bush phrase so neatly put it, "Kidman won't take on any man as manager who doesn't stand the treacle tin out in the sun for at least an hour before putting it on the kitchen table". To do Henbury justice, it must be admitted that its reputation had always stood much higher than that. Some of the rations supplied might have been inferior-grade in quality, but the quantities issued had always been generous. Beef, too, was given out most liberally; and the comparatively large number of cattle slaughtered at Henbury annually enabled "Bob Buck's tribe", as Buck referred to the non-working dark people in

the camp, to have some share in the food supply issued to the station hands. The Aranda local groups on the Henbury run had, on the whole, been fortunate in their treatment by the white pioneers from the earliest days. Unlike Mount Burrell Station, where stock had been introduced into the ancient tribal lands to the accompaniment of rifle shots fired by the first white cattlemen, Henbury had not witnessed any grim outrages by the early pioneers against the original dark residents. As a result even Mounted Constable Willshire had been compelled to admit grudgingly that, unlike Tempe Downs and certain other Central Australian properties, Henbury was "in a 'quiet' neighbourhood, as far as blacks are concerned - cattle spearing not being in vogue to any great extent there".

While Bob Buck was showing Theo over the station, Alf Butler had been inspecting the harness, and repairing some minor breaks and tears in the leather straps. Theo had a great liking for both men and an even greater admiration for their skill in handling stock. He had seen them in action whenever boundary musters had been held jointly by the Hermannsburg and Henbury stockmen. Buck's ability in directing half-wild bullocks in a drafting yard had seemed to him quite uncanny. He would stand in front of the cattle, whip in hand, facing the beasts on foot as they were being driven towards him by the men behind; and a light flick of his whip would determine whether a bullock went through an inner gate to another division of the yard or whether he was turned back into the milling mob behind him. Occasionally a bullock, excited by the shouts and whipcracks of the stockmen

behind him, would rush forward and charge Buck with his horns. But Buck had never had any difficulty in evading him, and only rarely had he been forced to clamber up swiftly in his riding boots to one of the top rails. Butler, on the other hand, had built a reputation for himself as one of the finest drovers in the Centre. It was claimed that he never lost his temper with stock, and that he could drive a mob of half-wild horses just as quietly as though they had been sheep. These two men had been the best of mates for years, and their long, drooping moustaches even gave their faces some kind of a vague family resemblance. Butler's moustache, however, was black, while Buck's luxuriant walrus version was of a dull sandy colour, tinged faintly with red.

The most important permanent piece of station property at Henbury was a brass memorial plate bolted to a stout post standing in front of the main blockhouse. This was a valuable historical document, for it gave the names and the years of arrival of the early Finke River pioneers - that is, of the white cattlemen who had taken up the first properties on the Finke River and of the white stockmen and station hands who had worked for them.

According to this plaque, the first two of these pioneers had been Richard Egerton Warburton (commonly known as "Dickie" Warburton) and Allan Breaden, and both of them had come into this country in the same year - 1875.

"Dickie" Warburton, a son of the explorer Major Peter Egerton Warburton, had died some years earlier; but Allan Breaden was still living, and managing Idracowra Station. Many of the other

names on this plaque, such as those of the two Parke brothers, Bill Stokes, Charlie Walker, Tom Norman, Ted Sargeant, Gus Elliot, Louis Bloomfield, and Bob Coulthard, were also familiar to Theo. He noticed that the list of names on this plaque excluded those of the early Hermannsburg pioneers. They had undoubtedly been omitted because of their association with the welfare of the aboriginal folk: this was believed by the cattlemen to be a lost cause since all the aboriginal lands had become "the white man's country". In any case, Hermannsburg would have needed a special plaque to itself; for no fewer than eleven men and eight women had resided there as members of the mission staff during the period 1877-90, and a considerable number of white children had been born to them in those years.

The final item on the plaque commemorated one of Joe Breaden's proudest achievement - to have been driven up from Todmorden to Henbury in 1917 in his own car. The journey had taken many days; and donkeys had provided the pulling power over the worst Finke crossings and sandhills. Quite unintentionally, this concluding plaque notice foretold, to the people of Central Australia, the passing of an age - the age of the technically advanced peoples' dependency upon the horse. Breaden had always been intensely proud of his fast, Todmorden-bred horses. Till the beginning of World War I he had used a buggy and pair when making his fortnightly trip of sixty miles from Todmorden to Oodnadatta to meet the mail train. Though the track went over rough gibber country and expanses of heavy sand, he had never taken more

than nine hours to reach the railhead, where he used to arrive "like clockwork, on the stroke of the hour", at three in the afternoon. To maintain this speed, he used to effect changes in his pairs every couple of hours from the small mob of loose horses driven by an accompanying "blackboy". But late in 1914 he had accepted a challenge made by Fred Budge, a "T model" Ford car agent employed by the Farina firm of J. W. Manfield & Co. Breaden had left Oodnadatta at six in the morning, with Budge following him four hours later. Though the little car had had to cut tracks for itself whenever the road went over sand, Budge had chugged triumphantly past Breaden at two o'clock in the afternoon, fifty miles out from Oodnadatta. Defeated and deflated, Breaden had purchased the Ford and become the Centre's first car owner. That contest had convinced Breaden that the age of the horse as a draught animal was rapidly waning. Only in war there still seemed to be no substitute for it: Australians had every reason to be proud of the military glory that the Australian Light Horse Brigades were winning for themselves in World War I. Surveyor-General Day, in the 1916 Report already referred to, had spoken enthusiastically about the reputation of Centre-bred horses, and had urged the Government to establish a central horse breeding station in the MacDonnell Ranges "for defence or other purposes". But towards the end of World War I the British invention of the tank suddenly made all cavalry units obsolete. Over thousands of years of military history cavalry charges had determined the outcome of many important battles. The Roman Empire itself had collapsed when its

borders had been crossed by whole tribes of Germanic peoples advancing westward to escape from the horsed Huns of the Asian interior. Now the age of the horse was reaching its end. Eight years after Day's recommendation for a central horse-breeding station, terrified horses were going to be shot in their thousands in trapping yards built around the pools and springs of the Centre, whose waters were to be defiled by their brains and blood. Soon afterwards the patient donkeys were to be wiped out in similar fashion. The only mourners for both the horses and the donkeys were to be the aboriginal station workers who had handled them for so many decades. The dark men could not comprehend the white man's mercenary attitudes: once his faithful animals had ceased being useful to him, he coldly exterminated them with brutal and callous ruthlessness. A cynic might have remarked that it had been Central Australia's greatest tragedy, in more ways than one, to have been lifted out from what could have been termed technologically the Stone Age straight into the age of the rifle and the bullet.

When Bob Buck and Theo had completed their survey of the station buildings, the yards, and the aboriginal camp they returned to the kitchen, and Molly Tjalameinta put a huge pot of tea and some johnny cakes before them. Alf Butler, too, came in and joined them. After all three had finished their cups of morning tea, Buck, Butler, and Theo went out to the van, to find that the eight donkeys had already been harnessed to it. Bob Njitiaka and his wife Lornie were waiting for the signal to leave, and Ettie and a few more Henbury boys and girls were

sitting on some other donkeys, ready to accompany the van for a few miles and see Theo off according to the Aranda rules of courtesy. Titus, the Hermannsburg van driver, had been lent a fresh riding horse and a saddle so that he could drive an additional eight loose wagon donkeys behind the vehicle.

And so, at half past nine in the morning, the van drew out of Henbury. Tjalameinta wept a few tears when she saw Theo leaving, and then called out a farewell to Lornie and to Njitiaka.

Tjalameinta and Lornie were sisters. But whereas Tjalameinta was cheery and chubby to the point of good-natured tubbiness, Lornie was a slim and somewhat reserved woman, though possessed of the same qualities of kindness and friendliness that also characterised her sister.

Their father had been Aremala, the eldest son of Nameia, the triumphant avenger of the massacre at Irbmangkara.

The Finke took a wide northward sweep at Henbury, and the furthest point of this huge loop came close to the low ranges which formed an edge for the northern skyline about five miles north of the station. Two well-known Upper Southern Aranda totemic sites were situated on the furthest portion of this loop - Tera, the home of a kwalba or sandhill wallaby ancestor, and Kantowala, the temporary hollow of a vicious Ijaltakalbala serpent ancestor. Both of these mythological personages had eventually left their homes forever and set out for the MacDonnell Ranges. In the low hills north-east of Kantowala lay Inteera, the far-famed kangaroo centre whose sacred rites had been witnessed and described in detail by Spencer and Gillen

before the turn of the century. Because of the long northward sweep of the river, the road to Idracowra crossed the Finke at Henbury, and the river remained out of sight till the next crossing, some sixteen miles away, at the point where the Britannia Sandhills had to be entered. The van accordingly crossed over to the southern bank. The eight donkeys pulled the vehicle across the Finke and up the steep sandhill bank on the other side without any fuss or bother. Nor did the donkey driver have to use any reins to guide them. Unlike horses, the donkeys stuck to their trail without any attempts to stray off the track.

Even at night they could be depended on to keep to the road without any guidance or supervision on the part of their driver. As the van climbed up the southern sandhill bank, it passed a large river gum that still raised its tall trunk skyward in token of its triumphant defiance of the high floods that had badly eroded the bank at this point and exposed all its roots to the depth of about four or five feet. These roots had since succeeded in growing mottled bark over their exposed upper sections. This dauntless tree looked like a magnificent symbol of all the plants and creatures that lived in this timeless land - a land whose weathered face clearly showed the scars of its many grim periods. Nothing that was not tough or high-spirited could survive in it for long; and the extensive flora and fauna of Central Australia showed in all its characteristics how successfully all things that lived in this country had become adapted to their environment. Nature showed a resourcefulness in the Centre that mere man could only

marvel at.

Theo followed the van with the other children, enjoying his last ride on Possum who had come forward to him at Henbury, nuzzling him for the familiar crust of bread. With Tjalameinta's help he had been able to reward Possum's affection. It was easy for the riders to keep up with the van, for the pace of the donkeys pulling it varied only from a speed of about two miles an hour in heavy sand to two and a half miles an hour on hard ground. This slow pace enabled all the young donkey foals to accompany their mothers. They had all been branded, and the males castrated, only a few days earlier, and most of them were still weak from their ordeal. All the dark children and adults hated branding day, and grieved for the unfortunate male foals. For the dark folk, who believed that human beings, animals, and plants were all indivisibly linked by a common thread of life, respected the dignity of the animals native to their country, and also that of the new animals introduced into their environment by the white men. They never failed to comment on the brutal manner in which the white men so frequently maltreated their own animals. These dark folk had not yet fully grasped the fact that, generally speaking, civilised man normally associates dignity only with power and with money.

Even fellow human beings who are lacking in power and in money tend to be regarded as inferior creatures, fit for all kinds of exploitation. As for the animals, these exist merely to provide handsome profits for their owners or convenient targets for the bullets of so-called sportsmen who may wish to fill in their idle hours by de-

stroying life out of sheer devilment.

After two hours of slow travelling the Five Mile Creek, a winding dry watercourse studded with flourishing box gums, had been reached. The children turned back with their mounts and the tired foals. Theo sadly took his leave of them, stroked Possum affectionately for the last time, and climbed on to the front seat of the van.

It was a little after four in the afternoon when the van reached the end of a long expanse of dreary flats that were skirted by a southern edge of low barren hills. Here the travellers once more caught sight of the magnificent gums of the Finke. The river, which had turned back from the hills north of Henbury in a series of great loops, now twisted its way south towards the Palmer River Valley. The road from Henbury forked at this point. One trail was the normal donkey wagon track, the other the rather shorter camel pad; but both led eventually to Idracowra. The wagon track bore to the right and kept to the Finke Valley. It crossed the river between Ekgata and Irkngalalitnama, and then went past Anbaia to Uratanga, a particularly salty waterhole which receded rapidly in dry periods and left behind great areas of salt-pans, yielding excellent supplies of crystallised salt. This salt was used, after grinding by dark women, both on Henbury and on Idracowra stations for dry-salting the corned beef supplies. After leaving Uratanga, the wagon road continued in an easterly direction and rejoined the Henbury-Idracowra camel pad close to Talpanama. This camel pad, which had crossed the Finke between Irkngalalitnama and Takalalama and immediately ascended into the Britannia

Sandhills, was only slightly heavier and not much more sandy than the Finke Valley wagon road. But while the donkeys could have pulled an empty vehicle without much difficulty up the steep Finke bank at this crossing, they would have had great trouble in bringing a fully loaded wagon down safely on the return journey. These station vehicles did not have effective brakes; and a loaded salt wagon could easily have careered into the donkeys from behind and maimed the shafters. Moreover, the road over the Britannia Sandhills had to cross many high red sand-dunes, and it was hence normally avoided by all wheeled traffic. However, the camel pad over the Britannia Sandhills was many miles shorter than the normal wagon trail down the Finke Valley; and hence both Hermannsburg vehicles had elected to follow it so as to save vital time. The van was pulled up in the Finke bed, and the donkeys were quickly unharnessed so that they could have a drink from the Takalalama waterhole. The loose donkeys and the saddle horse of their driver also took deep gulps of water; for the day had been a very hot one. Then the donkeys were harnessed to the van again. They were clearly tired from pulling the van for sixteen miles in the scorching heat; and since the river bank up which the road ascended into the sandhills was a particularly steep one, Njitiaka and Lornie, after breaking off new gum switches, walked on foot, one on either side of the bravely struggling team, yelling and shouting at the donkeys and bringing their switches down hard on the rumps of any animal that looked like slacking. For the vehicle had to reach the top of the steep bank

without coming to a halt. Otherwise it would have had to roll back again into the river bed before making a second attempt. However, the sturdy little creatures did not let their drivers down. Puffing and snorting, and shaking their long ears till they flapped together noisily, they drew the van to the top of the sandhill bank without a hitch. Once the crest had been reached, the van was pulled up. An examination of the tracks left behind by the buggy and the horses that had gone up this bank some hours earlier showed that the advance party had experienced even greater trouble in reaching the top than had the van. Njitiaka and Lornie climbed up on their seats again, and the van went forward for a further five miles into the sandhills, now blazing red in the light of the sinking western sun. There was a small flat with a fair amount of dry feed here; and a halt was made for the night.

The sun sank, and the rich sunset colour faded from the red sandhills. Theo sat down with his three companions and ate some of the steak that Lornie had grilled over the coals. Bob Buck had killed a bullock two nights earlier, and he had liberally replenished the fresh meat supply of the Hermannsburg party. Theo, who had previously seen only the yellowish sandhills on the Hermannsburg run, had been amazed by the brilliance and richness of the warm colouring on the Britannia Sandhills in the last glow of sundown. He looked forward to spending a night under the stars with his dark companions, and hoped to have a long chat at the campfire with them. But immediately after the evening meal Titus spoke up, and in his quiet and courteous

manner suggested to Theo that he should retire for an early night's rest. "We have to leave here after midnight," he explained, "soon after the moon has risen. We have to go a long way yet through the sandhills, before we get back to the Finke tomorrow and the donkeys can have a drink; and it will be night again tomorrow before we reach Idracowra." It did not take Theo long to work out that with only twenty one miles of the distance covered, Idracowra must still be thirty four miles away; and thirty four miles meant a long day's journey even when travelling with horses. The donkeys might take seventeen hours or longer to cover the same stretch. He unrolled his swag near the van and stretched himself out under the night sky, now ablaze with a myriad stars. Njitiaka and Lornie put down their blankets near the dying campfire, and Titus cleared a space for his swag a little further away. A welcome breeze sprang up and quickly lowered the temperature by several degrees. In the distance a lone dingo could be heard howling. From a mulga branch close by came the mournful night notes of a mopoke. Two or three bats swooped over the red embers of the fire to seize insects attracted by the dying glow. The clinking of hobble chains and the occasional tinkle of a bell indicated that the donkeys were still grazing contentedly close to the camp. It was reassuring to know that they would be too tired to stray far during the night. A few yawns from the weary travellers showed that they were tired also. And then their limbs relaxed in the luxury of sleep out in the open air, watched over by the eternal stars.

**Saturday, the fourteenth day of October,
1922**

IT WAS half past two next morning when Theo was wakened by the sudden blazing up of the restoked campfire and the talking of Njitiaka and Lornie, who were rolling up their blankets. The waning moon, which had risen almost two hours earlier, was now lighting up the landscape sufficiently to allow the journey to be resumed. Titus, riding bareback on his horse, was already bringing in the donkeys. Their hobble straps and chains had been taken off their feet and put around their necks; and the clinking of these hobble chains blended with the muted notes of the bells whose clappers had been slipped sideways into holes punched into the ends of their neck straps. Theo rolled up his swag, while his three companions harnessed up a fresh team of eight donkeys.

Then the gruff voice of Njitiaka barked out at the donkeys, and the van moved away from the cheery blaze of the campfire into the moonlit sandhill silence. The resinous scent emanating from the bulging tufts of spinifex which the donkeys kicked with their plodding feet was not as overwhelming in the cool night air as it had been in the heat of the previous evening; but it nevertheless pervaded the whole atmosphere with the unmistakable menace of its aroma. For here as elsewhere in the Centre this resinous fragrance drew attention to the deep loneliness and the dangerous waterlessness of the huge inland sandhill regions. The lushness of the spinifex tufts, now heavy in ear, showed how abundant the rains had been in this normally rather dry region during the previous year. Even

Henbury had recorded thirty three inches of rain during the period of twelve months beginning on 1st July, 1920, and ending on 30th June, 1921. Since no water could flow or drain out of the sandhill regions, all this amount of rain had soaked into the ground. But it was not only the spinifex which showed this lushness of growth in its great tufts and tussocks: the trees too - desert oaks on the dune slopes and crests, and ironwoods and mulgas on the numerous clay-flats between the dunes - were all clad with luxuriant foliage. The branches of the mulgas were densely covered with greyish-green leaves; the ironwoods with their drooping branch-tips had come to resemble river willows; and the continual sighing of the magnificent desert oaks in the soft night breeze indicated the extraordinary length to which their jointed needle-like leaves had grown. No longer did the strong moonlight conjure up a delicate tracery of dark lines and ribbons on the ground below the trees: the almost unnatural heaviness of growth in all foliage produced heavy and completely opaque shadows similar to those normally cast by the European trees. Theo was overwhelmed by the silence and the resulting sense of haunting loneliness that was brooding over these moonlit sandhills. It was easy to fill the scene with the spectre shapes of the iliaka njemba that had frightened him in his childhood, just as they had terrified the minds of the younger Western Aranda children at Hermannsburg. These iliaka njemba had been the legendary grim emu-shaped phantoms that stalked over the sandhill wastes at night and devoured children who had dared to move away too far

from the campfires of their parents. Though, like his dark teenager friends, he had long since ceased to believe in the grim fairy-tales told to shivering small children, he realised how perfectly these evil emu-like phantoms would have fitted into this eerie landscape. A more realistic fear that entered his mind while he was staring at the moonlit scene was the apprehension that from somewhere out among those deep tree shadows a wild bull camel might emerge and pursue the van in its rutting season madness. For a few wild camels did live in these sandhill wastes; and a bull camel "in season" was a terrifying and dangerous beast, if it took it into its head to chase an animal or human being that had come into its domain while it was in this state.

But nothing happened. The donkeys, unswervingly pursuing the winding, twisting camel-mail pad, gave short snorts every now and again, the gruff voice of Njitiaka and the low-pitched calls of Lornie rang out from time to time, and the van creaked its way forward over the spinifex tufts, cutting deep grooves into the heavy, colourless sand between them. Afraid that he might go to sleep on the seat of the van, Theo had decided to walk during the night hours so that he could chat to Njitiaka and Lornie. He walked barefoot according to his normal habit. So far he had, most unwillingly, put on boots only during the eight midwinter weeks each year in order to protect his feet against the heavy morning frosts and also against the freezing winds of cloudy days.

He knew that these were his last few weeks of barefooted freedom. After that he would have to

accustom himself to having his feet encased in imprisoning footwear for the rest of his days. Since the donkeys were pulling the van with real will and determination, it was easy for Theo to chat to Njitiaka and Lornie, and to ask them questions about the road that lay ahead of them. About what time would they emerge from the sandhills? Where was the next water? When would they be likely to reach Idracowra Station? And so on. Theo enjoyed listening to Njitiaka's replies. Njitiaka, whose name was generally abbreviated to Njitia, was a man only about five foot five inches tall, and of moderate build. He came from Ungwatja on the Finke River, below the Palmer junction, and belonged to the emu totem. His bushy black beard, streaked with many grey hairs, gave him, in Theo's eyes, a somewhat gnomelike appearance. But what he lacked in girth and inches he more than made up for by a powerful, gruff, and rasping voice. He always talked very loudly; and his speech, instead of flowing smoothly in the normal Western Aranda manner, showed rather the somewhat staccato pattern that was so characteristic of Lower Southern Aranda speakers, but which was found also among some of the Upper Southern Aranda folk. From his contacts with the Henbury visitors at Hermannsburg Theo had become aware of at least some of the dialectal differences between the speech of the Henbury and Hermannsburg Aranda groups. These differences had always led to much good-humoured mockery and banter among the children: everyone loved mimicking the speech of their dialectal neighbours, and then laughing at it. Theo was frequently amused when he heard Njitiaka

talking, and the latter retorted by passing derogatory remarks about Theo's Western Aranda manner of speaking. It was only occasionally that Theo and Njitiaka were unable to understand the meaning of individual words in each other's speech. Then they would ask and argue with each other about these words, with Njitiaka bluntly protesting that he had difficulty in understanding the "corrupt" dialect of the Western Aranda. He had Theo at a disadvantage here - a boy of fourteen could not repeat to a middle-aged man the stock Western Aranda reply that the harsh, broad, and halting chatter of the Southern Aranda was an utterly stupid and ridiculous kind of expression.

The black forests of desert oaks, whose moon-silvered crests were shimmering so brightly, kept on exciting Theo's intense admiration; for he had never before travelled through sandhill country at night. Eventually he passed a remark to Njitiaka concerning the brightness of the moon, referring to it by its Western Aranda name of "taia". Njitiaka, in true or wilful ignorance, failed to understand Theo at first, and when the latter finally pointed at the moon, he exclaimed gruffly, "Why don't you give the thing its proper name? You don't want to talk to me like one of those stupid Western Aranda men who don't know their own language." Then he explained to Theo proudly, "We Southerners alone have kept the Aranda tongue in all its purity as it has been handed down to us: the Western men have corrupted the speech of their forefathers. "Talpa" is the only correct word for what white men call the moon; as for "taia", I do not know what that means: I have not heard

my fathers using such a word."

Theo made no reply: though a white boy, he had long since learnt not to be rude to the older dark men. He merely smiled to himself, and reflected that probably people everywhere regarded any social customs and any forms of speech that differed from their own as being for that very reason inferior to their own. And in the Southern Aranda area it was only natural that Southern Aranda social customs and forms of speech had to be accepted as the correct local norms by all visitors.

Slowly the hours passed, and mile after slow mile was put behind the travellers. Theo was glad that the luminous dial of his pocket watch enabled him to work out the distance covered from the time taken in travelling between points.

Gradually the dark eastern horizon became tinged with grey. The blurred and shapeless tree forms began to reveal their limbs with increasing clarity. The eastern sky became overspread by a reddish-yellow tinge, and finally the spinifex tips on the crests of the sand-dunes began to glow in the first rays of the rising sun. As the sun soared over the horizon like a ball of fire, the sudden burst of warmth that accompanied its full revelation foretold that the day now begun would be, in local terms, "a real scorcher". To Theo it was a relief to know that so many miles of sandhill travelling had already been completed; for there were no dense stands of timber in this region for keeping down the midday temperatures. These soft red dunes, that still looked so beautiful in the morning light, would soon turn searingly hot in the fierce

overhead blaze; and the air above them would then singe the bodies of beasts and men like a blast from a heated furnace.

At seven in the morning a cloud of dust rising about a mile to the eastward showed that the buggy party was just leaving their night camp. Half an hour later the van reached the same spot - a flat on the edge of a shallow, dry water-course, studded with some box gums. The van halted in the shade of one of the larger trees. The campfire of the buggy travellers was quickly stoked up again. Soon billies filled with water from the galvanized iron canteens were boiling at the fire, and a quick morning meal of damper and steak grilled over an ample bed of coals by Lornie satisfied the hunger of the party. The stop lasted about three-quarters of an hour. Then the journey was resumed; and the donkeys, still unfed and thirsty, patiently plodded on without protests or jibbing into the heat haze that was now spreading its ugly grey veil over the country.

Like other Central Australian sandhill regions, the Britannia Sandhills did not form an unbroken waste of dunes. A number of small rocky outcrops rose up out of them, and sometimes low hills ran across the track of the travellers. There were quite a few clay-pans as well to ease the strain on the donkeys that had to pull the heavy van. For the camel-mail road over the Britannia Sandhills followed more or less in the wake of the mythical trail left by the fish ancestors, - a trail which had already provided the party with a gap at Iltjanmalitnjaka or Parke's Pass. During the night the van had passed two hills lying north of the road. These hills symbol-

ised the head and the body of an ancestral ntapitnja or bony bream, while the clay-pans over which the road made its way represented the lagoons once formed by the mythical flood that had carried these fish on towards Uratanga. Some low hills lying across the camel road also figured in the fish myth, and one ridge symbolised a fish weir cast up at the beginning of time. But for the most part the camel pad followed by the van led through heavy sandhill country.

Had the travellers taken the normal wagon road which kept to the Finke Valley between Ekgata and Talpanama, they would have passed a long line of important Upper Southern Aranda ceremonial sites, each linked with a magnificent waterhole. All of these waters contained fish, for they were permanent pools, fringed with long banks of green reeds. Even if an unusually long drought should have succeeded in drying up one or the other of these waterholes, the next flood would have brought down fresh fish from Irbmangkara or from the deep gorge holes in the MacDonnells that had always defied even the longest and driest seasons ever experienced in Central Australia. The first of the more important of these totemic sites was Peiterama, situated at the confluence of the Palmer River with the Finke, where an evil eagle ancestress, who had stolen a young eaglet from the Upper Southern Aranda eagle home of Pmoierka on the Palmer south of Henbury, had paused for a rest on her way back to her own home at Jora (or Joara). The frantic parents of the eaglet had tried in vain to recapture their fledgling: the daring Jora robber had turned herself into a wildly rushing whirlwind which had successfully

evaded the hysterical attacks made with beaks and talons by the swooping, screaming, pouncing parents.

The next waterhole was Iltiriltutnama, where the two rain ancestors from Pututunga, south-east of Irbmangkara, had crossed the Finke while travelling to the Eastern Aranda rain centre of Ujitja. Before reaching the Finke, these two rain ancestors had proved their terrible power by wiping out a group of foolish and unbelieving arkara bird men at Arkariwala on the Palmer River. They had destroyed them by unloading huge hailstones on their flimsy salt-bush rain-shelters and then drowning them in a cloudburst. The next site was the far more important ceremonial centre of Ungwatja, Njiti-aka's personal totemic site, where one of the box gum overflow channels of the Palmer known as the Waijowa Kringka entered the Finke from the south at the base of a mountainous red sand-dune. According to the local myth, the Finke flats at Ungwatja had been populated at the beginning of time by vast numbers of ancestral emus, all of whom had originated on the nearby clay-flats of Ilbungka Woputa from blood poured on them from the veins of the original emu sire. This sire had finally ripened his chest in order to pour out his very life-blood so as to create an abundance of new emu life. Because of the numerous mythical figures revealed in its sacred performances, Ungwatja was a centre honoured in a cycle of acts which took many weeks to stage in full. It was linked with a large number of ceremonial centres, both major and minor, in other Aranda and non-Aranda areas. It was associated in this way with the minor cere-

monial site of Taltjiltja, several miles downstream from Ungwatja, where a huge grinding stone was believed to have disappeared into the water-logged quicksand bed of the Finke. This grinding stone had rolled down under its own power from Tnjanawala, near Alitera, pursued by a group of ancestral teratera bird men. Each evening it had come to rest, only a few inches below the surface of the ground, at a convenient campsite; and the pursuing bird men had dug it up and ground their gathered store of grass seeds on it. But when Ungwatja had been reached, the teratera bird men had refused to allow one of the local emu ancestors to use this self-propelled stone for grinding his own grass seeds. In revenge the offended Ungwatja man had sung dark spells over it. The huge grinding stone had, as a result, begun to vibrate and to move ominously when the teratera men approached it. It had then spun away from them wildly, like a heavy, rolling stone disc, which they were afraid to touch lest it crush or maim them. All they had dared to do had been to pursue it as far as Taltjiltja, where it had sunk out of sight for ever. Another important Upper Southern Aranda ceremonial centre was located at Ultjua, on the third major Finke loop downstream from Taltjiltja. Ultjua was one of the most important carpet snake ceremonial centres in this area; and just as Ungwatja had been associated with several other emu sites, so Ultjua was linked by myths with a number of other carpet snake sites, such as the Lower Southern Aranda centre of Erulitna or Old Crown Point on the lower Finke River, the Antekerinja centre of Ananta on Lilla Creek, and the Matuntara centre

of Waltanta, whose soakage had been appropriated by white cattlemen and converted into the central station well of the Erldunda property. In the flanking box gum flats of Ultjua began the extensive stands of giant saltbush which stretched from here to Idracowra and beyond. The pioneer settlers had hence built a stockyard at Ultjua for use during periods when the cattle which were grazing on the middle Finke reaches were being mustered and branded. They had given Ultjua the name of "Main Camp", since it was the main cattle-holding camp on the combined Henbury, Idracowra runs.

At Ultjua the Finke turned north-east for some miles till it hit one of the most mountainous sandhill ridges situated at the eastern termination of the Britannia Sandhills. This towering ridge turned the river back in a south-eastward direction once more. The salty waterhole of Uratanga, which was situated at the extreme northern point of this bend, marked the final point in the travels of the Unmatjera-Aranda fish ancestors. The Uratanga dune ridge symbolised the fish weir of gum branches thrown up by the local ntapitnja fish ancestress Palupaltjura, which she had used in order to trap secretly the larger fish that had been swept down by the northern floodwaters from distant Anku-rowunga. Palupaltjura, who could assume the guise of a female ntapitnja fish, had turned into a woman whenever she caught and ate other fish. She had been so successful in her surreptitious trapping activities that the great crayfish ancestor who had come down in pursuit from the north, and who had been wondering why he could secure only small fish with his fish spear,

decided to lie in wait for the unknown poacher. One day he surprised Palupaltjura, who was too busy catching fish to notice his approach. He took up his stance at the northern end of the high Uratanga sandridge, at a place later marked by a tall bloodwood tree, stabbed Palupaltjura in the shoulder with his long, slim fish-spear, pulled her up from the edge of the pool, and flung her - all in one action - into the sandhills lying north of the Finke bank.

In addition to these larger waterholes located on the middle Finke River between Ekngata and Talpanama, there existed numerous smaller permanent pools in the river bed, and all of these had mythological episodes attached to them. This wealth of sacred traditions had been comparatively easy to preserve during the pre-white days. The wide and fertile Finke flats carried a profusion of the larger game animals, in particular of kangaroos, emus, and rat kangaroos; and the sandhills were rich in carpet snakes and all those smaller marsupials that stood in no need of drinking water. Since the Britannia Sandhills had, in the old days, yielded these additional highly prized food supplies, the middle Finke Valley dwellers had once been a very numerous group. There had never been any dearth of males who could be called upon to preserve the rich local heritage of myths, songs, and ceremonial acts from one generation to the next.

The depth of this wide river valley could be gauged from the fact that the Hermannsburg travellers who had taken the road from Takala-lama to Talpanama across the Britannia Sandhills could catch no glimpses of the Finke or its

gums from any point along the camel track. Theo, moving forward slowly by the side of the creeping van, was aware only of the apparently limitless vastness of undulating red sand all around him.

On a sunny winter's day the dune country would have looked beautiful because of its rich colourings. The flourishing desert oaks, standing well-spaced apart, looked magnificent. Their straight, dark, ridge-barked trunks rose to an average height of from twelve to fifteen feet before the first strong, crooked branches were reached; and the many hundreds of young desert oaks which soared up around the big trees in the form of slim, straight saplings showed that the Britannia Sandhills had enjoyed a long run of good seasons in recent years. Had successions of droughts been a normal occurrence in this area, this would have been revealed by the crookedness of the saplings and by the low height of the trunks of the full-grown trees. The fresh bluish-green needles of the desert oaks contrasted with the shiny dark-green leaves of the willow-foliaged ironwoods, and with the grey-green leaves of the mulgas. The spinifex tussocks on the flats between the dune crests, expanded by a succession of excellent years till each spiky clump touched its neighbour, were in full ear; and the swollen spinifex seed-heads closely resembled the heavy ears of a waving, ripe cornfield. On the sides of the tall dunes the spinifex clumps were spaced apart rather more widely, permitting the rich colour of the sand to peep through; and the bare crests of the dune tops shone a blazing red in the full light of the sun. The wind-rippled sand on the crest tops

was intricately patterned as by an artist's hand; and all animal and bird tracks on it stood out clearly, revealing to an experienced hunter's eye whatever movements had recently gone on in the sandhill country.

Emus, kangaroos, lizards, snakes, rabbits, crows, hawks, dingoes: all of these creatures had their homes among these dunes, and roamed over them in quest of food. Some of these birds and animals had to turn back south to the Finke Valley from time to time to slake their thirst; other species had learnt to live without water when they adapted their habits to their environment. To the eye of a white man the sandhill country might have looked a useless waste, almost devoid of life; but the nomad Aranda hunters living at the middle Finke water-holes had once found the bordering dune country to be a rich source of food. But on this particular morning Theo was conscious only of the heat and the menace of the dune country. It seemed to him a merciless, intimidating waste; and as he pulled out some spinifex ears in order to suck the sweet base ends of their stems, his one wish was to get out of this cruel red land as quickly as he could. By ten in the morning the blazing heat of the sand, which had begun to burn the tender parts of his feet between his toes, compelled him to climb back on the van. He sat down on the front seat with a gasp of relief, and watched the iron-shod wheels relentlessly cutting two deep parallel furrows through the sea of red sand and spinifex tussocks; it was about midday when the party reached the end of the Britannia Sandhills. Njitiaka stopped and pointed south to a long and mountainous red

dune which overtopped all other sandhill crests by scores of feet. "That is the Uratanga sandhill," he told Theo. "The Finke is just on the other side of it, and there is a large waterhole here, the Uratanga waterhole, which the whites call Salt Hole." Uratanga, which marked the end of the trail of the ancestral fish travellers, was more than two hundred miles distant from Ankurowunga, their original mythical starting point. The high sandridge that rose so menacingly into the air against the southern sky fell down with sudden abruptness towards the Finke on the other side. Both its shape and its position made it a perfect symbol of the final fish weir cast up against the mythical flood at the beginning of time. From the point where the sandhills ended the country sloped down noticeably. Soon a box gum watercourse was struck which came down from the northern plains and turned eastward towards some strikingly shaped purple hills, the largest of which was a high table mountain rising from a rounded base. The track followed this watercourse for a short distance, and then the van passed through Ankarinta Tuatja, a "gap" between two low edges of rock. Here some old, white-bearded totemic ancestors, who had travelled down from Albeitinta, a hill north of Takalalama, had gone to their last rest, according to the local myth. The white man's name for this gap was Hell's Gates: this name had almost certainly been given to it by one of the old pioneers who was leaving the shady Finke Valley on a hot summer's day on his way westward into the Britannia Sandhills. The track leading from Hell's Gates to the Finke passed quite close to the high and striking,

round-based table mountain.

Theo enquired after its name. "Its correct name is 'Karalananga'," replied Njitiaka, "but the young folk of today insist on calling it 'the Talpanama mountain'. That is because our young people spend all their time with the white folk, and grow up just as ignorant as the white men. Otherwise they would remember that

'Talpanama' is the name of a clay-flat north of the Intjinjera waterhole where we will be stopping shortly for our meal. That waterhole, too, the ignorant young people today call 'the Talpanama waterhole'." However, since the name "Talpanama" meant "(Where) the moon is", it seemed to Theo most appropriate that such an unusually shaped mountain should be associated with the moon in the minds of the younger generation.

Three miles on from the edge of the sandhills the Finke came into view. After completing, in a long series of gigantic loops and twists, its wide sweeping course around the southern border of the dune country, the river had begun to head northward once more. It was now reaching forward to the Talpanama complex of hills, where it would end its long northward sweep and turn east again. The donkeys began to move more briskly as soon as they reached the shady expanse of the flanking box gum flats: the thirsty animals had already begun to sniff the welcome scent of water. Some minutes later the van descended into the broad white sand of the Finke at a point close to the most advanced point of its northward curve. Njitiaka guided the donkeys across the heavy sand to the further bank and pulled up the van under a magnificent gum with

wide-spreading branches. It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and the hottest hour of the day. As soon as the donkeys had been unharnessed from the van, they made their own way to the wrongly named waterhole of Talpanama, and joined their loose mates, who were already slaking their thirst. After that they rolled about in the sand and then lay down for a quick midday rest. Only their heads and tails could not remain still because of the vicious flies. During the whole of the midday halt the swishing of their tails and the noisy clapping together of their long, stiff ears showed the extent to which the donkeys were being annoyed by their fiendish tormentors. Similarly, the constant angry hand-swipes of the travellers as they were hurrying through their quick midday snack afforded unmistakable evidence of their fly-ruffled tempers. Talpanama was only one of several open Finke waterholes in this region; and a considerable proportion of the cattle on Idracowra Station were grazing in this part of the Finke Valley. In consequence the swarms of local flies had assumed near-plague proportions. Theo and his companions had a difficult time in waving the flies away from their food and their faces. Their hands could not remain still for a minute while they were having their meal. Nevertheless, it was a refreshing break for them to sit in the shade of the large gum tree and look down at the long waterhole stretching against the northern bank of the river. After the sun-scorched furnace atmosphere of the Britannia Sandhills, the much lower temperature in the shade of the tree, though undoubtedly still high in the nineties, felt like a pleasant cool change to the trav-

ellers; and the sight of the commonplace, reed-fringed waterhole turned the midday rest camp for them into a soothing place of refuge in a weary land. Talpanama seemed a place infinitely more beautiful than the finest oasis shown in the desert landscape pictures of other countries. But with Idracowra Station still twelve miles away, the midday rest could not be a long one. At a quarter to three in the afternoon the donkeys that had pulled the van on the previous day were once more harnessed to it, and shortly afterwards the travellers continued their journey.

For the rest of the distance the road ran through wide box gum flats, first along the northern, then along the southern side of the Finke. This portion of the Finke Valley was beautifully wooded country. The wide, loamy flood flats were densely studded with flourishing stands of twisted, brown, rough-barked box gums. So thick was the timber that the Finke Valley at times looked almost like forest country through which a broad white ribbon of sand kept on running and shimmering. Even at this distance from their source in the northern mountain country, the swift-flowing floods that came down as far as Idracowra, perhaps at two-year intervals or even less frequently, were still sufficiently powerful to rip out any young gums that had shot up in the main channel during a lengthy dry period. In between these major floods portions of the river bed were sometimes filled for a distance of ten or twenty miles by the red-brown waters contributed by the numerous small box gum watercourses which came rushing down from the adjacent plains and low hills after

cloudbursts. Flourishing patches of giant saltbush ran through these box gum stands, particularly in the southern river flats. This flood valley was flanked in the south by towering red dunes, among whose brilliant fires the luxuriant shapes of hardy desert shrubs raised their green heads, challenging and defying the soft, drifting sand crests to drown them. On the northern flank a number of low and barren stonehills approached close to the river over the first six-mile stretch below Talpanama; then the sandhills encroached upon the northern bank of the river also.

A maze of cattle pads traversed this region; for the Finke Valley was first-class grazing country, with the saltbush providing a safe standby in dry seasons to eke out the excellent herbage which in normal times grew both on the flood flats and on the sandhills. With this proliferation of cattle pads came a great increase of dust; for the whole country had been powdered and churned up by the twin-clawed hoofs of hundreds of wandering cattle. The strong smell of the cattle and their droppings kept on increasing with each mile that brought the travellers closer to Idracowra.

When the sun was sinking low in the west, the red-and-white cattle could be seen moving through the box gum flats towards the waterholes in bellowing mobs, with the beasts normally advancing in single file. Most of them were in prime condition. The larger mobs usually had a heavy, broad-shouldered bull, with red-rimmed eyes, lumbering ponderously in their rear. Sometimes a bull would stop and give out three or four short, high-pitched calls

to the cows, after which he would lower his voice to a menacing growl, ending on a long-drawn-out bass note. If answered by another bull, he might pause, lower his magnificent broad head, and begin to throw dust over his flanks with his powerful front hoofs in token of his challenge and angry defiance. After that he would go on, taking slightly longer and more hurried strides till he had caught up with his own mob again.

The sun was about to touch the western horizon when its evening rays lit up yet another low hill standing close to the northern bank of the Finke. Though Theo was not given its name, this hill was called Tjina, and it sheltered in two of its caves the sacred tjurunga of the Idracowra local group.

For it was at Tjina that the local gecko ancestors were believed to have originated at the beginning of time; and it was from Tjina that the fierce gecko ancestor Itirkawara, wearing a bunch of red-and-black cockatoo tail feathers, had set out on his long journey north-east towards Queensland in order to fight his hand-to-hand battles with other totemic ancestors, each of whom he finally cut in halves at the waist with his sharp stone knife.

Shortly afterwards the sun sank like a blazing, fiery ball below the western horizon, giving the tortured land a most welcome respite from its searing heat. Soon darkness had fallen on the box gum forest. The tired donkeys continued to plod on gamely. Sometimes they panted a little louder than they had done when they had first been harnessed to the van; and the clouds of dust now being stirred up by the cattle made

them snort and clear their noses at more frequent intervals. But the strong-hearted little animals never faltered in their resolute steps. They took no heed of the bellowing cattle around them; and the intertwined network of cattle pads, which sometimes followed the road and sometimes criss-crossed over it, could not disturb their vision or confuse their sense of direction.

It was a little after half past eight when the kerosene lanterns and the campfires of Idracowra Station finally began to show up on the northern bank of the Finke. The van moved from the southern box gum flats across the Finke bed, here roughened into thousands of pits and bumps by the multitudinous feet of milling cattle, over to the open northern bank of the river. A loud chorus of welcoming voices greeted the weary travellers. Heinrich moved out from one of the log-houses, holding a lantern high in the air to show where the van should pull up for the night. The figure of an elderly white man could be seen standing under the verandah of the same log-house. This man was Allan Breaden, the manager of Idracowra Station. As soon as the van had halted, Allan came forward. His eyesight was very poor, and he had to move about carefully at night since the light cast by the storm lanterns was rather too dim for his vision. He invited Theo to come in for a late evening meal, and instructed his half-caste spouse Jessie to give Theo's companions their food to take over to the camp with them. At this moment Mrs Strehlow came out from another log-house and greeted her son affectionately. Then she hurried back to her sick

husband. "Your father has had a shocking day," explained Heinrich to Theo, "and Mr Breaden has given up his own log-house to your father and mother. We will have to rest here tomorrow to see how your father is getting on. And now go in and have your meal." Theo, who had met Jessie at Hermannsburg, lost no time before going in and enjoying a hearty meal after his long day's journey. When he came out, his swag had already been unfolded and put down on an iron camp stretcher in the open air alongside the log-house kitchen where he had eaten his meal. Heinrich was lying on his swag on a second iron stretcher about ten feet away, and Allan Breaden's stretcher stood a few yards further on. His son, Johnson Breaden, was already sleeping soundly on another stretcher placed around a corner of the building. Soon all three of them were sleeping soundly under the steady light of the blazing stars, utterly unmindful of the charging noises and the loud bellowing of the thirsty cattle at the station troughs a couple of hundred yards away.

Sunday, the fifteenth day of October, 1922

BREAKFAST was served soon after sunrise on the following morning; and Allan Breaden, Jessie, Heinrich, Johnson, and Theo sat down to the breakfast table in the log-house, which served both as station kitchen and dining-room. Since he had never eaten out before, Theo was perturbed when no one said grace before the meal: even on the two previous days Titus and he had said grace in Aranda before touching their food outdoors. Finally he said grace for himself, and in a firm voice, too, despite the horrified protests of Heinrich who had already fallen with relish to his meal with the three others. Allan Breaden paused for a moment and looked up from his plate at Theo with his usual placid and benevolent gaze, but said nothing. Heinrich, on the other hand, was thrown into complete and confused agitation. After breakfast he took Theo aside and told him in pressing and anxious tones never to do such a silly thing again in case it deeply offended his hosts. Full of indignation at Heinrich's sharp rebuke, Theo went over to the other log cabin and reported the incident to his mother. He had always been told by her never to disguise or hide his Christian beliefs before outsiders, since such an action would amount to a denial of his Saviour; and he confidently expected her sympathy and approval. But she merely replied, "When you are eating at the table of people who don't believe in religion, you must say grace silently to yourself"; and she refused to pass any comments on Heinrich's rebuke. Theo turned away, bitterly offended. Her advice seemed sound and reasonable enough. But why had he never been

given this advice before by his mother or by anyone else? Instead he had always been taught the all-overriding importance of saying grace before a meal. He had been assured that it was a sin to touch food without a prayer of thanksgiving to God; and this prayer had to be said audibly and with deep conviction. And now it was suddenly being explained to him that he had merely made a fool of himself.

If this was the case, why had not his religious training taken into account the sober realities of life? He felt that religious instruction should not merely serve to make people fit for living in their own homes but for conducting themselves appropriately in the outside world as well.

Deeply humiliated, Theo made no reply to his mother. He left her in silence, but decided to be more circumspect in future in accepting religious advice from anyone, and to keep his most deeply felt convictions strictly to himself.

Mrs Strehlow had scarcely been able to spare the time for listening to Theo's story, for she was a very busy and worried woman. As soon as he had walked away, she rushed back into the log cabin to attend to her husband. The latter was clearly approaching the end of his physical strength. On leaving Henbury he had still been hopeful of reaching at least the Overland Telegraph Line at Horseshoe Bend. But the fifty-five-mile journey from Henbury to Idracowra had shattered even his iron will. Travelling through the Britannia Sandhills had been for him one long nightmare. The horses had had to be flogged to the top of every dune, and the team in harness had to be changed frequently. The loud bursts of shouting at the horses by Heinrich

and Hesekiel sitting in the front seat, and the continual crack of the lashing coach-whip either to the side of the sweating team or on their trembling rumps, had deafened, and at times almost maddened, his ears. Nor had things become easier for him during the final twelve miles' drive into Idracowra. The heat of the sun had proved almost too much for the strength of a man who was beginning to sense that he might be embarked on his death journey; and he knew that he could not face the road any longer by day in these blazing heat-wave conditions.

Travelling by night, in the absence of proper waggon tracks and buggy lamps, seemed completely out of the question; and, finally, his physical condition was worsening much more rapidly than he had anticipated. In spite of the streams of sweat that had been pouring out from his body during these excessively hot travelling days, his limbs had swollen very considerably since his departure from Hermannsburg. He had had to sit upright in a chair, day and night, for almost a fortnight already; and he could no longer even lean back in his chair, since he would then feel immediately the pressure of the internal fluids against his lungs, - an excruciating pressure which produced agonizing jabs of pain and threatened to stop him from breathing at all. In order to rest or to sleep he had to lean forward and cup his chin in his hands, supporting his weary arms on his shapelessly swollen knees. A certain amount of pain was ever present now. It left him completely only when he had been drugged by his nightcap of laudanum.

Strehlow's low physical condition was matched by his intense spiritual despondency. Excruciating bouts of physical pain, a depressing sense that he had been disloyally deserted by his southern colleagues, and an agonizing awareness of the continuing and complete silence of God to his incessant prayers - these were the heavy afflictions that kept on tormenting his mind during all his waking hours. Till the morning of his departure from Henbury Strehlow had always experienced a new upsurge of hope and faith after praying, either alone or together with his wife, to that God of his fathers, in Whose almighty power he had put all his trust throughout his life. He had always considered himself to be a staunch Lutheran. This fact accounted for his strong sense of sin in himself, in others, and in the whole world around him; and many people who had come only into superficial contact with him might have felt that he had almost an obsession about the danger of sin lurking in every corner, even in things that most people considered as being harmless in themselves. Indeed, probably the majority of non-Lutherans would have regarded most staunch Lutherans as suffering in some degree from an obsession of this nature. But such a view would have given only one part of the picture. It would, in fact, have been a most misleading assumption to make that thoughtful Lutherans were interested in the existence and presence of sin more than in anything else. For this Lutheran sense of sin was, in men like Strehlow at any rate, a perhaps natural corollary of their belief that they and all other people were expected to be God's human instruments, whose actions, even the most in-

significant, were always before the sharp scrutiny of the Almighty. Hence all of God's servants who earnestly tried to carry out the work for which He had brought them into the world were always standing in His special care and protection till they had performed the whole of their tasks. To Lutherans of Strehlow's type perhaps the most significant aspect of their religion was the complete sense of confidence in God that their faith had kindled in them. It was not for nothing that the favourite hymns in the Strehlow home had been those composed by Luther and by Paul Gerhardt. A mighty fortress is our God, Commit whatever grieves thee, If God Himself be for me, and others of this kind, were hymns giving perfect expression of Strehlow's own complete faith and trust in God. The last-named hymn set forth in jubilant poetic language the sentiments so powerfully stated by St Paul in the eighth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose . . . If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God,

which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In his song Paul Gerhardt - in contrast to Luther who in his hymns had always clung to the plural pronouns that befitted a whole singing congregation - had changed St Paul's first person plural pronouns to the singular, in order to give the apostle's message a stronger individualistic force. Similarly, Strehlow had always expressed his faith in God in strongly personal terms.

But as Strehlow was sitting in his log cabin at Idracowra on the Sunday morning after his arrival from Henbury, his extreme physical weakness and his constant pangs of pain made him wonder whether the Bible did not contain some other, and rather darker, messages that might be more relevant to his present condition. A strong, healthy man who had had little personal acquaintance with sickness until three months ago, he had led till now a far too active life ever to have given much thought to the problems of pain, of suffering, and of calamities in a world governed by an omnipotent God of Love. He had, it was true, always been impressed by the grandeur, the depth of thought, and the magnificent poetry of the Book of Job, the finest exposition of human pain and suffering, and of the calamities afflicting even the innocent and the God-fearing, that was to be found in the pages of the Old Testament. But he had always been rather more interested in the verses which expressed the trustful resignation or the strong faith of the afflicted than in those passionate passages in which the ancient writer had grappled with life's deepest problems and with catastrophes which had defied all attempts at satisfactory explanations. Strehlow had always

been moved during the Hermannsburg funeral services by the resigned piety of the verse "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"; and Job's profession of deathless hope that had been so beautifully expressed in the verse beginning "I know that my redeemer liveth" had been so dear to him in its old formulation that he had regarded the modern translations which substituted "without my flesh" for the older version "yet in my flesh shall I see God" almost as sacrilegious corruptions.

But he had never had much leisure to ponder deeply over the arguments raised by Job and his friends with such passionate poetical fervour on page after page of this magnificent book.

But now that he himself was experiencing the crushing hand of God in his own afflictions, he was beginning to understand fully the deep tragedy in Job's call of anguish to God, "Why hast Thou set me as a mark against Thee, so that I am a burden to myself?"; and he readily comprehended from his own agony the dark depth of meaning in Job's wild cry of despair beginning with the words, "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived". Job's heavy plight and his bottomless despair suddenly began to assume a new and deeply personal significance for him. It was precisely the man who had trusted implicitly in God, who had anxiously striven to please the Almighty, and who had patiently accepted the early calamities blow by blow, who had been crushed and humbled till he could bear his afflictions no longer, but had left his house and sat among the ashes

for seven days and nights without opening his mouth. And when Job had finally given expression to his anguish and to his utter inability to understand the ways of the Lord, the three friends who had come to share his sorrow had suddenly turned on him. Like most priests, ministers, and pious church folk who visit persons who have been crushed by illnesses, accidents, or calamities, Job's friends had felt obliged to defend the Almighty and the justice of His ways against Job's cries of bitter anguish; and, in rebuking him sternly, they had increased his misery till his trustful resignation had threatened to turn into a bitter mood of resentment and revolt, in which he could find relief only in hurling accusations against God. The writer of the Book of Job had made no attempt to solve the final mysteries of pain and calamity: only God could fathom the ways of God. The Almighty, when replying to Job in the closing chapters of the book, had merely confronted the exhausted sufferer with a long series of counter-questions which no man could answer, thereby clearly demonstrating that no creature was able to call to account its own Creator. Job had, in reply, hastened to declare his complete and unquestioning submission to the will and the judgments of a God Whose ways human wisdom could not understand. God had thereupon severely reprimanded Job's three friends for having dared to defend the ways of the Almighty in petty human terms which had brought discredit to God. Only Job's prayers for his officious and conceited friends had finally appeased the anger of the Almighty against their presumption. The Book of Job had thus concluded with a severe Old Testa-

ment lesson on the punishment awaiting all self-righteous men who misused God's calamities as opportunities for increasing the miseries of the victims by proclaiming that the Lord had resorted to special disciplinary measures against them. After Job had prayed for his friends, God had blessed him, restored to him his health, doubled his possessions, and enabled him to have a second family.

However, on that Sunday morning hope itself seemed to have died. Strehlow could obtain no message of comfort from the conclusion of the Book of Job. He could appreciate as never before the anguished cries of a tormented soul that had felt itself crushed by a long series of calamities and suffering, rarely sent down singly on a single human being. But his physical condition gave him no ground for hope that God would restore him to health and bless him once more with the joys of this world. He could only strive to endure his agony manfully, and he felt that his physical strength was rapidly reaching its breaking point. Yet whatever the future might hold for him, he would try to cling to his faith steadfastly, even, if necessary, blindly: it was the only thing left for him to grasp, now that the last glimmerings of hope had almost completely vanished from his heart. He would spend the day pondering over the next steps that he and his party should take. At least it was comforting to know that he had safely arrived at a station before reaching this point of almost complete mental and physical collapse.

Theo spent the morning wandering over the station area with his friend Johnson Breaden, the three-quarter white son of Allan Breaden. He

had first met Johnson Breaden at Hermannsburg on one of Bob Buck's Christmas visits. Johnson Breaden and his mother Jessie had both wanted to take a holiday away from Idracowra, and Bob Buck had included them in his Henbury party. One of Jessie's three-quarter aboriginal daughters had been staying at Hermannsburg permanently and attending the mission school. Like many other half-caste women in the Centre, Jessie had always been in a difficult marital position. Being a half-white woman, she had always been expected to live with any white station man who might take a fancy to her. Generally the man who had the first right to her would have been the station owner or manager himself, or else the white head stockman. But none of these men, who enjoyed supreme authority over the station and its inhabitants, would ever have dreamed of legally marrying her. Nor would they have given much care to any three-quarter white sons which she might have borne to them. All of her three-quarter white daughters, on the other hand, would normally have been sent down south to a home for children - or, very much more rarely, to white relatives of their father - so as to save them from being brought up "among the niggers" and treated by other white men as their mother had been by their father. When the white owner or manager or stockman left the station, his half-caste spouse and her children would in most cases be left behind to fend for themselves as best they could. Often it would be a dark man who now came to their rescue. He would invariably be proud of his "white" wife, and he would become a perfect foster-father to her children, always

looking after them as though they were his very own. For in the Aranda-speaking areas of the Centre (and probably in most of the adjoining tribal areas as well) any man who lived with a woman was looked on as her properly married husband; and he was expected to regard and to treat every one of his wife's children irrespective of their actual parentage, as his own progeny). This was an attitude that the "civilized" white folk who came into the country found impossible to understand. For a man to treat all the children of his wife, irrespective of their parentage, as his own, was held to be a sign of the supreme stupidity of the dark race. Even some of the missionaries had been perturbed to find that no stigma was ever attached to "illegitimate children". The very term "illegitimate children" had no meaning in the Aranda-speaking community, and could not, in fact, have been translated into Aranda.

When Strehlow, while translating the New Testament, needed an Aranda equivalent for the expression "illegitimate child", he had to be content with the word "wolurkuna": this term, however, merely meant a "deserted child", - that is, a child whose father had abandoned it and its mother by going to live in a different local group or tribal area. Jessie, too, had had her share of the vicissitudes of life. Her mother Rounja had been an elder sister of Njitiaka. Jessie's white father was generally accepted as having been Walter Parke, the younger of the two Parke brothers who had founded Henbury Station, though there were one or two dissident voices which claimed that the real father had been a man called George Elliot, who had been the sta-

tion cook during the time of the Parke brothers. Jessie had sometimes been the proud half-caste mistress of the station, and sometimes the spouse of a dark stockman in the native camp on the same property. Her eldest child had been Baden Bloomfield, the three-quarter white son of Louis Bloomfield. Louis Bloomfield had been a prominent man among the Finke River pioneers and cattlemen at Henbury, before acquiring Love's Creek Station. After this son by a white man came the three-quarter black half-siblings, William, Eileen, and Elvida. The father of these three children had been her full-blood husband Ungwanaka. But she had also had a second three-quarter white son, who came between William and Eileen.

This was Johnson Breaden, and his father was Allan Breaden. Jessie had been living at Idracowra Station for some time now; and she was keeping house for Allan Breaden and her son Johnson. Throughout her difficult life Jessie had managed to preserve to the full her great natural charm. Nor had she lost her impressive air of quiet womanly dignity in any of her difficult marital situations. An air of almost aristocratic aloofness often seemed to surround her.

Jessie had, however, been fortunate in being able to keep all her children; for the two children which she had borne to white men had both been boys. In this regard she had been more fortunate than the other half-caste woman, Leisha, who had, like herself, experienced the favours of both Allan Breaden and Louis Bloomfield. Leisha's two daughters Sarah and Susie, whose fathers had been Breaden and Bloomfield respectively, had been sent south as

small girls; and she had never again set eyes on them. She had, however, had the consolation of four other, three-quarter dark, children by two full-blood fathers.

On Johnson's first visit to Hermannsburg Theo had immediately struck up a friendship with the pleasant and cheerful near-white boy, and he thoroughly enjoyed his walk with Johnson over Idracowra Station that morning. Johnson was, like his father, rather shortsighted, and his thick and somewhat pouchy eyelids, which he had likewise inherited from his father, gave him a slightly sleepy though particularly good-natured facial expression.

The buildings at Idracowra Station were of the same rough and ready gum log construction as those of Henbury.

There was, first of all, the simple one-room blockhouse, roofed with galvanized iron, which served as Allan Breaden's residence, and which was at present being occupied by Theo's parents. Two bush beds, with bullock hide "mattresses", stood in this room, their legs let in through a floor paved with stone slabs. The door of this blockhouse had been made of packing-case boards, and the walls were covered inside with illustrations from *The Chronicle* and cartoons from *The Bulletin*. The second log-house was the one in which Theo had already eaten two of his meals. This building also was roofed with galvanized iron. It was a kitchen/dining-room unit with a mud-mortar chimney and a stone floor, and it was protected by a verandah. Its furnishings were of the utmost simplicity - two home-made tables, a somewhat rickety wooden food-safe, and a cockatoo perch

on which a white cockatoo screamed and talked during the hottest daylight hours. A three-legged cast-iron camp-oven stood on the ground in one corner. A rain gauge had been placed on a low post between these two main station buildings. It had to be cleaned out whenever rain was expected: normally it was full of sand from the sandstorms that enveloped Idracowra on all days when strong winds blew from the north or the west. There were two further structures - the meat-house and the harness-room. In front of the thatched meat-house stood a meat bench with a top layer of heavy logs on which the carcass of the slaughtered bullock was cut up before the meat was taken inside. During the winter months certain parts of the carcass were hung up on hooks inside the meat-house, where the cool air of the day and the icy draughts of the night kept the meat in prime condition for a week, and even longer, without any need for artificial refrigeration. The tender steaks cut from such a naturally chilled carcass had a rich flavour which far surpassed that of any meat which was to be taken out by subsequent generations of station folk from refrigerators introduced in later years. However, much of the beef in winter, and most of it in summer, was dry-salted, bagged in empty 150-pound flour-bags, and stored in these containers in the meat-house during the day. It was then spread out in a coarse wire-netting trough, suspended from a frame set on posts fixed in the ground inside the meat-house, so that the large chunks of salt meat could air during the night. The fourth building was the rough and simple harness-room or saddle-shed (also constructed

of logs), with its rails and pegs for holding the saddles, bridles, packbags, and all items of donkey waggon harness. All greenhide ropes, when not in use, were also hung on pegs in this saddle-shed.

A couple of chains of linked new greenhide hobble-straps stretched down from other wall pegs. Close to the harness-room stood a row of posts from whose top rails hung suspended the hides of the bullocks killed at the station. The cattle-yard of Idracowra had been erected as close to these station buildings as had the cattle-yard at Henbury; and Idracowra, like Henbury, possessed also a goat-yard crammed full of well-fed goats, which supplied the station with milk, cream, and butter.

Two particularly high sandhills raised their red foreheads not very far from the station. They were important enough to have names - Tnakatuma and Ntonurknga. Because of the rapid destruction of the vegetation around the station buildings by horses, cattle, donkeys, and goats, Idracowra had been notorious for the severity of its dust-storms ever since its establishment.

There had been an earlier station settlement a couple of miles downstream at Iwutitnama. The present site - Mbontuma - had been selected by the owners because the sandy northern Finke bank at this point was raised slightly above the level of the highest floods. At the same time, the saltbush flats which covered the southern bank of the Finke spread out as far as the edge of the high sandhills rising over a mile south of the main river bed. This wide belt of saltbush was several miles long; and a couple of miles east of Idracowra this plain was inundated from

time to time by the brown floodwaters brought down by the Kringka, - a lazy box gum channel which wound its snakelike course towards the Finke from the clay-pans and clay-flats situated on high-level country more than a hundred miles away to the south-west of Idracowra. This Kringka rarely ran in flood over the full distance of its course. Normally it consisted of a series of large, but very shallow, clay-pans, which were linked by channels only when the rains had been sufficiently heavy to make the water rise high enough to flow over and tear breaches in the low sandbars that used to spread across many parts of the Kringka during lengthy drought periods.

But the very sluggishness of the floodwaters, and the many sandbars that normally blocked their course, helped to keep most of the water brought down by local rains in the country where it had fallen. Hence the Kringka channel, and the many broad box gum flats in it, carried a long belt of saltbush, and in good seasons of rich herbage, through the Erlunda and Idracowra station runs; and nowhere was this belt wider or more fertile than from the point where the Kringka channel joined the southern box gum flats of the Finke to the place of its entry into the bed of the Finke at Knguljambalataka. At the latter site stood a post carrying a locked letter-box, in which the camel postman could leave the mail intended for Erlunda Station. For Idracowra Station was often left unmanned during mustering periods; and the Erlunda folk could then pick up their mail at The Letter Box. The name Idracowra was a corruption of Itirkawara, the Aranda name for Chambers Pil-

lar, a striking sandstone formation rising high above the red dunes some eleven miles north of the station. But in spite of its corruption by the whites, the initial "I" of Idracowra was still correctly sounded like the initial "I" in Itirkawara - that is, like the vowel in the English word "it". Occasionally this initial vowel was sounded long, like the "I" in "machine". Chambers Pillar marked the final resting place of the fierce mythical gecko ancestor called Itirkawara, who had set out as a young man on a long journey north-eastward from Tjina which took him across the border into Queensland. During his travels he had grown into a huge and powerfully built man of superhuman strength and extreme violence of temper. On his way home to his birthplace he had challenged and cut in halves with his stone knife a number of other unfortunate totemic ancestors in various Aranda-speaking areas.Flushed by the ease of his successes, he had disregarded the rules of the strict marriage code whose provisions were to become obligatory for the Aranda folk of later days. He had, in fact, deliberately committed the flagrant moral crime of having marital relations only with girls who belonged to that kin-group class from which not his wife but only his mother-in-law should have come. In the later human days men who committed this most abhorred "incestuous" act were invariably punished by death. The presumptuous gecko ancestor, however, had defied even the anger of his own kinsfolk at Tjina by improperly bringing such a girl to their camp as his wife. His enraged relatives had promptly banished him and the girl from their midst, and told the ostracized

pair to make their home out in the sandhills, far from the waters of the Finke.

Itirkawara, though raging with fury, had been powerless to defy the edict of his own gecko kinsfolk. He had retreated north into the sandhills, taking the shrinking girl with him.

Among the dunes the pair had suddenly grown weary and turned into prominent rocky formations. Itirkawara had changed into a stone pillar standing on a high base and raising its crest some hundred and fifty feet into the air. The unhappy girl had turned into a low hill, situated about a quarter of a mile from the Pillar; and, just as the girl had at the very end crouched down on the ground, averting her face from her seducer in deep shame, so the rocky crest of this low hill turned its face away from Chambers Pillar.

The old Mbontuma waterhole had become silted up by the Finke floods soon after the establishment of the second Idracowra Station; and a well had been sunk on the northern bank, several chains upstream from the buildings, to provide water for the many hundreds of cattle that browsed in the rich saltbush and herbage flats on the southern side of the main channel. This well was of the normal two-bucket type found everywhere in Central Australia at the time; but Theo had never seen one before, since Hermannsburg and the two adjoining station properties of Henbury and Glen Helen had been so copiously supplied with open waterholes by the Finke River. He therefore accompanied Johnson and some of the dark station women when they took the donkeys down to operate the double draught system of the well. With one bucket

coming up full to the surface whenever the other one went down into the well, it did not take very many hours to fill the big black-iron stock tank that supplied the long stocktroughs. Hesekiel, Titus, and Jakobus were already down at the well, looking critically at the Hermannsburg horses. The tired animals were standing around in dull listlessness. They would have stood there completely motionless if it had not been for the fiendish persistence of the tormenting flies, which forced them from time to time to toss their heads wearily and to give occasional savage swishes with their tails.

Dark streaks and weals on their rumps still bore witness to the cruel cuts they had received from whips on the previous day. All their rearing pride of only five days ago had gone out of them. Their bodies still looked reasonably rounded and strong; but there was no longer any fire left in their sad, tired, pleading eyes. Their spirit had been utterly defeated by the hard journey; and it was clear that many days would have to elapse before they would be fit for any further duty.

"They are knocked-up altogether," Hesekiel remarked; "we'll have to get fresh horses from this station before we can go on to Horseshoe Bend." "Donkeys are better than horses in this country," put in Jakobus; there are too many sandhills down here." Theo agreed heartily with the latter remark. As draught animals in sandy country, the local donkeys had no equals. With their ability to eat and digest anything, from grass, herbage, and acacia foliage down to rags and paper, these sturdy animals never lost their condition in the alarmingly quick manner of

horses. In addition, women and even children could harness them and work them; and if the donkeys were slow, they were also completely reliable. It seemed ironical that these sturdy animals should ever have been termed "asses" in a derogatory sense: this term of abuse could well have been reserved for their unthinking two-legged detractors.

The day again turned out to be a scorcher. Men and animals were grateful for the long midday break, which most of them spent resting or sleeping in the shade of the big river gums. It was a relief when evening came and the long, hot day ended. And for Theo it had been his first Sunday without hymns, prayers, or church services.

**Monday, the sixteenth day of October,
1922**

DURING Sunday Allan Breaden and Heinrich had spent much time in discussing Strehlow's desperate plight, and the problem of how to bring him closer to medical help. Both men were convinced that Strehlow was far too ill to continue his journey in the buggy. Only a motor vehicle could take him to the next station; and the best plan would be for the sick man to wait for Mr Wurst from Appila to come to Idracowra.

The train on which Mr Wurst had arranged to bring his car had been due to reach Oodnadatta on Friday night; and even if he had not been able to leave the railhead till midday on Saturday, he should by now be well on his way north from Oodnadatta.

When Allan Breaden and Heinrich visited Strehlow in the blockhouse on Monday morning, both were deeply shocked to see him looking so ill. His day of rest had not improved his condition in the slightest. There was no time left for any hesitation or indecision. "Mr Strehlow," said Allan, "you can't leave Idracowra in your buggy today. Your horses are knocked-up, and this hot weather knocks hell out of any man even if he's in the best o' good nick. Tell you what I'll do. I'll send two boys to Horseshoe Bend with a letter to Gus, telling him to send the car on to Idracowra as soon as it gets to The Bend. His donks will take about six hours to pull the car over the Finke and the box gum flats for the first twelve miles. After that it's hard, solid going till the car gets here; and our donks will pull it over to the station. That'll let you have a spell here till the car comes. The old blockhouse isn't much of a

place to stay in; but at least it's solid and keeps you out of the sun."

The sick man was only too ready to accept Allan's offer.

But when he was about to express his thanks, Allan quickly brushed his remarks aside. "Look, it's nothing what I'm doing. Everyone in this country would be only too glad to do the same for you. I'm only sorry I can't do more." And with those few words Allan strode out, told two of his stockmen to saddle up the two best riding horses in the yard, and sent them off with a letter to Horseshoe Bend.

Allan Breaden had spoken the truth. Though he was Joe Breaden's brother, he was merely the manager, not the owner of Idracowra Station. During the course of his long life on stations in the Centre, Allan, like some of the other pioneers, had from time to time made considerable amounts of money as a cattleman; but after spending forty seven years in the cattle industry, he was still only an employee, and not a man of property. He was now aged about seventy. All he could look forward to was to end his days on some cattle station willing to accept him as an Old Timer living on the old-age pension.

Allan David Breaden, who had been born on Booborowie Station, north-west of The Burra in South Australia, had first come into the Centre in his twenties, in the year 1875, and hence shared with "Dickie" Warburton the honour of being one of the first two Finke River pastoral pioneers.

Allan had initially gone to Glen Helen. It was he who had discovered the natural stock-paddock formed by the parallel ranges south-west of Old

Glen Helen station while riding with a mate through the Upper Finke country north of Hermannsburg in 1879; and the creek running through this paddock had been named "the Seventy-Nine Creek" from the date 1879 which Allan had carved into a big gum tree close to its point of entry into the Finke. But the aboriginal population in the north-western MacDonnells had been too numerous for the taste of the early cattlemen; and, together with Gus Elliot and a number of other Upper Finke pioneers, Allan had after some years moved to stations situated downstream from Hermannsburg. After a first term at Idracowra, at that time a holding belonging to Messrs. Grant and Stokes, Allan had become manager of Mount Burrell on the Hugh River, a property which was then one of those Elder stations that went in mainly for horse breeding. Mount Burrell shared, with Owen Springs and Undoоля, the distinction of being one of the very first pastoral properties to be stocked in the Centre. Mount Burrell had originally been held by Messrs Gilmour, Hendry, and Melrose, under a South Australian Pastoral Application for Lease granted on 7th December, 1875. The local Southern Aranda had resented the intrusion of the white men and their cattle, and had resorted to cattle-spearing in order to drive them out once more. The white men re-torted by going out and firing shots into the aboriginal camps. Among the victims on these shooting occasions had been Anngamilja, a woman who belonged to the star totem of Iloata. Her descendants, who later on became some of the best aboriginal stockmen on the stations situated on the lower Hugh and the

middle Finke River, kept alive both her name and that of the white station man who had led the attack on the camp in which she and some other folk had been killed. "The Gilmour (or as the aboriginal pronunciation had it, "Gillimore") mob" was to be remembered for its alleged murderous misdeeds eighty years after the Mount Burrell lease had first been granted. But matters had improved by 1891, when Allan Breaden had been able to tell the members of the South Australian Pastoral Commission, on their visit to Mount Burrell on 6th April that year, "Formerly the natives were very troublesome, but they are now civilized", and add the tribute that he had found them very helpful as station workers. On all stations where Allan had worked, his dark employees, in their turn, referred to him in appreciative terms - " 'Im good-fella boss, quiet man altogether". At a later date Breaden had moved down from Mount Burrell to Henbury; and he subsequently became manager of Idracowra after its acquisition by his brother Joe.

Like Bill Stokes (who had been one of the first and most important part-station owners in those early days) and most of the other pioneering cattlemen of the Centre, Allan had never known how to save money. He had preferred to enjoy his pay cheques to the full whenever they came in; and so his money had soon "gone west" on liberal drinking bouts and on trips to the southern cities, where grog and other diversions had quickly emptied his pockets. For most of the Central Australian cattlemen hotels such as the Black Bull Hotel in Hindley Street, Adelaide, had too often represented not only journey's end,

but money's end, too. But to go through one's money as soon as it had been earned was what every true Central Australian bushman was expected to do; and Allan, like the others, had never been restrained in his easy spending habits by any worries or fears about the future.

Once the hard-earned money had gone, these cattlemen had returned to the Centre and to the loyal companionship of their dark and coloured women. The latter were universally known as "kwialis", - "kwia" being the Southern and Eastern Aranda term for a girl. After returning to their old haunts, the pioneers had gone back without complaints or regrets to their tough life of work and hardship, relieved by the friendship of mates. In the eyes of the white population the vast spaces of the Never-Never were stripped of many of the terrors of its bush isolation by the knowledge that in times of need every man in the Centre could be counted on to come to the rescue.

After Allan Breaden had left him, Strehlow was able to give himself up to his self-questionings and to even deeper reflections on the problems of pain and the nature of man's relationship towards God. Now that the letter had been sent to Horseshoe Bend, there was nothing left for him to do but to wait and to think. His wife remained in the room with him to attend to his needs, and his meals were brought to him from the station kitchen. In any case, he had little appetite left for eating any food. His upper body had been wasting away for weeks, as was becoming painfully apparent from the hollowness of his cheeks and the strange new bony appearance of his once strong and heavy hands. Loss of appetite,

lack of sleep, a grossly swollen lower body, and his never-ending struggle against pain, had reduced him to a state of near helplessness. But his powerful heart was still beating strongly, and his clear brain was more active than ever.

On this morning Strehlow knew that only a miracle could save him; and he knew also that it was beyond his power to bring about that miracle. Not even prayer could guarantee, let alone compel, an answer from God. Like Job, he could only sit and wait for whatever answer would come from God, the supreme Lord of life and death. And in his heart he was growing more and more certain that the answer would be death. If so, it would be death either here or at some other station on the track; he would never reach the railhead at Oodnadatta. His grave would be dug in this desert waste.

And then what would become of the faithful wife, so utterly dependent on him, who was sitting by his side, completely unaware that he was a dying man? Or of the son whom he had prepared to the best of his ability for a good secondary education in Germany? Both would be left penniless and without a single relative in Australia. With Germany itself in chaos and political turmoil, and writhing in the iron grip of galloping inflation, no relatives over there were in a position to come to the rescue of the two persons whom he would be leaving behind him when he died. They would have no protector save God to take pity on them.

God: there was the problem. What was man's relationship to God? The Book of Job had not answered the problems of human pain, of human calamities, and of those shattering blows

that sometimes overwhelmed even the finest and best men and women in human society. On the contrary, Strehlow's own experience had convinced him that it might well be the finest and best people in the community, and those who had loved God and trusted Him beyond everything, who sometimes were subjected to the most cruel experiences possible and to calamities which ended only in their own final agony and death. The history of the early martyrs of the Church, and the history of the persecution of God-fearing men and women at the behest of the organized churches in previous ages, gave many eloquent proofs of that.

Not that he was afraid of death. His physical condition actually made him long for release from that shocking feeling of water-logged internal heaviness that reached from his abdomen to his swollen feet, from the pains that racked his chest when he took a slightly deeper breath or his back whenever he attempted to rest for a moment against his chair, and from those occasional paroxysms of asthmatic breathlessness during which he was gasping and choking helplessly to get sufficient air into his lungs. Death would mean a merciful termination of his sufferings. But why should that God, Whom he had endeavoured to serve so faithfully, abandon him and his family out here, in these lonely desert wastes, to die one of the most cruel deaths imaginable? Without medical assistance little could be done even to ease the pain of his last days. God could have helped him greatly by merely permitting the weather to keep cool during his journey to seek aid. It was still only October - a month in which long heat waves were

most unusual. But the weather had turned unseasonably hot shortly after he had set out on the road; and there seemed to be no prospect of a break in the series of scorching days that were helping to turn his final brief span of time into a long stretch of almost unbearable misery. In his present condition, and particularly because of the heat that made his body run with sweat hour after hour, he should have been washed and had his body moved into different sitting or lying positions several times a day. But because only sitting in a certain posture still enabled him to breathe with any degree of comfort, he was compelled to stay in this attitude day and night, without any chance of lying down even for short periods of respite. As a result, his skin was breaking out into sores in many places under the unnatural weight of swollen flesh. A cool change could at least have put an end to his day-long sweating bouts, and made the agony of his slow, but relentless death struggle a little more bearable. Instead the sun's fire was being stoked remorselessly day by day: the God of mercy seemed to have no compassion left for him. Kyrie eleison - Christe eleison - Kyrie eleison: he had intoned these prayers so often before during the Hermannsburg church services. These cries for God's mercy had formed an integral part of Christian church worship since the earliest centuries of the Christian era; and their position at the beginning of the liturgical part of the service indicated the high importance in which they had been held by all past generations of Christian worshippers. They were so old, and so well known, that the Western Church had never translated them from the

original Greek either into Latin or into any of the other vernaculars. He himself, like his predecessors at Hermannsburg, had intoned them every Sunday in Greek during the Aranda service. Now he had come to know why these cries for God's mercy had been regarded as providing the most appropriate opening for Christian worship in the liturgical service.

If God demanded from him to give up his life in the desert, could He not at least have shown him more mercy during the agony of his final days? Could not God have been more generous to a man who had always believed himself to be God's servant, and at the very least permitted him to see his own country once more and to leave his wife and son behind among relatives, before death took him away from them? He had been so very young when he had first come to Australia - a young man aged only twenty. Most of the next thirty years had been spent in hardship, loneliness, and frustration. Throughout this time he had believed himself to be battling resolutely in God's service: was this cruel death to be his very last experience, when God could so easily help him to slip out of life's troubles in peace? And yet it was both foolish and unworthy of his rock-like faith to argue against God in this way: that was one lesson which had been demonstrated with startling clarity in the Book of Job. An ant was clever only in the ways of an insect; but its understanding was always limited by the very nature of its tiny thinking organ. Any ant that had strayed into the room of a great mathematician, a great musician, a great scientist, or a great thinker, could certainly have perceived this man to be a human being and

sensed those of his actions which affected its own existence; but it could not have fathomed the tremendous fullness of the human mind. Similarly man could not hope to comprehend God. Man's highest and deepest thoughts were limited by the bodily structure of his mortal brain: what was infinite and immortal could not be grasped by an instrument that was finite and mortal. To protest or to murmur against God was hence not only wrong but utterly futile, since the very reasoning that lay behind it was the result of man's insistence on envisaging God merely as a glorified and apotheosized human being.

Whatever his tormented brain might think about it all, Strehlow knew that there was only one Christian answer to his problems of doubt and fear: to pray with all sincerity that hardest, gravest, and darkest of all the petitions in the Lord's Prayer - "Thy will be done". He had prayed the Lord's Prayer many thousands of times in his life - in German, English, Dieri, and Aranda; and he had often read it also both in Latin and in its original Greek. He had preached sermons on it, and believed himself to be aware of all its awesome implications. It was only now, however, that its full and limitless command to the human spirit to surrender and to subordinate all its wishes and aspirations to the will of God had begun to throw out its iron-fisted challenge at him.

Rock-like faith was not enough in the eyes of God. Indeed, men whose faith had the strength of granite were often men of strong personal will as well; and it was precisely these men who were often subjected to the hardest tests by

God - to tests designed to break their will and to force them to submit themselves without any reservations to the supreme will of God.

Perhaps he had been too conscious in the past of the strength of his personal faith, and now his Master was testing him in a furnace heated to its grimdest fire by hot blasts of pain and by paralysing sensations of his state of absolute forsakenness. Each day it was getting harder, not easier, for him to pray in full honesty that grave petition - "Thy will be done"; and yet he felt that he must learn to do so, without faltering, without doubts, and without any secret personal reservations.

**Tuesday, the seventeenth day of October,
1922**

NEXT MORNING Strehlow woke up from another drugged night to face another long and enervating day of physical pain and further wearisome and tiring hours of mute self-questioning and spiritual struggle. That struggle was all the harder for him because he could not share more than a small part of it with his unsuspecting wife, whose eyes seemed to have been mercifully blinded so that she could not see that the man sitting in the chair next to her, whose pains from time to time caused him to groan audibly, was slowly approaching the end of his sufferings.

Strehlow knew now, not only that that simple-sounding petition "Thy will be done" was the hardest prayer ever enjoined on mortal men, but also that there were situations in which few, if any, men or women could repeat these words without at least some measure of hypocrisy. Try as he might, he could not rid his mind of some last-minute reservations.

Had anyone ever been able, by his own strength of will, to utter those words with complete sincerity during the hardest tests imposed on him from above? And was God unaware that there existed situations which the tortured hearts of His sincerest servants could not face with complete, unquestioning submission to His will? Suddenly he recalled Christ's own passionate prayers during his last night in the garden of Gethsemane. He had so often reviewed the story of Christ's passion in the season of Lent, when the Aranda congregation at Hermannsburg, according to a long-standing station tradi-

tion, attended a short service every Wednesday morning before starting their work for the day. But never had that one brief span of twenty four hours into which Christ's sufferings had been compressed before his death on the cross become so meaningful for him as during the weeks of his own cruel illness. Only now had he come to realize fully that even Christ, who had so often proclaimed that he and the Father were one and that he had come into the world to fulfil the will of the Father, had, when the hour of that fulfilment came upon him, faced an all-exhausting battle in his own heart before he had been able to submit his will to that of his Father. As a result of his own illness the sick man had attained to a new and clear vision of that titanic struggle in all its passionate intensity. There had been no purposeful calm courage in Christ's own mind when he had led his eleven loyal disciples into the secluded garden of Gethsemane. Upon entering it, he had left eight of them behind to wait for his return. He had gone on a little further with his three leading disciples and left them at another place, after telling them, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me." After that he had gone a short distance further for his final struggle, which only his Father might witness. He had fallen on his face to commune with God about the hours of suffering, anguish, public disgrace, and death that lay before him. Not only once but three times had Christ himself, who had taught the Lord's Prayer to his disciples, prayed earnestly that the cup of bitter suffering and death which was now being put before his lips by his Father should, if possible,

pass from him; and three times he had forced himself to add that, if the Father had decided that he must drink from this cup, then he, the Son, would accept the Father's wish: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt. . . . If this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done."

Even Christ had found the struggle so exhausting that in the end his whole body had been covered in sweat, and the sweat that poured from his body had come to resemble great drops of blood. The gospel writers had not recorded how long Christ's agony had lasted in the garden of Gethsemane; but it was only after he had prayed three times, and after he had received comfort and strength from above, that he had at last been able to rise to his feet and go forward with firm steps to meet the implacable anger of the enraged Church leaders, the insults and the mockery of an Oriental king, the shouts of an incensed, priest-incited multitude clamouring for his death, the violent scourge strokes that quickly turned his back into a quivering expanse of raw flesh, and the hard hammer blows that drove great nails through his hands and his feet. Nailed to his cross, his head lacerated by a crown of thorns, he had then gazed as calmly on the milling, mocking crowd below as he had earlier suffered the brutalities of his jeering tormentors without any screams of pain.

And so Christ, too, the sick man reflected, had been compelled by God to pass through the full measure of anguish to which ordinary humanity could be subjected; and he had hence experi-

enced for himself the dark depths of that struggle through which thousands of ordinary men and women had had to pass before they could utter in perfect sincerity that simple-sounding, yet humanly almost impossible, prayer: "Thy will be done."

With that realization, peace came upon him. He would strive to become more like Christ: he would pray for the strength to submit his own will to the will of that God Whose ways were so completely inscrutable, but Whose love for mankind offered the only hope on which men and women could base their faith. And his lips moved as he repeated in a whisper to himself, "Kyrie eleison - Christe eleison - Kyrie eleison - Thy will be done."

Except for one or two brief snatches of sleep, Strehlow spent most of the day pondering over his personal relationship towards God. The camel-mail team, returning from Hermannsburg, halted for about an hour in the lengthening shadows of the tall river gums at the station while Jack Fountain sipped a leisurely cup of tea with Allan Breaden and Heinrich. Then Fountain resumed his journey, and soon the camels had vanished once more into the southern box gum flat on their road to Horseshoe Bend. Slowly the hot sting of the sun lessened, and the scorched and weary land became covered with an intricate lacework of shadows.

At six o'clock there was a sudden commotion in the camp.

A cloud of dust could be discerned rapidly approaching the station along the Horseshoe Bend road. Within minutes the shapes of horses and of four riders could be seen emerging from this

cloud of dust; and by the time this horse party had reached the bank opposite the station, keen-sighted watchers had already identified the riders - they were Mrs Gus Elliot of Horse-shoe Bend Station, accompanied by one of her dark stockmen and the two messengers sent out by Allan Breaden on the previous morning. The whole population of Idracowra rushed forward as the riders dismounted, and the all became filled with their shouts and greetings. Mrs Elliot dismounted with the athletic grace of an experienced horsewoman. She shook hands briefly with Allan Breaden and Heinrich, and then asked to be taken without delay to the log cabin where the sick man was anxiously awaiting her news. The shouts of the population had already informed him who she was.

One look at Strehlow told the young woman that he was close to death; but she concealed her apprehension about his condition perfectly, and smiled pleasantly at him and at his tired wife as she went straight to the point of her errand.

"Mr Strehlow," she said in a rich, low-pitched voice, "I've come with a message for you from the Reverend Stolz. The car he and Mr Wurst were coming up in from Oodnadatta, broke down in the Stevenson crossing north of the Alberga on Sunday morning. The Alberga had pretty well knocked the car out, and the Stevenson finished it off. Mr Stolz was lucky enough to catch the camel-mail from The Oodna soon after the car broke down, and he spoke to Gus, my husband, over the phone as soon as he got to Blood's Creek this morning at half past nine. When Gus told him he'd got a message from Allan last night about your wanting to wait at

Idracowra, Mr Stolz grew quite alarmed. He wants you to come down to The Bend immediately, so's you'll be on the Overland Telegraph Line. He said there's a doctor in Oodnadatta at present, and you could get medical advice from him or from the Hostel by phone once you got to The Bend. But that's not all," she added quickly, when she noted the look of pain and deep disappointment that had come over the tired face of the sick man; "Mr Stolz said he was arranging for a local car in Oodnadatta to come up as far as The Charlotte, to take up the doctor himself, and Gus will bring on the doctor from there to The Bend by buggy. There shouldn't be any trouble as far as The Charlotte - most of the country up to there is, as you know, hard gibber country."

Here Mrs Elliot paused for a few moments to allow her more comforting second message to cheer up her listeners.

Strehlow replied in a slightly choked voice, "Do you think the local driver will do any better at the Alberga crossing than Mr Wurst? And what about all the rest of the creeks after the Alberga? What about the Stevenson? What about Hamilton Bore?"

The young woman smiled and went on in her comforting voice, "Mr Strehlow, the local drivers know how to handle all the creeks north of The Oodna. They've had to cross them plenty of times when going over their station runs. They aren't newchums like the drivers from down south. And they know the right places for crossing the creeks. Even Mr Wurst might've got over those two crossings without doing in his clutch if he'd had a better pilot than that chap Jack Fox

he picked up in The Oodna. Jack's all right when he's sober; but I bet he was drunk when he left The Oodna pub."

Strehlow sighed, and sadly nodded his head in agreement.

He recalled the trouble he had had on one occasion years ago when he was trying to set out in the van from Oodnadatta to Hermannsburg. His white driver had been Dave Hart, the man who had done most of the building jobs for him at Hermannsburg. Dave had been a tireless and honest worker on the mission station. But once he reached an hotel, nobody could tear him away from the bar. Strehlow had finally, after a delay of twenty four hours, gone into the bar, dragged Dave out, put him on the van, and then driven the horses himself for the first couple of hours till Dave had sobered up sufficiently to take over the reins. Wurst could easily have had a similarly thirsty bushman to contend with.

"And now, Mr Strehlow," concluded Mrs Elliot, "here's our last suggestion. As soon as Gus heard that your horses were all knocked-up, he said to me, 'Ruby, take our buggy horses and one of our boys to Idracowra and bring Mr Strehlow down. And take Allan's boys back as well.' And so we got the boys to round up six buggy horses and some saddle horses early this morning - all the ones close to the station, you know - and after that, the three boys and I got going. We left a bit before eleven o'clock this morning, and it's taken us seven hours to get here. And now please listen to me. You must come with us, so please don't say no. Gus and I both know you can't stand the heat any longer. So I'll just have a quick cup of tea and a snack

while the boys harness our horses to your buggy. We could leave here in half an hour or so, and travel right through the night. It may take us thirteen or fourteen hours to get back to The Bend; for we'll have to go pretty slowly over those gutters in the table mountains. There'll be no moonlight tonight - it's almost new moon, you know. But we'll be close to The Bend by the time the sun's up, and you'll be sitting under a roof next to a phone before the day turns into another scorcher."

Strehlow hesitated for a moment. "But how will you get on, Mrs Elliot?" he faltered. "You've been in the saddle for seven hours already. You must be tired out. You need a good night's sleep first."

"Never mind me," replied Mrs Elliot firmly. "I'm only a girl you might say, and the bush made me tough years ago - I can see the distance out as well as any of the stockboys. No, we must go back tonight. One of the boys and I will carry storm lanterns and ride ahead of the buggy. All your driver has to do is follow the lights."

And then she added the final warning, "It'll be a bumpy ride through the table mountain country. Those gutters are pretty rough, and storm lanterns don't throw much light. But at least it'll be cool, and we can stop on the track and give you a spell whenever you want one. So please come back with us, won't you?"

Strehlow had watched Mrs Elliott with growing admiration. Here was a woman who was not only young and pretty, but strong, athletic, vital, and courageous. Her smile was warm and sincere, and her face still possessed the unspoilt charm of mature girlhood. Slim, tanned, and

willowy, she looked almost ten years younger than her real age of thirty years. If she was prepared to stay in the saddle all night, then he too would, in God's name, nerve himself up for that last terrifying stage to Horseshoe Bend. There he would find proper hotel accommodation and be linked by telephone with Oodnadatta so that he could obtain medical advice at once. And the further promise of a car and a doctor to come up to him had suddenly renewed his downcast spirit.

"Mrs Elliot," he said, and his voice sounded unsteady as tears began to dim his red and tired eyes, "you have been wonderful, riding seven hours in this heat today. Yes, I'll come back with you, if you think that you can ride all night as well. And I don't know how I can thank you and Mr Elliott enough for what you have done for me."

"It's nothing," replied Mrs Elliot cheerfully. "And now, please excuse me. I must rush out and organise everything. As soon as everything is ready, we must go. It will be a long, slow trail back, and the sun is going to be up nice and early tomorrow morning."

The station suddenly burst into hectic activity. The mission horses were brought up from the well so that they could be driven behind the buggy as replacements for the Horseshoe Bend team should the need arise. Swags were quickly rolled. Strehlow had a rushed meal with his wife in the log cabin, while Mrs Elliot hurried through hers in the station kitchen. The lanterns were filled with kerosene, and an extra can was taken for replenishment. Experienced hands lifted the sick man's chair back on the buggy and wired it

down securely. Then Strehlow was half assisted, half lifted to his seat, and Heinrich, Mrs Strehlow, and the Hermannsburg driver climbed up on the buggy. Four of the Horseshoe Bend horses were quickly harnessed to the vehicle, and then the travellers left, to the accompaniment of long-drawn-out farewell calls from the Idracowra population. The sun had already gone down, and soon the retreating cloud of dust was lost in the fast-thickening gloom of the approaching night.

Then all colour went out from the western sky, and darkness fell over the sun-wearied land. Theo and his dark companions retired to rest soon afterwards. They would have to leave Idracowra early next morning if they wanted to do the thirty-five-mile stretch from Idracowra to Horseshoe Bend in one day.

**Wednesday, the eighteenth day of October,
1922**

AT SEVEN o'clock next morning the van was already moving through the luxuriant giant saltbush flat which spread south towards the sandhill edges from the right bank of the Finke.

Theo, who had just said goodbye to his last local Aranda acquaintances, felt sad and rather lonely when Idracowra Station faded from his view.

The donkeys, refreshed by their three days of rest, moved forward with vigour and determination. The saltbush flat extended east for close on four miles; and somewhere near its centre, about two miles from Idracowra, lay the sacred rain totemic site of Mborawatna. Its name was known throughout the Southern Aranda, Eastern Aranda, and Matuntara areas, many of whose rain sites were linked by myths with Mborawatna. According to the local beliefs, there had been two ancestral camps at Mborawatna at the beginning of time. One had been that of the rain ancestors, the other that of the rain ancestresses. It was the latter who had wielded most of the power to create rain; and the whole plain had been turned into a vast boggy swamp by the fluids pouring forth from their bodies - fluids that had created all the rainclouds in this country ever since the beginning of time. According to the Southern Aranda traditions, rainclouds still formed whenever the hot north-west summer winds swept over the saltbush flat of Mborawatna. At the beginning of time heavy thunderclouds had towered in multi-tiered array over Mborawatna; and the lightning flashes from these clouds had been visible from places a hundred miles distant, and even further. They

had hence been seen also from Ilara, on the Palmer River; and two male kangaroo ancestors, who had likewise possessed the power of creating rain, had travelled to Mborawatna from Ilara, carrying a huge waningga whose edges were ablaze with lightning flashes. They had sunk down deeply into the mud as soon as they reached the boggy plain of Mborawatna. To save themselves, they had flung away their heavy waningga.

But even this desperate act had proved unavailing. They had in the end sunk completely out of sight in this almost bottomless swamp, and had been forced to continue their further journey underground for many miles till they emerged onto firm ground again near another rain site called Puna. From here they had gone on to join the Loritja kangaroo ancestors at Itinja, near the source of the Goyder River.

A short distance past Mborawatna the van moved over the saltbush flats of the Kringka, close to its point of entrance into the Finke. The name "Kringka" signified "game tracks" - an appellation explained by the putia myth, which related how a large party of putia or sandhill wallaby ancestors and ancestresses had left their home at Urkatura in the Musgrave Ranges in order to follow an Eastern Aranda messenger from Alatopa who had brought a young novice with him. The messenger and the novice had travelled back from Urkatura surrounded by the male putia ancestors. The putia ancestresses had moved as a separate group, and had performed their women's ndapa dances over the whole of the distance traversed. After reaching the saltlake north of Pulkura, they had left be-

hind a visible track in the country over which their dancing feet had taken them. Trees and shrubs had been broken down and sandhill crests levelled by this vast party of putia women: the Kringka watercourse was, in fact, believed to represent the trail once carved into a still plastic countryside by the feet of these dancing women. The putia party had paused from time to time at some local sites in the Finke Valley, and had then continued their journey north across the sandhills as far as Alatopa, in the Eastern MacDonnells. Here the novice had been initiated; and the weary putia travellers had thereupon turned into upright stones, which still rose up in considerable numbers at the final mythical campsites of the party.

The saltbush flat stopped soon after the broad Kringka watercourse had been crossed, and the level of the country began to rise once more. A few miles further on the highest point of this rising ground had been reached. From here a brief glimpse could be gained of Chambers Pillar, where the fierce gecko ancestor Itirkawara had settled down to his last rest. The Pillar, about sixteen miles away, rose high into the air, looking almost like a distant, lopped-off factory chimney.

But its shape was blurred by greyish-white heat haze, and the site of Idracowra Station itself was now indicated only by great clouds of red dust. For hot north-west winds had begun to roar over the countryside while the van was passing across the saltbush flat of Mborawatna: the rain ancestresses were awakening from their sleep, and these hot winds were bringing clouds into the sky-clouds that might pour down re-

freshing showers on this desiccated and parched country within the next few days.

Beyond the highest point of the rising ground the level of the country sloped down again towards a vast pebble-strewn waste, from which an imposing array of table mountains raised their flat ceremonial crests of solid rock hundreds of feet towards the leaden sky. The van moved down this sloping country with ease; and for the rest of the day the party travelled up and down the rises and the falls of this barren waste, often following small watercourses between the bare, stony hills. Except for the two major box gum creeks which ran across this desolate area, the whole country looked like a forbidding desert gripped in the bony clutch of death.

Even the trees and shrubs had suddenly vanished from the scene, and only a vast expanse of pebbles and stones stretched out before the eyes of the travellers, hour after weary hour.

The first of the two box gum creeks that crossed the camel-mail pad followed by the party was known as the Nine Mile Creek, and the second was called the Fifteen Mile Creek.

Both creeks figured prominently in the myths of this desolate country which was, according to the Southern Aranda traditions, the land where Death had first come into the world.

How this had happened was related in the myth of the two Ntjikantja brothers of Ndapakiljara, a place situated not far from the Finke River several miles below Idracowra. At the beginning of time a shell parrot ancestress was said to have come to Ndapakiljara. She had become pregnant by her own will from the winds that had

been blowing upon her. She had given birth to twins, who had later assumed the shape of baby snakes belonging to the greenish-black and venomous ilbaralea species. After giving birth to her twins, the ancestress had once more turned into a shell parrot, soared up into the sky, and left her babies to fend for themselves. The two abandoned brothers grew at a magic pace to their full adult size, and then began to wander into the table mountain country that lay between the Nine Mile and Fifteen Mile Creeks. Sometimes they wandered about in the shape of ilbaralea snakes, sometimes in the guise of young men. When the mother finally returned to them, she swooped down from the sky like a bird, changed back into the shape of a woman, and offered one of her breasts to her sons. The younger brother, incensed at having been abandoned at birth, closed his mouth around her breast, turned himself into a snake, and bit it off. Then he resumed his human shape and hurled the breast to Bagatia, where it turned into a large breast-shaped hill.

The terrified mother, shrieking with pain, changed into a bird once more. She flew south for hundreds of miles to gather a band of avengers to kill her two treacherous sons. At length she came upon a great horde of Tangka warriors in the Lake Eyre country. These had banded themselves together in order to kill several other totemic ancestors who had perpetrated deeds of crime and murder against their nearest kinsfolk. The advance of the Tangka avengers on their circuitous journey of perhaps six hundred miles or more to the Fifteen Mile Creek was of necessity a very slow one. They suffered se-

vere casualties at Akara in the Simpson Desert, where hundreds of them fell to the spears of two ancestral eagle brothers who had previously murdered their cousin; and only a remnant of them escaped after the eagle brothers had finally had their arms broken by boomerangs thrown by a left-handed Tangka warrior. Even so there were still a hundred or more of them left, when the shell parrot ancestress at this point assumed leadership over them and guided them towards the lair of her sons.

When the warriors approached the Fifteen Mile Creek, the two Ntjikantja brothers grew afraid. They turned themselves into ilbaralea snakes and sloughed off their skins.

These skins, immortal like themselves, immediately became filled with flesh and bones. The brothers ordered these newly-formed snakes to crawl away towards the rough country where the Nine Mile Creek was to originate subsequently.

Then they hid themselves till night had fallen. The Tangka warriors, having quenched their thirst at the Undunja waterhole, went on a little further to camp on an open flat at Uralterinja. The brothers came forward to the blazing camp-fires of the warriors and mingled with them, pretending to be two innocent local young men; and the shell parrot ancestress herself failed to recognize them. Instead she offered herself to all of the southern warriors in turn, in order to strengthen them for their grim purpose: after union with the ancestress no man might flee to save his life, no matter how savagely the Ntjikantja brothers, whose presence at Uralterinja no one suspected, should strike back at him.

But the two brothers had a different plan for saving their own lives and for punishing the Tangka avengers. They roused the warriors in the darkest hour of the night and led them to a low rise a short distance away, where they challenged them to a spear-climbing contest. "Let each man stab his spear into the ground and attempt to climb up on it into the sky," they urged the surprised Tangka men. The southern warriors obeyed; but their spears proved useless for their intentions. At last a faint greying of the eastern sky showed that a new day was approaching. Triumphantly the Ntjikantja brothers thrust their own slim spear known as a walera into the ground. The spear immediately began to shoot upwards. It grew and grew till it touched the sky. At the order of the brothers, the southern warriors attempted to climb up on this magic spear; but they were unable to get very far and leaped down to the ground again. The brothers ordered the last inept warrior to descend, and gripped their walera with their own hands. The elder brother began his climb confidently; and he had no difficulty in penetrating into the vault of the sky. The awe-stricken Tangka men, who had gathered around the magic spear very closely when the elder brother had grasped it, fell back in shocked amazement when they saw his miraculous ascent. For the spear had turned into a serpent that rose into the sky and carried him with it. The younger brother followed in the same effortless manner. From the newly made opening in the sky the command of the Ntjikantja brothers came roaring down to the shocked warriors to pull the spear back to the earth. But none of the Tangka

men had the courage to touch the magic weapon. Thereupon the triumphant brothers pulled the spear up into the sky so that no man could follow them.

Proudly they proclaimed their new names to their duped enemies. The elder brother assumed the name of Koputangualka, "the Bushy-haired One", from the huge crest of eagle plumes that he was carrying on his head. The younger brother called himself Natnitjintika ("Climbed Up Sitting"), because he had climbed up into the sky, taking the walera between his legs. Blazing in the sky like two bright stars, the brothers now pronounced the curse that brought Death into the world - first of all to the Tangka warriors and then to all human beings of later ages that were to come after them: "You miserable death-doomed wretches, all of you must die now! You may never return from the earth while you are living, and you may never return after you have died!"

And now the first glimmers of orange and red appeared in the eastern sky. Terrified, the Tangka warriors picked up their useless spears. As soon as the morning light was strong enough for sighting tracks, they began looking for the footprints of the Ntjikantja brothers, not realizing that they had just seen them with their own eyes vanishing into the sky.

As soon as they sighted the two snakes that had come into being from the sloughed-off skins of the two brothers, the Tangka men rushed forward, killed them, cooked them, and devoured them, flinging only their bones away. After the meal they lay down and rested, happy in the belief that they had accomplished their dreaded

errand with unexpected ease. But the bones of the two immortal brothers came together again of their own accord, and soon two ilbaralea snakes crawled away once more. Moreover, their bodies had grown to a much bigger size than before. The surprised Tangka men pursued them again. They killed, cooked, and ate the two snakes as before, and flung their bones away a second time, only to see the snakes returning to full life once more. After several repetitions of this death and rebirth cycle, the two ilbaralea snakes had grown to such vast proportions that the Tangka men no longer dared even to approach them for fear of being swallowed by two gigantic monsters that could not be killed.

The track carved out by the fleeing snakes turned into the ever-broadening bed of the Nine Mile Creek. Where this creek entered the Finke, a large waterhole called Tjikara was formed. The two ilbaralea snakes, who had long since turned into huge water serpents, rushed into the depths of this waterhole and disappeared in it forever.

From that moment of time the two Ntjikantja brothers who had ascended into the sky had looked down in deep malice upon the earth and its human inhabitants in the form of the two Magellanic clouds; and all men and women had been compelled to die at the end of their days. The curse of the Ntjikantja brothers had taken away from mankind all hope of immortality.

Uralterinja, the site where the Tangka warriors had made their camp on the edge of the Fifteen Mile Creek, had come to be regarded as accursed ground; and the dwarf box gums standing on it, which vainly tried to grow any taller,

showed that the deadly magic of the brothers had saturated with its venom the whole of the camp ground of the southern visitors. The low rise from which the Ntjikantja brothers had made their successful ascent into the sky was looked upon fearfully as the very home of Death. Only men of mature years who belonged to the local snake totems were ever allowed to be taken to this dreaded site on special secret occasions. All men of other totems, as well as all women and children, were banned on pain of death from entering the several square miles of prohibited country that constituted the private domain of Death. Its very name was kept a secret that could be divulged only to the older snake totemic clansmen. To discourage idle speculation and to lessen the danger that curious prowlers might seek to catch an unauthorized glimpse of Death's own home, the rest of the local population (and this included all younger Southern Aranda snake men who had not yet been shown the secret site) were told the official lie that the Ntjikantja brothers had ascended into the sky at Tjikara.

This then was the myth explaining why a curse had been laid upon the upper reaches of the Fifteen Mile Creek, and why this arid and gloomy expanse in the heart of the table mountain region had become the Land of Death. Strehlow, who had passed Uralterinja somewhere about midnight, had not been able to view the sombre landscape; but Theo, who was seeing it in the middle of the day, felt intensely depressed by its almost ominous barrenness, even though he did not know the grim myth associated with it. The fierce dust-storm of the morning had brought up

mountainous thunderclouds from the north. At midday the storm began to ease considerably; and for the last mile or two before the van reached

Uralterinja an unnatural calm set in. It was now one o'clock in the afternoon. Suddenly a loud crash of thunder broke the silence. Heavy drops of rain began to fall noisily. A wild gale suddenly leapt into life, and the gnarled box gums marking the beginnings of the Fifteen Mile Creek bowed their thickly leaved crests before its tempestuous fury. Great branches were twisted as though they had been thin twigs, and hundreds of torn-off leaves could be seen scurrying helplessly across the shelterless expanse of pebble and stone.

Little dustclouds began to reveal the many-tailed trails of violent gusts across the hard ground. The donkeys laid their ears back close to their short, upright manes, and began to snort apprehensively. Fortunately Undunja waterhole was close at hand; and when the van reached its high bank, Njitiaka and Lornie stopped the donkeys and took refuge themselves in the totally inadequate shelter of the rocking van. For a few minutes it seemed as though the whole desolate landscape, whose unnatural darkness was lit up by sun-bright flashes of forked lightning, would be overwhelmed by the mad fury of driving wind and pelting rain. Then the reverberating rolls of thunder ceased as suddenly as they had begun, the heavy drops stopped falling, the storm died down and subsided, rifts appeared in the ominous cloud-banks above, and an almost breathless calm ensued. The brief burst of welcome,

rain-scented freshness that had come into the heated, dust-laden air departed again, and the heavy, sultry atmosphere was even more unpleasant and oppressive than it had been before.

As soon as the last fitful gusts had died away, Njitiaka and Lornie gathered up a few dry twigs which the storm had ripped off some of the box gums near the van, and lost no time in boiling the tea billies. For several hours past there had been no firewood along the track, nor was there any more firewood available before the next Finke crossing; and the travellers were not due to reach the latter much before sunset. The donkeys, too, were given a drink at Undunja, though they had travelled only fifteen miles since leaving Idracowra. For the heat of the morning had been unexpectedly fierce, and the next watering place would be at Horseshoe Bend.

A long, sultry, tiring afternoon followed upon the resumption of the journey. Hour after hour the van clattered over the pebble-strewn waste-lands, scarred deeply by sharp, ditch-like water-courses that had cut their way through the softer layers of clay and rock. These water-courses came down from the flanking line of table mountains south of Uralterinja.

Many of these mountains marked sites visited at the beginning of time by the crow ancestor of Mbalka. Theo watched with horrified fascination the wheel tracks made by his father's buggy the night before, particularly at the places where they crossed these sudden watercourses. Many of them were only about twenty feet wide, and their low, hard clay and rock banks descended

almost perpendicularly to a depth of two, or even three, feet at the camel pad crossings. It was clear from the wheel marks and the tracks of the struggling horses that the buggy had plunged down during the night into all of these watercourses with a violent jar that would almost have shaken the passengers off their seats, and that sometimes several harsh and jolting leaps by the rear horses had been necessary before the vehicle had bumped its way out of the deeper gutters again. Since the driver had had only the dim lantern lights carried by the two riders in front of the buggy team to guide him, it was amazing that the vehicle had not been overturned when hitting the sharpest and deepest of these ditches. What the totally exhausted sick man had been forced to suffer on his rough night ride through the Land of Death was almost beyond imagination. Occasionally the tracks showed that the buggy had halted for a while after gaining the top of the opposite bank of a gutter, probably in order to enable Strehlow to regain his breath after being flung hard against the back of his chair.

Somewhere near four o'clock in the afternoon the majestic, cone-shaped mountain of Kngeit-nama could be seen towering up against the sky several miles south of the track. Its mighty cone dominated the flat-topped mountains around it, just as a decorated ceremonial chief, wearing a sharp crest of white plumes, might loom up above a group of his followers who were carrying horizontal ornaments on their heads.

Kngeitnama, whose name meant "the Father is standing", was associated with a local rain myth. Its sharp and pointed crest was formed of

white rock, and from its broad and rounded base the land fell down steeply towards the green Finke Valley, which could be seen against the northern horizon. The sun came out from behind the clouds which were beginning to break up with the waning of the afternoon. At last some signs of life appeared - red-and-white, and mottled, Horseshoe Bend cattle, with their long, sharp horns, grazing among the juicy herbage that grew in the narrow beds of these sharp watercourses. Their slim cattle pads could be seen winding for miles in a northerly direction towards the waterholes in the well-timbered Finke Valley. The smell of the rain in the early afternoon had induced these cattle to come out into the barren table mountain country for some miles further south than usual - to the very ends of even their tiniest hair-root trails.

The buggy tracks now began to veer back towards the Finke Valley; and some time after six o'clock in the evening the iron-tyred wheels of the van ceased to clatter noisily. Instead they began to bite deeply into the soft ground that marked the edge of the box gum flats flanking the broad, sandy river bed. A large stockyard on the southern bank of the Finke indicated the proximity of the waterhole of Uleta.

The road had to cross the riverbed here, since the southern bank of the Finke at this point was formed by high cliff walls. These marked the trail of the Tangka men on their way to Uralter-inja. Behind these cliff walls rose some single flat-topped hills which indicated the haunts of an Ititilbiria bird ancestor who had once proudly pound his large heaps of grass seeds here in order to knead meal cakes from them.

The sun sank below the crests of the western table mountains as the van made its first crossing over the Finke below Uleta.

There was no time to halt for an evening meal. For the remainder of the journey to Horseshoe Bend the van followed the well-defined donkey waggon trail which led from the Uleta stockyard to Horseshoe Bend Station. The brief rainstorm that had hit the travellers at Undunja had not extended as far as the Finke cliffs below Uleta; and as the van moved slowly through the northern bordering box gum flats and stands of needle bush, it was enveloped and swallowed up by a cloud of warm and choking dust stirred up by the plodding, dragging feet of the tired donkeys. The wheels of the van sank deeply into the loose soil powdered up some weeks previously by the Horseshoe Bend waggon which had carted posts and rails for the cattle-yard, and firewood for the station population, from the splendid river gum and box gum stands in this area. The van wheels, being much narrower than those of the heavy waggon, cut at least three or four inches down into the loose ground which was a mixture of river sand and flood loam. The wooden fellies and the ends of the wheel spokes carried up tall, thin slices of powdered earth when rising; and the dust created by this soil when falling down obscured the lower parts of the wheels almost completely as the van moved forward slowly, evenly, relentlessly, without halt or pause, into the gathering gloom that was beginning to descend on the thick tree stands.

Two hours later a hot night lay in breathless oppressiveness over the dark landscape. The van

once more crossed the Finke in order to cut off a large bend, and the vehicle now moved over into the sandy silt flats bordering the southern bank of the river. The soil here was a mixture of white creek sand from the Finke and red sand from the mountainous dunes that flanked its southern overflow channels. This wide silt flat was covered with tussocks of tall cane grass; and the bare ground between these tussocks had been gouged out deeply by the heavy floods of the previous year.

The surface of the silt flat was accordingly very rough, and bumpy with hillocks a foot or eighteen inches high. The height of these hillocks was due to the fact that the dense network of roots under the cane grass tussocks had enabled the ground covered by them to withstand the gouging action of the ripping, tearing flood-waters. The springless van began to lurch and bump like a drunken thing in a thicket-like darkness unrelieved by any vehicle lights; and Theo decided to complete the final miles of the journey on foot. Njitiaka had long since tied the reins of the leading donkeys to the curved piece of flat iron projecting over the tool-box mounted on the front of the van, for the donkeys could be relied on to follow the tracks of the station waggon without any deviations. They moved forward with surprising briskness although they had already covered a distance of more than thirty miles from Idracowra. They seemed to sense that a few miles further on they would come to journey's end; and that would mean water, feed, and rest after a hot day and a long, hard pull. Njitiaka's occasional harsh barks were not really needed any longer, but he kept on

shouting at the donkeys from sheer force of habit. Theo could not help marvelling at his seemingly iron-lined throat, which had enabled him to keep calling out loudly for some fourteen hours with few breaks of any length.

And so the last miles were covered, chain by chain, yard by yard, step by step. Theo put down one bare foot before the other almost mechanically, sometimes wondering whether the long-expected station lights would ever come into view. There was no moon; and though the stars were shining, their brightness, too, seemed to have been dimmed by the heavy pall of dust that still hung in the atmosphere after the wild storm gusts of the morning. Because of the darkness which blotted out all the more distant objects, such as the hills and the dunes, it often seemed as though neither the van nor the team was moving forward at all. In spite of all movement the travellers seemed to be marking time; and even the closer trees passed by them seemed to reappear again and again. From time to time Theo would ask how much further the station was, and Njitiaka would bark out gruffly in pidgin English that it was "close up now-little bit long way yet".

And then, when Theo was beginning to walk and to stumble like a sleepwalker, the van, which for a while had been heading directly towards a dark cliff bank on the eastern side of the river, turned in a more southerly direction. A few minutes later the dim lights of a couple of storm lanterns could be seen blinking uncertainly beyond the southern end of this cliff bank from somewhere on the rising ground across the white river bed. The donkeys slipped down a

steep decline into the loose sand of the deeply scoured-out main channel of the Finke. There came a hard and heavy pull through the fine, powdery river crossing and a hard and steep pull up the high and sharply rising bank on the far side.

Then the van rolled slowly past the stockyard gallows, from whose high cross-beam the carcass of a freshly slaughtered bullock was hanging, split down its middle. A pack of half-starved camp dogs, sniffing and wallowing amid the strong-smelling mess of bullock blood and fresh manure, slunk off snarling as the travellers went past them to the front of the Horseshoe Bend Hotel, some chains further on. The van pulled up in front of the hotel verandah. It was ten thirty in the evening.

Dark men and women came forward to help Njitiaka and Lornie with unharnessing the sweating, snorting donkeys.

The swags were tossed off quickly. Heinrich came forward and took Theo to the kitchen. Mrs Strehlow greeted her son briefly and then rushed back inside. A quick supper ended a long day's journey for the party, all of whom were too tired for any conversations. Everyone wanted to go to sleep as quickly as possible.

Njitiaka, Lornie, and Titus carried their swags to their friends in the camp, which was situated across a deep natural gutter. These gave them sleeping room in their tin shacks for the night. Theo was bedded down on an iron stretcher placed on the hotel verandah outside the room in which his parents had been put up. He was glad of the waterbag hanging from the verandah rafters close to his bed - he had not been able

to stop drinking all day, and the water in this bag seemed deliciously cool after the constant great draughts of lukewarm and hot water which he had been consuming on the long journey.

His queries after his father's health were answered with curt briefness by people who were feeling just as tired as he was. The buggy had arrived at Horseshoe Bend only at ten o'clock in the morning. His father had scarcely been able to stand the cruel bumps over the pebble-strewn country among the table mountains during the night; and when the hot morning sun had begun to pour down its fires on him, he had been seized by an asphyxiating bout of asthmatic breathlessness. He had gasped for air for at least half an hour back in the first box gum flat before the buggy had been able to move on. Only the thought of being put in telephone communication with medical aid had given him the necessary strength to complete the last few miles to the hotel. The heat of his first day at Horseshoe Bend - well over a hundred degrees in the shade - had further exhausted him. He was asleep at last, but he had needed a heavier dose of laudanum than ever before.

**Thursday, the nineteenth day of October,
1922**

THE HORSESHOE BEND area had been remarkable for its cruel heatwaves for as long as human memory went back, and long before that time; for the main totemic sites in this region were all associated in some way with fire or with the scorching heat of the summer sun.

The station had been built on a site known as Par'Itirka ("Incestuous Gum Tree"), so called from a large old gum growing on the bank of the Finke River near the station stockyard. This ancient tree with its swollen trunk figured in a mythical episode describing Par'Itirka as the home of devastating summer heat from the very beginning of time.

The major mythological sites closest to Horseshoe Bend were all situated along the high rocky cliffs which marked the left bank of the Finke from a point located about a mile upstream from the station down to the rockholes of Gula situated about three miles downstream. The furthest rocky bank upstream was the high cliff of Pot'Intinja, the "White-haired Mountain", which was known also as Ingodna, the "Spark of Fire". At Ndaterkaterka and Gula began a number of totemic sites associated with parties of ancestral carpet snakes. The main ceremonial centre among all these sites was Pot'Arugutja, the "Stone Women". The local myth of Pot'Arugutja related that at the beginning of time there had been a camp of ancestresses here belonging to the ntjira grass-seed totem. These ntjira women had been under the guidance of two female chiefs who were sisters and who bore the names of Lakuta and Ulirtjata. The two sisters

had a nephew who, like them and the ntjira women, was remarkable for his very light, copper-coloured skin. Ntjira grass is a sandhill grass with reddish seeds; and these ancestral ntjira folk had kept the copper-coloured skins commonly found among the more light-skinned, new-born Aranda babies. The two sisters of Pot'Arugutja sent their nephew with escorts up to the Northern Aranda centre of Rubuntja, a lofty outrigger mountain rising high above the plains situated north of Ljaba, the great honey-ant home of the western MacDonnells. Rubuntja belonged to the fire totem; and a spark of fire from Rubuntja had landed at Inggodna some time earlier. The ntjira boy was to be initiated into manhood at Rubuntja and then returned to his relatives at Pot'Arugutja.

But the fire totemic ancestors of Rubuntja, whose bodies were all coal-black, like the burnt stumps of the trees which their bushfires had incinerated around their mountain, became fascinated with the red-coloured boy and decided to keep him after his initiation. When the time came for his return, they substituted one of their own new initiates for their visitor, and sent this black-skinned novice, escorted by a large party of Rubuntja men, back to Pot'Arugutja. The ntjira sisters went out eagerly to meet the Rubuntja party and came upon them at Pot'lluntja, a flat in the sandhills, several miles north of Inggodna. But one glance at the dark-skinned substitute novice was enough to reveal to the sisters the treacherous trick that had been played on them. Angrily they poured on the ground the stone-ground meal of ntjira grass seeds they had brought in their wooden

vessels as a gift for the Rubuntja visitors. They refilled their empty vessels with draughts of magic poison and offered this to the thirsty men. The men drank deeply of the poison, and followed their hostesses back to Pot'Arugutja. But it was not long before the Rubuntja men began to feel sick. Some of them vomited and died before reaching Inggodna, others succumbed after they had reached the main ntjira camp at Pot'Arugutja. As soon as the last of the treacherous northern men had died in the windbreak of the Pot'Arugutja women, the ntjira sisters gathered up their wooden vessels, refilled them with grass seeds, and strode eastwards to Jitutna, a place located in the high dune country east of Horseshoe Bend. They bore themselves triumphantly; and the brilliant red-and-black cockatoo feathers which rose high from their heads symbolized the flowering tufts of ntjira grass that sprouted up everywhere they went. Wherever the Rubuntja men had vomited, heaps of black pebbles came into being. These were believed to contain the fiery essence of the Rubuntja visitors. The Horseshoe Bend men used to visit them during the freezing spells of mid-winter in order to perform rites designed to draw down greater warmth from the winter sun above so that the hunters could go out after game in excessively cold weather. A small fire of dry saltbush twigs would be lit over these heaps, and the black pebbles would be stirred up in the hot ashes. During this procedure the following special fire verses used to be chanted:
Let the afternoon sun shower down its sparks!
Let the afternoon sun send down its fire!
From the crown of the sun's head let the sparks

fly out!

From the crown of the sun's head let them
spread out fan-wise!

From the hollow of the shield let the white heat
glow down!

From the hollow of the shield let the fire shower
down!

During summer, on the other hand, these pebble heaps were carefully avoided and the charm verses belonging to them were never uttered, lest their inherent magic power should cause the sun to scorch to death both men and animals; for the very presence of these black pebble heaps at Ingodna was believed to be one of the reasons for the long and fierce heat-waves that afflicted the Horseshoe Bend area each summer.

Ingodna was, however, only one of the totemic sites associated with fire and hence with the heat of the summer sun. Two other sites further downstream were believed to be even more potent. The first was Uralirbuka, whose name meant "Where the fire went underground". Here was a huge cave where the bushfires that had burned their way at the beginning of time from distant western Paranerka towards the Finke Valley were believed to have gone underground. The trail left behind by these bushfires between Paranerka and Uralirbuka was marked by a long, low line of black hills.

But the most potent of all these primal fire sites was Mbalka, a pyramid-shaped mountain about sixteen miles south of Horseshoe Bend. Mbalka had been the home of a malicious crow ancestor who had flitted about over this unfortunate land and lit devastating bushfires whenever he flew

down from the sky. The fiercest fires had raged around Mbalka itself, striking terror into all other totemic ancestors for many miles around lest the whole countryside should in the end be utterly consumed by roaring tornadoes of leaping, billowing flames. Huge resin-charged spinifex tussocks exploded noisily as the shrieking flood of fire cascaded over the sandhills, and the beautiful green pmekua bushes on their crests quickly turned into scorched brown shrubs and began sprouting little flames from their drooping branch tips.

Thick stands of cane grass started to smoke as soon as the sudden blast of heat swept over them. All the mulgas, bloodwoods, and mallee trees turned into swaying pillars of fire, and their limbs became crackling torches of flames. So fierce was the blaze that even the finest grass roots were scorched black in the hot soil, while the roots of the larger trees smouldered and turned into grey ashes many feet below the surface of the ground. Long twisting tongues of flame broke off from the main billows of the conflagration, shooting skyward like red-and-yellow evil spirits. The roar of this devastating, storm-fanned blaze sometimes resembled the mad howl of a tornado and sometimes the rushing noise of a great flood of water that had risen high above the restraining level of its river banks. Helpless marsupials, lizards, and snakes died in their thousands, unable to escape from this vast lake of fire, whose lapping tongues often shot out suddenly for hundreds of yards into thickly grassed or well-timbered plots of country, and then curled and twisted around till their tips of flame met, encircling and trapping fur-

ther helpless populations of singed and trembling animals. In the sky above large flocks of screaming parrots and cockatoos could be seen fleeing from the fury of the blaze below. Though most of these ancestral birds were able to effect their escape, the black, red, and grey feathers in the plumage of their later bird descendants were believed to reveal how close they had come to finding death in the merciless blast furnace below.

For in the Aranda-speaking area the pink and red feathers of these parrots and cockatoos were taken to symbolize the colour of the leaping flames, the black feathers the dead bodies of charred birds, and the grey feathers the ashes of birds totally consumed by the blaze. This destructive, howling bushfire lasted for many days.

Each night the cloudbank of black smoke hanging low over Mbalka glowed dark red on its underside from the vastness of the reflected conflagration below. At last, when the unbridled insolence of the crow ancestor had reached its peak of destructiveness, two rain ancestors from distant Erea, a long lagoon situated close to the final floodouts of the Finke River, approached Mbalka with stealthy steps. As they drew nearer, the ground grew dark under the huge shadows of their accompanying retinue of rainclouds; and one night they surprised the crow ancestor himself, clad in his black coat of fire-charred feathers, while he was gloating in high arrogance at Mbalka over the bushfires that were raging and roaring about him on all sides. Heavy rain began to gush and pour in torrents from the clouds accompanying the two

Erea ancestors. Soon the vast lakes of fire were turned into seas of water, and clouds of steam hissed up from the sizzling tree skeletons and charred stumps. The crow ancestor himself was drowned by the overwhelming fury of this rain-storm; for the sheer weight of the water poured down from above was too heavy to permit him to unfold his wings in flight.

But though the rain ancestors of Erea had quenched the primal fires of Mbalka, this mountain was still believed to shelter eternal heat and flames under its vast and heavy mass.

Any frivolous performance of its secret fire rites by "the human beings of later days" was believed to have the power to recall into existence and to fan into sudden fury disastrous bushfires throughout the land; and these bushfires would in turn magically induce the summer sun to increase its heat to such a dangerously high level that men and animals everywhere would be scorched to death. Hence the fire rites of Mbalka were carefully kept a close secret by the old leaders of the local fire totemic clan; and they were performed only on the rarest occasions, particularly during long and unusually frosty winters.

The very existence of Mbalka and Uralirbuka, of Inggodna and Par'Itirka, was believed to keep up a constant threat of heat and fire over the Horseshoe Bend country.

Since this local group area also included the Land of Death around Undunja and Uralterinja, the Horseshoe Bend clansmen enjoyed a most unfortunate notoriety in the Aranda-speaking country: all of their major totems were of a kind that increased the afflictions of mankind; and

any reports of the performances of the Horse-shoe Bend sacred ceremonies were greeted with noticeable lack of enthusiasm by all Aranda groups who were living adjacent to this area. Horseshoe Bend was fully living up to its mythical reputation as a heat-creating totemic centre on that oppressive Thursday morning which awakened the two parties of tired travellers that had arrived from Idracowra on the previous day: the temperature had not gone much below the nineties during the night, and the mercury in the thermometers had quickly climbed back to the century mark by ten o'clock in the morning. At this hour hot north-westerly gusts were whirling and whipping up the sand from the dunes and the river flat on the far side of the Finke into shrieking waves of yellowish-brown dust which kept dashing against the barren, rocky expanse on which the station stood and hurling themselves in fury against the groaning metal sides and roof of the hotel building. The latter was a wood and iron structure the roof and the outside walls had been constructed from sheets of corrugated iron, and the inside walls and the ceilings from ornamental figured tin. On a hot day the heat inside the hotel was virtually unbearable, and the only relatively cool spots for its guests were to be found under the shade of the verandahs which protected all four sides of the hotel. Strehlow, who was too ill to be moved except for the most necessary purposes, was forced to sit in his chair and to endure the near bake-oven temperatures of his tin-lined room even during the hottest hours of the day. At the same time, he was rather more comfortably off than he would have been had he

stayed in the log-house at Idracowra. For the Horseshoe Bend Hotel was Gus Elliot's pride and joy, and its furnishings gave expression to his desire to provide a home fit for occupation by his city-born wife who had come here as a bride from Melbourne. City dwellers might have regarded the temperatures inside the hotel rooms during hot summer spells as excessively high, but this opinion was not generally shared by the Central Australian guests. The men and women who lived in this country were used to toiling long hours out the open under a broiling sun in summer, and to sleeping and eating in rudely-constructed bush shacks that lacked virtually all the amenities of civilized living. By contrast, the Horseshoe Bend hotel had been put up by professional labour, and all its materials had been brought up from the south at heavy expense. At the time of its construction it had been considered to be perhaps the most modern hotel building in Central Australia. Hence though it contained only half a dozen bedrooms, these were all distinguished from each other not by numbers but by names, such as "the Sullivan room", and so on.

On that Thursday morning it seemed as though the mythical ancestresses of Pot'Arugutja had, after destroying the northern visitors from Rubuntja, left all their baleful influences behind when they left for Jitutna, so as to ensure a harmful and deadly reception for the sick man who had come to their deserted windbreak from the precincts of the north-western MacDonnells. The hot, dust-drowned landscape could not have looked grimmer and more hostile than it did on that unfriendly morning.

Strehlow was much lower in point of physical strength and mental alertness than he had been only the day before. Mercifully perhaps, his overwrought mind began to wander every now and then; and in his moments of delirium he did not seem to be conscious of those excruciating pains that had begun to rack his body most of the time. But these fits never lasted very long, and then his low moans would show how much pain the very act of taking breath was causing him. The lower portion of his body, from his chest downward, had become swollen to such an extent that he could no longer put on any clothes; and his lower limbs hence had to be covered with a sheet during the day and with a threadbare blanket at night. From the chest upward his body had wasted away till all his ribs and most of his bones were visible in clear outline. His once powerful hands had become so thin and emaciated that his wedding ring had fallen off his left hand a couple of hours after his arrival at Horseshoe Bend.

While Strehlow sat helplessly in his room, the men and women around him were sparing no efforts in their battle to save his life. The owner of Horseshoe Bend Station and the proprietor of its hotel, Gus Elliot, had made many long telephone calls on the previous day. The doctor from Marree who was staying at the Oodnadatta Hostel had been contacted several times, even though his medical advice remained of necessity singularly ineffective. There were no medicines at Horseshoe Bend that could be recommended for the patient's treatment; and the only possible remaining measure of relief-surgically tapping the sick man's swollen body - had to be de-

ferred till the doctor himself could reach the sick man. The telephone news about the possibility of car transport, however, had been most reassuring. The doctor had been only too willing to undertake the trip to Charlotte Waters in the event that a suitable local car and an experienced bush driver should be found. Acting on further special pleas made by Pastor Stolz by telephone from Charlotte Waters on Wednesday midday, two hours after Strehlow's arrival at Horseshoe Bend, Joe Breaden had at last consented to take the doctor to Charlotte Waters. The twenty-four-hour delay in Breaden's final answer had been caused by the necessity for making arrangements that would ensure adequate petrol supplies for the car: there were no commercial refuelling points located north of Oodnadatta. The doctor, too, had been compelled to make arrangements for an anticipated lengthy absence from his usual place of duty. He was the medical officer responsible for attending to the health problems of the railway employees, and was normally stationed at Marree. He visited Oodnadatta only once a fortnight, on the weekend when the fortnightly passenger train reached this northern rail terminus. However, the comforting fact remained that Stolz's final telephone call from Charlotte Waters had definitely clinched the matter of car transport; and Joe Breaden and the doctor now hoped to leave Oodnadatta on Thursday or Friday. Their car was expected to reach Charlotte Waters some time on Friday or Saturday; and the doctor had agreed to continue his journey from the telegraph station to Horseshoe Bend in Gus Elliot's buggy.

Augustus Henry Elliot, who was universally known as Gus Elliot, was a strongly built, well-set-up man, who despite his greying moustache and growing portliness still moved around with very brisk, firm steps. He had been one of the early Finke River pioneers; and, like most other elderly white men in Central Australia, he was very sensitive about his real age. No one, not even his closest friends, knew for certain the year in which he had been born though many people made shrewd guesses at it.

His parents had been among the first settlers who had moved into the Flinders Ranges in the 1850s. His father, Albin Walter Elliot, had been a station contractor, married to Maria Elizabeth Hughes. The normal work done by station contractors at that time consisted of fencing and well-sinking; and hence Gus Elliot's father had been involved in the uncertain fortunes of the early pioneers as they pressed forward into the Flinders Ranges "to open up new country" for pastoral purposes. The local aboriginal population had not been "co-operative" towards the white new-comers who were pushing them off their tribal lands; and there had been numerous "incidents". When referring to those early times, Gus's sympathies were, naturally enough, on the side of the pioneer settlers. "Well, what else could you expect?" he would exclaim to the hotel guests. "The pioneers came to open up new country. They brought their stock and they had to have labour - not easy to get in those days, I can tell you! Not one of the old niggers'd work for them, only some of the kids came along - boys of fourteen and fifteen or less. The pioneers would teach them to handle sheep, then

one day the old folk'd come and tell them to run away. Now what could the pioneers do? They'd got their holdings from the Lands Office in Ade-laide, and were paying rent on them, and any-way the niggers had never done anything with the land before the white man came into this country. The police wouldn't help them in any way - in fact, lots of the settlers were too far out to call the police when trouble started. So when the boys ran away, all the settlers could do was to ride after them, bring them back, and give them a good hiding with a stockwhip to teach them they couldn't just walk out on their jobs and let the sheep get killed by dingoes or let them die without water. After that the old niggers'd start making trouble. They didn't often attack the homesteads - they usually started killing sheep or cattle, and there was no way of catching them. If the police came, they were weeks late getting there; and mostly they took no action unless you could tell them what nig-gers'd done it. As if any of the settlers would've known! In any case, there weren't enough po-lice in the whole of the bloody State to protect the poor battling cows in the outback from the thieving niggers in those days! All the pioneers could do was to get together when things got too tough. Then they'd go out in parties and raid the niggers' camps and knock the thieving bas-tards over with bullets. Never got very many, of course: bush niggers're pretty cunning, and their camps were hard to find, and they'd all run like rabbits if they saw a party of settlers com-ing up on horseback. But after some years eve-rything quietened down. The niggers had enough sense to realize that they just couldn't

walk around the country killing sheep and cattle, and they got to respecting the white man's property. They settled down pretty well after that, and some of 'em worked jolly hard for the pioneers. It was only during the first few years that things were really tough down in the Flinders."

Gus Elliot, who had been born at Quorn, remembered how excellent this district had been in his boyhood days for grazing sheep and cattle. It had been first-class saltbush country, and he regretted that so much of it had in later years been foolishly ploughed up for wheat farming - an industry that had never been safe in that area because of the low and erratic rainfall. "A lot o' good sheep country was ruined by ploughing, and the wheat cockies never got a proper living out of it," he claimed. "Those government blokes in Adelaide should've had more sense than trying to get people to grow wheat at Quorn, Hawker, and other bloody dry places like that."

Upon reaching manhood Gus had become caught up in the general excitement that spread like wildfire among the younger South Australian station hands and men on the land. Many of the more adventurous spirits saddled up their horses and went out into the relatively unknown regions of the Centre which had become publicized through the journals of the first inland explorers to cross the Northern Territory border, notably John McDouall Stuart and Ernest Giles. The latter had traversed the greater part of the Finke River Valley in 1872; and the completion of the Overland Telegraph Line furnished a safe overland route through the interior of the coun-

try from the same year onward. Men rode far and wide on horses, seeking land and adventure. Only a minority of those who went out stayed long enough, or lived sufficiently interesting lives, to earn spaces for their names in the history of Central Australia. The Henbury plaque, for instance, omitted at least as many names as it mentioned.

Thus the name of George Elliot, who acted as station cook at Henbury in the time of the Parke brothers, was not remembered on this brass plate; but since he was Leisha's white father, his numerous part-aboriginal descendants played a most important role among the stockmen and station workers from whose labours came the profits made from Henbury and Idracowra stations by their various owners.

Not all of the men who rushed forward into the vast spaces of the inland waited for the new areas to be surveyed, or even to be leased to them. In Central Australia, as elsewhere, the advancing tongues of the forward-sweeping flood of the more restless pioneers ranged far ahead of the often rather sluggish forces of cautious and slothful officialdom. In fact, one of the great attractions of the outback for its early white settlers was that here was a country where men whose lack of money and education made their chances of success rather slim elsewhere received their opportunity to become owners and masters of the land their eyes had first surveyed.

A second category of pioneers consisted of men who had come up against the forces of law and order in the longer established regions of settlement, and who hoped to get a second chance of

life in the outback. Nor should the dark feminine attractions of Central Australia for many of the first white pioneers - almost all of whom were males - be minimized. As Mounted Constable Willshire was to express it later on in one of his books: "Men would not remain so many years in a country like this if there were no women, and perhaps the Almighty meant them for use as He has placed them wherever the pioneers go. Surely if the "Contagious Diseases Act" is legalised in British possessions, then what I am speaking about is only natural, especially for men who are isolated away in the bush at out-stations where women of all ages and sizes are running at large."

But these more or less realistic, and materialistic, reasons would not by themselves have provided such a powerful impelling force for young Australian men in the latter half of the nineteenth century if the inland itself had not added its own mysterious call to their receptive ears. Youth is, after all, both the period of idealism and the time when love of adventure for its own sake grips the imagination; and many young country lads responded to the appeal of the inland with an impetuous enthusiasm that city dwellers who have been cooped up all their lives within the dull confines of large house-covered areas find almost impossible to grasp. Yet to those who have experienced it in their own youth, the call of the bush is something that they can never forget, even in their declining years. For the bush is a free land that no man has ever succeeded in taming finally, let alone in conquering. In its ageless immensity, small spirits felt ennobled and timid spirits embold-

ened, while strong spirits became tinged with heroism.

When he first arrived in the Centre - in 1880, according to the Henbury plaque -, Gus Elliot had been one of the pioneers at the original Glen Helen Station settlement known as Mangama, which was located on the Ormiston River near the junction point where it merged with the Davenport River to form the Finke. He could have been about twenty three years of age at that time. From Mangama he had taken a number of long rides into the still unexplored country west of Glen Helen. He had even reached the spring on the northern side of the Mt Liebig complex, though this mountain was located close to the western termination of the MacDonnell Ranges, some two hundred miles west of Alice Springs. He had found the waters of this spring flowing down a gully for several hundred yards into potentially good cattle country. All of Elliot's long rides had been undertaken during the early days of the Hermannsburg settlement, about a decade before Strehlow's arrival in 1894. But during the 1880s the Western MacDonnell Ranges and the Mt Liebig country had been far too densely populated by aboriginal tribesmen for the peace of mind of the early white stock-owners, who had to be prepared to suffer heavy stock losses if they set up stations in what were at that time still undisputed Western Aranda and Kukatja tribal areas. After staying for several years at Mangama, Gus Elliot had moved into the safer cattle country located downstream from Hermannsburg. He left behind him a half-caste son, whose mother Utnea came from the Mangama area. This half-caste son,

who was called Gus Elliot after his father according to normal Central Australian custom, was brought up at Hermannsburg, and later christened Michael. Some time after leaving Glen Helen, Gus Elliot had become the junior partner of Edwin Hooper Sargeant (commonly known as Ted Sargeant), the new owner of Horseshoe Bend Station; and the two men had jointly established an hotel here and become its joint proprietors. Horseshoe Bend Station had originally been sited on the left bank of the Finke near Inggodna. This "old station" had been built by "Dickie" Warburton - the man who had eventually sold out to Sargeant. It was only after Sargeant had taken in Elliot as his partner that the station was moved about a mile down to its present site of Par'ltirka. The new site was above the level of the highest Finke floods, and a shallow well near the new stockyard yielded water rather less brackish than that available at the original homestead. Because of its shallowness, this well could be worked by a rotary pump, with the donkeys moving in circles as they turned the main horizontal pumping lever. Elliot's affairs had prospered greatly after his move from Mangama to Horseshoe Bend. In 1912 the death of E. H. Sargeant had made him the senior member of the new partnership of Elliot and ("young Harry") Sargeant (the two names being transposed in this way to indicate the change in seniority): "Young Harry" Sargeant was the son of "Old Ted" Sargeant. And finally, on 30th August, 1913, he had married, in the South Melbourne Baptist Church, a Victorian girl, Ruby Elizabeth Martin, who had been born as a labourer's daughter in Geelong.

At the time of her marriage Ruby had been twenty years of age. Just before their engagement Elliot had told his future bride that his age was twice her own, and on the day of the wedding he had amended this figure and set it down on his marriage certificate as forty eight years. But the old hands in the Finke stations area claimed that Elliot must have been at least fifty six years of age on this occasion. The Elliots had had one child - a daughter called Sheila. Sheila, who was now eight years old, was not present at Horseshoe Bend when the Strehlow family arrived. She had already been sent down to Melbourne for her schooling.

Though Elliot was by now undoubtedly in his middle sixties, he still lived a surprisingly active life. His marriage to a young woman seemed to have rejuvenated him, and given him the freshness and the vigour of a young man.

Hence no one could see anything strange in his offering to race down eighty miles in a buggy to Charlotte Waters in less than a day and a half, pick up the doctor on his arrival, and then turn around without a break in order to speed back in the same space of time or even less. Perhaps, too, his young wife's heroic achievement of riding seventy miles in twenty four hours over rough country without taking a rest had given him additional inspiration to attempt a similar or even greater endurance feat.

Elliot was the perfect host to the Hermannsburg travellers that morning. Normally breakfast was eaten as a rushed meal at Horseshoe Bend; for, like all other cattlemen during the summer months, Elliot attempted to get most of the station work done in the morning hours before the

day grew intolerably hot. But with a true bushman's courtesy he realized that Mrs Strehlow needed to be taken out of herself and given a break from her own anxieties at least during mealtimes; and he was only too willing to indulge in his reminiscences about the by-gone pioneering days in order to divert her thoughts temporarily into new channels.

Mrs Strehlow had last enjoyed Elliot's hospitality ten years earlier, on the occasion when Ted Sargeant had suddenly died at the hotel. She and her husband, when returning from long leave, had been struggling to get back to Hermannsburg on the dry and desolate road leading north from Oodnadatta. Progress had been painfully slow because of the exhausted condition of the mission horses. She and Theo had walked many miles, both in front of and behind the van, during its snail-like progress over the gibber plains: one night they had even walked in front of the exhausted van horses for two hours, carrying a storm-lantern in order to guide the driver along the telegraph line to Blood's Creek. Strehlow had held the reins, while the dark coachman had walked beside the team to urge it along with incessant whipcracks. Walking had been a more comfortable mode of progress than sitting on the springless van, whose bumps over the pebble-strewn gibber flats had threatened to dislocate all the vertebrae in the backbones of the travellers. Even Jakobus, who was bringing up the loose horses, had been forced to drive them on foot at one stage since the saddle horses were too knocked up to bear a rider. On the forenoon of the day on which they had left Old Crown Point they had been met in the

stony, undulating country near Cunningham's Gap by a mounted dark stockman who was driving four fresh buggy horses towards them. He had handed over a letter from Elliot, advising them that his partner, Ted Sargeant, had died early that very morning, and requesting Strehlow to accept the loan of these horses so that Sargeant could be given a Christian funeral on the same afternoon.

With the aid of these four fresh horses a quick dash had been made over the remainder of the distance. The horses had galloped over a good part of these final twenty two miles.

Horseshoe Bend had been reached by a quarter to four in the afternoon; and Strehlow had conducted Sargeant's funeral immediately afterwards, for the hot March weather would not have permitted the mourners to delay the burial of the body any longer.

Mrs Strehlow, who had been greatly surprised on the previous afternoon by the relatively small number of dark folk she had seen at the station, was curious to know the reasons for this decline. "I think I saw many more people here last time," she remarked to Elliot at the breakfast table; "there don't seem to be many left now."

"You're right there," Elliot replied. "That Spanish influenza did it, three years ago. The blacks here died like flies, and it was the same everywhere, all the way down to Oodnadatta."

"Yes, we heard about the Oodnadatta epidemic from the Kramers two years ago," replied Mrs Strehlow. "Mr Kramer helped the police to bury the dead. So many died that the rest all fled out bush and did not stop even to bury their relatives. It must have been a terrible time."

"It certainly was," interrupted Mrs Elliot.
"Hundreds of them died within a few weeks at Oodnadatta. It was the same at all stations between there and here; and nobody'll ever know how many died out bush after they'd rushed away from the stations. I'll tell you how bad things were at that time. Gus sent out old Gallagher Tom, one of our best stockboys, with five other boys to take some cattle down to The Charlotte. There was nothing wrong with any of them when they left. And then, ten days later, old Tom came riding back on his own, with a couple o' packhorses. He was in tears when he walked up to Gus. He and the others had all caught the 'flu from some of the New Crown boys. The other five boys had died on the track, and only old Tom had managed to come back alive. Of course, they'd lost the cattle and the rest of the plant, and Tom was frightened that Gus'd be wild with him. But, of course, we only felt sorry for the poor old thing, and for the other boys, too - a couple of them had been our very best stockboys. Old Tom was ill for another month or so before he could come back to work. But we got our horses and most of our cattle back at the next New Crown muster."

"Yes, old Tom Pearce down at The New Crown is a jolly good bloke," added Elliot. "Absolutely honest - never played a dirty trick on anyone all his life. He was one o' the characters in Mrs Gunn's *We of the Never Never*, you know. He's called 'Mine Host' in that book."

"And is that why there are so few people here in the camp now?" Mrs Strehlow asked, with a note of obvious concern in her voice.

"Yes and no," replied Elliot, and put his cutlery

down against the side of his plate. "You see, the blacks're dying out pretty fast everywhere in these parts. When I first came up here as a young chap, the whole country was just thick with blacks. They were everywhere, and it was pretty hard for a cattleman to keep his stock safe from their spears. Just let me give you an idea of what things were like then. You could see big, laughing camps of niggers - beg pardon, blacks - in mobs of eighty or a hundred, at every big waterhole along the Finke River; and they were just as thick along the Palmer, the Lilla, the Goyder, and even down at that god forsaken dump, The Charlotte. Well, they never seemed to have many kids, at least not after us whites came into this country; and few of the kids they had ever lived long. By the time the 'flu hit them, there were no blacks living along the Finke in camps of their own any more. What was left of them had moved to the stations. The 'flu just speeded up things like. Some folk down south're starting to complain that the early settlers must've shot them in their hundreds; but I tell you most of them just went off naturally - no resistance, just had no will to live, it seems. Anyway, the blacks've always been treated very well on this station, and on most other stations on the Finke as well."

"They're not dying out at Hermannsburg," put in Mrs Strehlow softly, "and there are plenty of children up there."

"That's what everybody tells us," confirmed Mrs Elliot.

"You and your husband must take most of the credit for that, though I don't know how you've done it."

A happy smile stole for a moment over Mrs Strehlow's worn and tired face. "Thank you, Mrs Elliot," she said warmly, "it's so good of you to say so. My husband and I have just tried to do our duty, and perhaps God has blessed our work."

Elliot, who had the normal bushman's aversion to hearing the name of the Almighty mentioned except in certain blasphemous stock phrases, looked a little uncomfortable at this last remark. He twirled the ends of his light-grey moustache a couple of times with his fingers, and then announced that it was time for him to leave the table and attend to some station matters. And so the breakfast party broke up - Elliot went out and summoned his stockboys, Mrs Elliot retired into her kitchen, Mrs Strehlow returned to the sickroom, Heinrich moved out under the verandah and started chatting to two other hotel guests, and Theo was glad to be able to escape to his friends in the aboriginal camp.

Elliot left Horseshoe Bend in the early afternoon. His horses were fresh and well-fed, and he anticipated reaching Charlotte Waters about noon next day. The ground to be covered consisted mainly of bare plains and undulating stony country. There was only one long and difficult sandy stretch on this road - the three notorious Finke crossings at Old Crown Point, twenty six miles south of Horseshoe Bend; but these crossings were not expected to worry unduly a spirited team of fresh horses pulling a light and unloaded buggy, with Elliot and a dark stockman as the only passengers.

Elliot's departure was attended by the usual clamour of dozens of campdogs which barked

furiously and rushed madly after the buggy as it rapidly climbed up into the steep and fairly narrow cutting carved from the cliffs east of the station; but the trotting horses outdistanced them at a fast pace, and the buggy soon reached the top of the rock wall flanking the Finke Valley on the eastern side. It then swung over the red ridge of a dune crest beyond the cliff tops, and was completely lost to view. About half a mile from the station the buggy passed a lonely grave. It was that of a prospector who had tried to walk the twenty six miles from Old Crown Point to Horseshoe Bend at the turn of the century during the time of the Arltunga gold rush. He had attempted to cover this distance on a hot summer day; but he had already drained his waterbag dry after walking little more than the first twelve miles. A few hours later he became delirious from thirst, and his pace had lessened with every mile walked in the scorching heat. His strength had finally given out when he had almost reached the one remaining sand-dune which lay between him and safety. Had he walked the last few chains to its crest, he would have caught sight of the green Finke Valley stretching out below him; for these sand-dunes reached forward from the high-level country situated east of the valley, and completely covered the tops of the high cliff wall that protected the river bed below from the menace of their ever-encroaching sand waves. By the time of Elliot's departure Strehlow had passed through many hours of pain, delirium, and exhausting mental struggle. There was no longer even a faint flicker of hope left in his mind: to pray "Thy will be done" now meant

asking God for strength to die with the fortitude of a servant who had been loyal unto death. Thoughts of what would happen to his wife and son, whom he was leaving behind him completely unprovided for in a country that he had never regarded as his homeland, began to oppress him more and more; and his inability to give any directions for the future to the unsuspecting woman who was so soon to become a helpless widow preyed ever increasingly on his mind. Yet he knew that his lips had to remain sealed in her presence. To endure her grief and her despair in addition to those torments of body and soul through which he was now passing would have been more than he could endure. The man who had been regarded in every way as a rock was beginning to crumble under the incessant hammer-blows of excruciating pain, his resistance undermined by his own doubts and fears.

Late in the afternoon Strehlow could bear the cruel struggle no longer: he would have to shed his pride in the strength of his own self-sufficiency and confide his last requests to a sympathetic person who could be trusted both to keep them secret while he lived and to carry them out after his death. Hesitantly he turned towards his wife, trying to screw up his courage to ask her to leave the room. Mrs Strehlow was quite unaware of the struggle that was going on in her husband's mind. She had been sitting patiently opposite to him, attempting to cheer his spirits by informing him of the moves that were being made to bring a doctor to his side.

"Darling," she said, with a ring of relief and hope in her voice, "just think of it - the doctor

should be here by Saturday afternoon. Everything will be all right after that. He will be able to give you relief immediately. And when you are stronger again, we will be able to go on, and this time in a car. Mr Wurst is merely waiting in Oodnadatta for new car parts, and then he will make the second attempt to come here to Horseshoe Bend."

"Frieda," the sick man suddenly interrupted her, "please ask Mrs Elliot to come. I want to talk to her - and, please understand me, I want to talk to her alone."

Mrs Strehlow looked at him in staggered surprise. She had never before been asked to leave her husband's room unless he had wanted to talk to someone in a purely official or clerical capacity. But surely he could have no clerical reasons at this moment for seeing Mrs Elliot? However, she rose and left without asking any questions, only too willing to humour her husband and always ready to believe that his actions were invariably prompted by the best of reasons, even if he would not give them to her.

"Mrs Elliot," she said, when she came into the hotel kitchen, "my husband wants to speak to you. And he wants to speak to you alone. I will wait here. Please go - he is almost too weak to talk this afternoon."

Mrs Elliot hesitated for a moment; for the thought of being alone with a dying man terrified her. Then she noted the pleading look in Mrs Strehlow's face and assented. She hurried into the sickroom. One glance at the sufferer's tortured and twitching face, red and purple from the neverending struggle of breathing, told her that the man before her would not have many

more days, or even hours, to live.

"Mr Strehlow, I believe you asked for me to come," she said in a low voice, trying hard to conceal her shock at the obviously serious deterioration of his condition. "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Please do sit down," Strehlow replied. "Yes, Mrs Elliot, I want to ask you to help me, please. There are several things I want to talk to you about."

Mrs Elliot pulled up a chair and sat down close to him so that he did not have to raise his voice much above a whisper. His breath was coming in half-choked gasps, and she wished to save him any unnecessary physical strain.

"I must be brief," Strehlow explained. "My strength has almost gone." She nodded sympathetically.

He paused for a moment, summoning up his courage to give his final confidences to a young woman who had been a virtual stranger to him before she had come to take him away from Idracowra. Always self-reliant in the extreme, he had never fully put his trust in any man, still less in a woman, but always only in God. Mrs Elliot, however, had been different. Though she still looked only a charming young girl, she had proved herself to be a spirited woman whose strength of purpose and physical stamina were beautifully matched by her deep compassion for him and by her kindness to everyone who needed her help. Strehlow felt that, of all the people present at Horseshoe Bend, she was the only person who could now be told the full truth about his condition and given the last directions for assisting his loved ones after his death.

"Mrs Elliot," he began hesitatingly, "I am dying. I have not many more hours to live."

"Don't say that," she urged, trying to comfort him though she knew only too well that he was speaking the truth. "You are much stronger than you think. Gus'll bring the doctor back by Saturday afternoon, and after that everything will be all right with you."

"No, Mrs Elliot," he continued, "I know that I am dying. And I think you know too. And so does your husband. But my wife does not. And she must not be told. I want her to have peace while I am still alive. I am afraid that she will break down completely when I'm gone. It will be hard on her. She has always relied on me in everything. She will not know what to do once she is a widow."

Although he had spoken in short sentences to save any undue exertions in breathing, he now had to pause for some moments to regain his strength. The young woman waited in silence. She knew that there are moments when being listened to in unspoken sympathy brings more comfort to a sufferer than all the words of comfort that may be stored in the listener's vocabulary. For when death approaches, not even a lifelong partner or the closest and dearest friend may accompany the dying person on his last grim and lonely journey.

Strehlow continued slowly, "Please, Mrs Elliot, comfort my wife when I'm gone. Only a woman can understand a woman's grief. I am glad that I will die at a place where there is a woman to comfort my wife. And please help her and my son to get down safely from here to Oodnadatta. All our horses are knocked-up. Many of

them have already been left behind. And my wife will need supplies for the road - I can no longer attend to anything."

"Don't worry about anything, Mr Strehlow," replied Mrs Elliot, glad for this opportunity of saying some words of cheer at last. "Gus and I will look after everything, if anything happens. We'll let you have fresh horses from The Bend for a start, and there'll be the car to take your family down from The Charlotte. Gus'll look after the supplies from the store. So, please, don't worry about what might happen to your family. Gus and myself, and all the other station people between here and Oodnadatta, will look after them. Everybody'll treat them like their own folk. And, in any case, I'm sure the doctor will still be able to pull you through when he comes."

Strehlow shook his head wearily and continued hesitatingly, "And here's my last request. Mrs Elliot, you and your husband and all the station people along the Finke have been so very good to us. But I am not leaving much money behind, and I can't do much to repay your many acts of kindness."

"Nobody would think of accepting anything from you, Mr Strehlow," swiftly interposed Mrs Elliot, in a tone of light indignation. "It's one of the laws of the bush that everybody has to help the man who's down and out. All of us would be offended if you'd offer us any money for doing what is only right and proper. That's the sort o' thing people down south might do, but nobody up here'd ever dream of accepting payment for helping somebody that needed it."

"I know," replied Strehlow; "and that is why I

am asking you to help me now. The bush people won't accept any money from me. But they'll never refuse a bottle of brandy or whisky.

Would you please ask your husband when he returns to send a couple of bottles of brandy or whisky up to Bob Buck and Allan Breaden, and to let the men in your hotel have a few rounds of drinks in your bar on my account? And I also want your husband to put aside a couple of bottles for himself at my expense. After all, that's the custom of this country. I saw it for myself when I buried old Mr Sargeant here ten years ago. And please send this chair back to Henbury - I promised Bob Buck he could have it when I no longer needed it. I want the bush people to know how much I have appreciated all they have done for us. Please give all of them my thanks. And may God bless you and your husband and all the bush people for what you and they have done for me. And I pray He will reward you richly by giving you all the happiness that you want in your life."

At the last remark the young woman suddenly started as though someone had touched a hidden sore with a sharp point. But she composed herself again in a few moments and looked at him with deep compassion. She quietly brushed some tears from her eyes and forced herself to smile at him.

"I promise you that I'll do everything you've asked me to do," she said in a firm voice, suppressing an almost overwhelming urge to sob. "Gus'll help me. He always has in the past. And one thing more: Gus and I, like the rest of us bush folk, are only too proud to have this chance of showing you and your wife how much

we all admire and respect both of you."

Strehlow wearily laid his chin back on his cupped hands, and his elbows once more dug deeply into his swollen knees. "May God bless you all," he whispered as he shut his tired eyes. Seeing that he was too exhausted to continue talking, Mrs Elliott excused herself and softly went out of the room. Her place was taken once more by Mrs Strehlow. But though the latter wondered what had passed between her husband and Mrs Elliot, she did not ask him any questions.

It was sufficient for her to know that her husband, though still in extreme physical distress, was clearly looking much more composed after this confidential talk than he had done earlier that afternoon.

Friday, the twentieth day of October, 1922

AN OMINOUS, leaden Friday morning dawned after an oppressively hot night. It had been a night when the thermometer had not fallen below ninety degrees; a night when sleepers had tossed off all blankets and spent most of the snail-paced hours perspiring lightly even when lying on top of their bed sheets or camp sheets; a night when the easing of the hot north-west gale that had roared, raged, and rampaged during the day had served only to increase the breathless closeness of the overheated and stifling atmosphere; a night when even those sleepers who had moved their beds into the illusory freedom of the open air had still felt oppressed by a sky that seemed to shut in as with a blanket the heat reflected against it during the day by the sun-scorched ground; a night in which sleepers had tossed, turned, complained, groaned, sworn, and cursed loudly, debilitated by almost intolerable and completely enervating discomfort.

Mrs Elliot had been disturbed at three o'clock in the morning by a knock on her door. Victoria, one of her half-caste kitchen women, had roused her with the news that the camel-mail team had returned, and that in addition to the mailman there was a passenger waiting outside who required accommodation in the hotel. This passenger was Pastor Stolz, and it was at his urgent pleading that the mailman had agreed to do a special night-stage to Horseshoe Bend. Normally the southern-stage mail-driver, after leaving Oodnadatta on the Saturday following the arrival of the fortnightly train from Adelaide, would reach Old Crown Point, some two hun-

dred miles away, late on the following Thursday afternoon. Here he would meet the northern-stage mail-driver, who had come down from Alice Springs via Horseshoe Bend with the down-mail both from Alice Springs and from the Finke River stations. Both men would leave their tired camels at Old Crown Point, and exchange their mailbags. Next morning they would set out on their separate return journeys. In view of Strehlow's desperate state of health Stolz had pleaded with the Alice Springs mail-driver to have his fresh camels saddled up as soon as possible after the Oodnadatta mailman had reached Old Crown Point, and to return to Horseshoe Bend that very night. The Alice Springs mail-driver agreed without hesitation; for camels, like donkeys, kept to pads and trails, and could hence be used in safety for travelling at night.

Worn out by his marathon ride from Oodnadatta, Stolz slept in till the Friday morning breakfast session was over. Strehlow, who had been awakened from his laudanum-drugged sleep by throbbing pains in his chest long before sunrise, was even more restless than he had been on the previous day. The moment of death was clearly drawing nearer. It might be even closer than he had thought only yesterday. Was he in a fit and prepared state to meet God? In his sermons he had often stressed the fact that believers resembled living stones that were being shaped by a master hand so that they could be built into a spiritual house of worship, erected on the eternal foundation stone of Christ Himself. But the shaping of these stones had to go on all through the lives of the believ-

ers. God's chiselling away of man's imperfections did not end till the moment of death. It was only after death that man could become a perfectly fitting stone in the eternal temple of God. Hence Strehlow had preached more than one funeral sermon based on the Old Testament verse describing how all the stones from which skilful masons had built Solomon's temple at Jerusalem had been cut and shaped in the quarries from which they had been taken: already perfect in shape, they had merely been fitted together on the temple site - "And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building." Strehlow grew more and more restless with pain-inspired self-questionings - had God's hammer-blows succeeded in shaping him into a stone fit for the edifice of that new Jerusalem in which he believed with unbroken firmness of faith, or were there still left in him rough, untrimmed edges that had to be chiselled away before death?

Finally he asked his wife to call Heinrich into the sick-room. Since the day when he had read the bitter attack made on him by Heinrich in the letter written to the Munchenbergs, he had felt deeply resentful towards the young teacher who had, in his opinion, talked about him in such treacherous terms. But with the hour of his own death approaching fast, Strehlow began to feel that the time had come when he would have to face his Maker with a heart free from all vindictiveness and resentment. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against

us": this injunction from the Lord's Prayer had never before appeared as necessary to him as it appeared now. He asked that Heinrich should be invited to come into the sickroom. When Heinrich came in, he asked him to sit down on the chair opposite to him and to join him and Mrs Strehlow in singing a hymn.

Heinrich and Mrs Strehlow did most of the singing, with the sick man coming in whenever his difficulty of breathing permitted it. The verses sung were the first few stanzas of the German hymn *Wer sind die vor Gottes Throne:*

Who are these like stars appearing,
These, before God's throne who stand?
Each a golden crown is wearing,
Who are all this glorious band?
Hallelujah!, hark, they sing,
Praising loud their heavenly King.

These are they who have contended
For their Saviour's honour long;
Wrestling on till life was ended,
Following not the sinful throng;
These, who well the fight sustained,
Triumph through the Lamb have gained.

But the singing of this hymn and the prayers offered by his wife and by Heinrich could not bring complete calm to Strehlow's troubled mind.

Soon, too soon, he knew that he would have to face Stolz himself in this room. It could be a trying meeting, and one that he would gladly have avoided in his present state of helplessness. But it was clearly God's will that he should fully compose his differences with Stolz before he stood face to face with his Master.

For many weeks previously Strehlow had discussed with his wife what he would say to Stolz

when they finally talked together confidentially. He had known Stolz most of his life, having first met him at Killalpaninna thirty years previously. Stolz had been a son of Mrs Reuther, the Killalpaninna Mission Superintendent's wife, by her first marriage to the deceased Pastor J. M.

Stolz; and Strehlow, who had been only a few years older than the younger Stolz at the time, had been his tutor in Latin and Greek during his stay at Killalpaninna. He had therefore always felt that he was standing in a privileged position towards the new chairman of the Hermannsburg Mission Board. Stolz, in his turn, had always held Strehlow in pleasant memory as the kind-hearted and cheerful tutor who had given him his grounding in the two classical languages required for his theological studies.

Strehlow had often rehearsed with himself what he would say to Stolz when the latter came into his sickroom. He would reproach Stolz in a fatherly way for his failure to come to Hermannsburg on an inspection visit despite repeated requests in former years. For how could anyone be an effective chairman of a mission board if he had never set eyes on the station that he was helping to administer? He would remind Stolz of the Finke River Mission Board's ingratitude for not taking any vigorous steps to save his life while there had been time to do so, and he would compare the indifference of Stolz and his clerical colleagues with the humanity, the sympathy, and above all, the practical helpfulness of the churchless bush people. He would quote Christ's own injunctions to Stolz; for Christ himself had taught in his sermons, and shown in his parables and stories, that practical

love towards one's neighbours came second only to the love due to God Himself. He would further stress that even St Paul, whose clear statement that man was justified by faith without the deeds of the law had always been regarded as a cardinal element of Lutheran doctrine, had also rated love as being greater than hope and greater than faith in that magnificent thirteenth chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians. It was the failure of the Lutheran clergy to give due weight to the God-established supremacy of love that had constituted such a grave weakness in the doctrinal soundness of much of their preaching.

But now that Stoltz had arrived at Horseshoe Bend, Strehlow lacked both the physical strength and the mental calmness for indulging in any hard and intellectual theological arguments. Within hours he himself would be standing before his Master and be called upon to give an account of his stewardship in this life. A man who deeply needed God's forgiveness for himself could not call any of his fellow men to account for any apparent neglect of duties or responsibilities. He would have to forgive all, just as he hoped to be forgiven all, for Christ's sake. It was still in the early part of Friday forenoon when the two men met. Physically, no greater contrast could have been imagined than that which existed between them. Strehlow, even in sickness, was a large, heavily built, clean-shaven man.

Stoltz, on the other hand, was slight and short of stature, and wore a dark, pointed beard. Again, whereas Strehlow's manner of speech was measured, resolute, and authoritative, Stoltz's

speech habits and movements, particularly in moments of excitement, had something of the mercurial nature of quicksilver about them. After the preliminary greetings Stoltz expressed his deep sympathy for Strehlow's condition. He had come prepared to see a very sick man; but his first glimpse of Strehlow obviously shocked him almost beyond words. He could scarcely believe the testimony of his own eyes.

"Brother Stoltz," said Strehlow slowly, "I have been waiting for you for many years. You have come at last, but it is too late." Stoltz was about to break into a voluble account of the many excellent reasons he had for the lateness of his visit; but Strehlow cut him short with a tired wave of his hand. "I am too weak to say more than a few words to you today. I have been disappointed and very bitter during these last few weeks; but there must be no words of anger between us. We are both standing here in the sight of God. Let us do what He wants us to do." He paused, for one of his spasms of difficult breathing was beginning to come upon him. When it had eased once more, he continued, "Brother Stoltz, for twenty eight years I have tried to be a faithful shepherd to God's congregation at Hermannsburg. I have had to abandon the people entrusted to my care. I have not been able to install anyone else to take my place. Please see to it that a successor is appointed who will guard my congregation faithfully. Remember that it is God who jealously watches over all work that is done in His mission field. Don't let Hermannsburg die as Bethesda has died!"

Stoltz had involuntarily started at the mention of

Bethesda - the official Church name of the Killalpaninna Mission Station. Though he had not personally been involved either in its long decline or in its final and utter ruin during the war years, its destinies had for years been guided by his stepfather. The final abandonment of Bethesda had been preceded by many dark and tragic events which had enabled the tough-skinned cattlemen on the surrounding stations to point fingers of scorn and disgust at this long-established Lutheran mission station.

Strehlow had blushed when hearing some of the worst stories that came to his ears, and so had many other loyal supporters of Bethesda. For the unsavoury pages in the annals of a Church can do far greater damage to its reputation than any of the unfounded slanders of its worst enemies.

"Brother Strehlow," Stolz replied earnestly, and there could be no doubt about his deep sincerity and whole-hearted determination, "the Finke River Mission Board knows that it is responsible to God for what happens to Hermannsburg; and I give you my full and loyal assurance that I, as the chairman of the Board, will never allow the Church to abandon Hermannsburg, so far as this lies in my power."

Strehlow, who had not taken his searching gaze off Stolz's face while he was making this declaration, relaxed visibly and said, "May God grant it!" Stolz grasped Strehlow's tired hand lightly.

"I make this promise before God. And now may God bless you for the loyalty you have shown to His cause during those twenty eight years in the heart of Australia; and may He be your help today and your comfort in the illness that has

stricken you down."

Strehlow returned the pressure of Stoltz's hand, and then Stoltz said a short prayer and slowly moved out of the sick-room. He had suddenly become a shaken and a strangely quiet man. After he had gone, Strehlow sat in his chair with closed eyes. Now that he had composed all his affairs, and said all the things that still had to be said, he could afford to withdraw wholly within himself. Only eternity now remained to be faced. Whatever he had done in the merciless rush of his active years still had to await the final test posed by eternity.

In past years his eyes had often turned to a large ornamental wooden plaque hanging in his study at Hermannsburg, whose inscription reminded him in moments of acute stress and deep despondency of that final judgment of a man's worth that could be passed upon him and his works only after death. This plaque had borne the simple words:

Pour thy light
On Time's night,
Bright Eternity!

Show us small things in their meanness,
Sharpen great things to full keenness,
Blest Eternity!

Like St Paul, he felt that he could say of himself that he had finished his course and was now ready to be offered. The only question that remained was whether the Lord, the righteous Judge, had laid up for him that crown of righteousness after which he had striven during his long, hard years in Central Australia.

Because of the hot night it had not taken the thermometer long to pass the century mark that

morning; and from then on the temperature kept on rising steadily, hour after hour.

In contrast to the previous days of howling sandstorms, Friday was a relatively calm day, with only occasional slight northerly gusts. By two o'clock in the afternoon the thermometer was registering a hundred and ten degrees in the shade of the verandah, and the galvanized iron sheets of the hotel roof crackled loudly as the curved flutes pressed and strained against their holding screws, expanded to their fullest extent by the merciless blaze from above. Even the tin ceiling sheets in the rooms creaked noisily at times, and the lining wall sheets of the hotel rooms grew noticeably hot to the touch of a hand. All outdoor work had stopped long before midday. Men, women, and children snatched what relief they could in the shade of the few trees and the iron buildings. Thirst could no longer be quenched, no matter how much liquid was consumed. Neither tea nor water was able to slake the thirst of any man for more than an hour. The hotel customers had given up consuming beer several days ago, for no bottles that depended for coolness on their being wrapped in damp bags lying in the draught on the hotel floor could be expected to yield a liquid that was fit for drinking. Only brandy, whisky, and rum still afforded a pleasurable kick to the tough throats of the hardened bush hotel guests. But on this hot afternoon the heavy drinking of spirituous liquors served only to increase the thirsts of the customers; and all water funnelled into pannikins from the large canvas waterbags hanging under the verandahs tasted lukewarm and insipid: the pace of con-

sumption allowed insufficient time for the water to be cooled by evaporation to any significant extent.

In the stifling, suffocating heat of his room Strehlow was groaning with racking pains in his chest. Huge liquid beads, which he was too weak to wipe off, kept on emerging from his forehead, his face, his neck, and his chest; and from there they united and tumbled down in rivulets, soaking the lower part of his body in a stream of sweat which no amount of hot air could dry.

These physical sufferings were matched by the intensity of that other battle which was going on in his mind. No prayers were bringing him any relief from the torments of his body. On the contrary, he felt that God was increasing the unbearable load of his afflictions to the very breaking point - the point where these trials would shatter and overwhelm his strength, and utterly crush the last reserves of his courage, his endurance, and his faith. He felt that he was being extended and stretched out to his physical and spiritual limits, like a tough piece of steel wire clamped in a laboratory testing device that had been designed to measure the amount of strain that it would stand before breaking. Like an experimenter intent on ascertaining the breaking point of the material tested by him, God had been heaping pain upon pain and disappointment upon disappointment on him, one week after the other, during the past three and a half months. And now He had permitted an unseasonal heat-wave to add its fires to his torments. Cool changes, even cloudbursts that brought sharp downpours of rain, were common

features of October weather in Central Australia: why would not God permit at least a cool breath of air to fan his tortured body? Instead the very atmosphere above the barren cliff tops beyond the hotel could be seen quivering and simmering in the summer heat.

Strehlow's thoughts had frequently returned to the scene of Christ's mental struggle in Gethsemane, as he tried to repeat "Thy will be done" in the spirit in which Christ had uttered these words during his agony in the garden. But on this Friday afternoon Strehlow's restless searchings for a fuller understanding of God's purposes led him to meditate more and more deeply on Christ's last day of suffering - on Good Friday and on the final events of Calvary. In his Lenten services he had often stressed the physical pains endured by Christ on Good Friday; but he was now beginning to appreciate even more the mental agony suffered by Christ on that grim day when all faith which he had kindled among men during the three years of his ministry had died like a flickering candle flame, unable to withstand the unexpected gale that had burst upon it. Christ's physical tortures had been many: his head had been lacerated by a crown of thorns, his back had been turned into raw flesh by the metal pieces knotted into the many-tailed scourge used for flogging him, and his hands and feet had been gashed by the cruel nails driven through his flesh and bones. But his most terrible torment had resulted, not from the thoughts, words, and deeds of his enemies, but from the disloyalty and the silence of his friends and disciples. One of the latter had betrayed him, a second had publicly denied on solemn

oath that he had ever known him. All the rest had fled in fear and shame and despair. Of all those who had been nearest to him only four persons had dared to stand close to his cross on Calvary, - a man and three women. The man had been his favourite disciple, who up to the previous evening would have proudly proclaimed him to be the Son of God. This man had been present at his trial in the high priest's palace, and had gathered up sufficient courage to come in order to express his mute farewell to him. But no longer had this last loyal disciple held any faith in Christ. His heart had been wrenched with sorrow for his dying master; but he had also been convinced that all the things he had believed in for three years had been only a dream and a myth, and that this dream and this myth would end with the death of his master on the cross. His deeply revered master had proved to be only a human being after all - and all his faith in Christ as the promised Messiah had already been dead while he was gazing at the figure nailed to the cross.

One of the three women had been Christ's own mother - she who as a young and deeply pious girl had seen a vision in her home at Nazareth of the angel Gabriel, and had heard him calling her the blessed one among women. On that grim afternoon at Calvary she had stood at the foot of her son's cross, heavy with unbearable sorrow, feeling as though a sword was piercing through her soul. Christ's mother would have had a mother's uncontestable right to proclaim her faith in him before the whole seething, muttering multitude. But she had not said a single word. Was it because she too had been torn and

tormented by doubts whether all that she had ever experienced or believed in might only have been the result of a grim series of hallucinations? Scores of thousands of Christians in later decades, from one century to the next, had dared to proclaim their faith in Christ at their own places of execution, finding strength through their belief in his divinity to face death in all its forms, even the most horrible.

Yet on Good Friday no confession of faith had been made at the foot of Christ's cross: for when a god dies, all faith placed in him must needs die too. Immortality and eternity are inseparable from the notion of the divine. In the end Christ had said to the silent woman and to the silent man, "Woman, look, there is your son", and, "Son, look, there is your mother." Even though death was fast approaching him, he had not addressed the silent woman as "mother". After that darkness had fallen upon Calvary and the whole surrounding country for three hours, during which Christ had, obedient to the will of his Father, tasted to the full all those spiritual torments through which men and women have to pass when they are no longer able to believe that there is any one, either in heaven or on earth, who cares for them, who loves them, or who will help them. After three hours of this torment in the black abyss of lost and forlorn loneliness Christ himself had startled the dense crowd that was gazing up at his cross by repeating from the twenty-second psalm that grimdest of all cries of despair that can be uttered by any man who has trusted in God all his life: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" And when the Son of Man, who had so of-

ten spoken of himself as being one with the Father, had shouted that sentence of seemingly utter and absolute despair over the hill of Calvary, probably even the last waverers in the watching crowd around him had become convinced beyond any doubts that he had always been a fraud, and that it was his own fear of his impending hour of death which was now forcing him to admit publicly the full and complete falsity of his sacrilegious claim.

And thus all faith in Christ had died on Good Friday. All faith? Not quite. Two men had expressed their belief in Christ on the Roman execution hill for criminals. One of these had been a criminal who had been crucified at the side of Christ, the other the Roman centurion who had watched him dying. The criminal had been clubbed to death before sunset; but he had died with the promise of Christ ringing in his ears, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise". It was this criminal who had been the first of a long line of witnesses who had died affirming their faith in the divinity of Christ. But the voices of these two men had been the only two voices raised on Good Friday that had publicly professed their belief in Christ in spite of his death; and one of these voices had been silenced for ever at sundown on that same day. After his death none of the terror-stricken men who had been his disciples had dared to be present at his burial.

Joseph of Arimathaea alone, a wealthy and powerful member of the Jewish Establishment, had possessed the almost foolhardy courage to ask the tired and angry Roman governor for leave to take Christ's body down from the cross and bury

it in his own newly-hewn rock grave. He had been helped at the burial by Nicodemus, a highly educated man of deep religious learning, who had risked the anger of his authoritarian church leaders by supplying the costly resins intended for the later embalming of the body. When Christ's body had been laid to rest, all faith once placed in him by his friends had been buried too. Good Friday had witnessed not merely the death of Christ but the extinction of his message to the world as well: the powers of darkness, death, and hate had prevailed over the Lord of light and life and love. It had needed the miracle of Easter to rekindle the quenched flames of belief in Christ.

If Christ himself, after he had chosen to experience for himself the temptations and the sufferings of mortal men, and while he was identifying himself in all respects with mortal men at the will of the Father, had been forced to call out "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?", then it was clear that there were dark moments in human suffering which could crush the faith of even the strongest of men.

Not that these men would, even in such moments, doubt the existence of God. Far from it. Paradoxical though it might sound, - their overwhelming despair would spring from the unshakeable strength of their belief in the existence of God.

Their anguish would stem from their conviction that, although God existed beyond any doubt, He was deliberately refusing to listen to their prayers and that He had deliberately broken off all links between Himself and them. As the hours slowly dragged on in the sickroom at

Horseshoe Bend, Strehlow was coming to dread more and more that he, too, was going to be one of those men whose rocklike faith in God was going to be put to the final, crushing trial. Or that, like steel wire stretched taut in a laboratory testing device, it would have weight upon weight added to it till it snapped. While the corrugated iron building around him groaned and creaked in the fierce sun, he was fighting for his very breath, as his life was being slowly choked out of him, gasp by strangled gasp. He felt as though the clutch of giant hands was crushing his chest till his lungs could no longer take in sufficient quantities of life-giving air.

At four o'clock, as a last desperate measure, he was given a draught of medicine prepared by a chemist in Quorn for the relief of "asthma due to a dropsical condition". It had been procured by Stolz to alleviate Strehlow's breathing troubles. No one knew what the medicine consisted of, and no one had much faith in its efficacy. Unfortunately, this drug did not lessen Strehlow's breathing difficulties: if anything, his gasps grew even worse, till the last reserves of his strength were being consumed in the effort of getting air into his choked lungs. When Pastor Stolz left the room, after watching the tortured victim writhing in his chair for almost an hour, Mrs Strehlow, who had been sitting nearby in helpless fear, moved closer to her husband. To comfort him, she began to sing one of his old favourite hymns that gave expression to a believer's trust in God in situations like the present. It was the hymn Sollt es gleich bisweilen scheinen, whose first two stanzas ran as follows:

Should dark doubts sometimes awaken
That God's folk are left forsaken,
Then in faith I know for sure:
God helps those who long endure.
Help He has today suspended
He has not forever ended
Though at times in vain we plead,
Help He gives in deepest need.

At this point the sick man interrupted his wife's singing. "Don't sing that hymn any more, Frieda," he begged, in a strangely dull and strangled voice: "God doesn't help! "
"O darling, please don't talk like that," she pleaded tearfully, slipping down on her knees before him. "God will help when His time has come. You have always said so. Perhaps His hour has come now. "

The sick man did not reply. His body shook, his lips quivered, the swollen veins in his purple face pulsed heavily; but he remained silent. He had, at long last, spoken what he knew to be the full truth - that his hour of death was at hand and that any further pleas to God were futile. God had said a final "no" to all prayers - the communication line between God and the two people in the sickroom had been severed inexorably.

The clock in the next room struck five. Mrs Strehlow persisted bravely in pouring out her words of comfort, but it was doubtful whether the sick man was even capable of listening to them any longer. He had clearly come to the end of his strength. After some minutes he closed his eyes, still without uttering a word; and Mrs Strehlow rose to her feet and sat down on the chair opposite, patiently watching him.

Stoltz came in quietly for a few moments, and then went out on tiptoe so as not to disturb the sick man's rest; for he seemed to have fallen asleep at last.

It was as though Strehlow's final remark had greatly helped to ease his mind. He had ceased pretending to his wife that even a rock-like faith could sway the Almighty.

What he had said represented, in a way, a free version of the psalmist's despairing cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?". He had been completely honest at last with himself, with the wife who still believed that he would live, and with God. And now his restlessness slowly disappeared. His breathing, too, became less strained and more regular, as though great physical relief had come to him at last.

Strehlow slept for a little longer than half an hour, during which time his wife watched him with lessening anxiety.

Then he suddenly gave a gasp, followed by a deep sigh. His breathing stopped for a few moments. Mrs Strehlow sat up, startled and suddenly apprehensive. There was a second deep sigh. After that the sleeper's body slumped against the back of the chair, and lay there motionless. The great swollen veins that had stood out so clearly in the wasted throat pulsed convulsively a few times. Then all movements stopped in the body, and a bluish tinge began to spread over the face.

It was a quarter to six in the evening.

With a cry of cold fear Mrs Strehlow leapt from her chair.

"O my God, he's dead!" she sobbed wildly and collapsed before the moveless body that lay be-

fore her, slumped in the high-backed easy-chair.

Soft swift footsteps behind her made her turn her head back. It was Mrs Elliot, who had been standing outside the door, whispering with Pastor Stolz about the sick man. "O Mrs Elliot," she sobbed, "he's dead - my Carl is dead. And I didn't even know that he was dying . . ." She broke down in a spasm of convulsive sobs. The young woman put her arms around her and raised her to her feet. "Dear Mrs Strehlow," she said in a voice almost choked by tears, "your husband doesn't have to suffer any more. He is at peace at last. You must come away from here with me. I've got a new room ready for you for tonight."

Mrs Strehlow stopped sobbing. "But I don't want to leave my Carl yet," she whispered. "He has always been so good to me. Oh, what will I do without him? Please let me stay with him a little longer!"

"Please, my dear, you must come with me now," insisted Mrs Elliot, gently but firmly.

"There are lots of things that still have to be done for your husband. We must get him out of the chair onto the bed and wash his body before it grows rigid. But there are others who'll help me - it's better that you shouldn't be there when we do these things. You'd only be upset, and you're completely worn out already. You've nursed him all on your own for two months already, and you need a break. Please do come with me now - you can look at him again, once everything is over and he is lying on the bed." Mrs Strehlow offered no further resistance, and Mrs Elliot took her into the adjoining room,

where two beds had already been made up. "The second bed is for Theo," Mrs Elliot explained. "I thought you might like to have somebody to talk to tonight in case you can't go to sleep in this heat."

As Mrs Elliot turned to leave the room, Pastor Stolz entered. "Sister Strehlow," he said in a low-pitched yet resonant voice, "I have come to express to you my deepest sympathy. In this grave hour I can do no more than commit you to the care of the Lord, Who has promised to be the protector of the widows and the orphans. He will comfort you and care for you."

"Pastor Stolz," replied Mrs Strehlow, bravely trying to speak coherently in spite of her tears, "I just cannot understand it. I did not know that my Carl was dying. It was just as though my eyes were being held shut so that I could not see anything. And now he has gone - I did not even tell him before he went how much I loved him. The last words I said to him were spoken when I was so very upset, and he did not reply to me."

She broke down and buried her face in her hands. Stolz's voice was calm as he comforted her. "Sister Strehlow, you have done the impossible for your husband for many weeks. Don't blame yourself now for anything that you didn't do. I am sure that God Himself in His mercy shut your eyes so that you could carry on as you did till this very hour."

When Mrs Strehlow had calmed down a little, Stolz continued, "And now let me tell you what Mrs Elliot and I were whispering about just outside the door as your husband died. She had received only a few moments earlier a telephone

call from Charlotte Waters, telling her that Breaden's car which was to bring the doctor up from Oodnadatta had been held up by an unexpected flood in the Alberga. It could not hope to get through for several days, perhaps even for a week, depending on how quickly the Alberga went down. Gus had rung to ask her about your husband's condition. He wanted to know, should he wait at Charlotte Waters for that time or not. When Mrs Elliot told me this, I knew that it was God's wish to call unto Himself the soul of His weary servant and to give him his reward for his faithfulness unto death. That was why all our little human efforts to intervene had to fail. What has happened has been the will of the Lord of life and death. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" "I shall try to accept God's will without arguing against Him," whispered Mrs Strehlow, battling in vain to stop her tears. "Only I still cannot grasp it - O my Carl, I did not even know that you were dying. Why did you not take me with you? O my God, what is to become of me?"

"The Church will not let you down," Stoltz promised. "It will mean your staying in Australia for the time being. But I will talk to you about that tomorrow, when you have had time to rest. And now, here's your son - I will leave you together and go." And he closed the door on their grief. Theo had been told the news of his father's death while he was sitting with his friends in the aboriginal camp. It had been relayed by the half-caste kitchen women by shouts and sign language, and had been received in the camp with loud cries of grief. The women immediately began their customary wailing for the dead man

who had long since become accepted as an Aranda father figure even at places as far removed from Hermannsburg as Horseshoe Bend, Alice Springs, and the stations located on the Hugh River. Theo had run to the hotel as soon as he had heard the news.

Though shocked by the final suddenness of his father's death, he reacted with outward calmness; and when he was left alone in the room with his mother, he tried to reassure her as much as any teenage boy could. Nor was he afraid of the future - it might be harsh and difficult, but he would face up to it, come what might. Other boys had come through similar and even much worse tragedies. He had always believed that life in the white world would be a hard battle for a bush boy who had never known any white playmates.

Whether that struggle would have to be fought out in Germany or in Australia did not really matter to him. The cheerful little freckle-faced boy who had ten years earlier walked many miles with his mother on the journey from Oodnadatta to Hermannsburg had long since acquired the sturdy independent attitudes of a "bush kid" to a degree that his mother had not yet comprehended.

At about seven in the evening Mrs Elliot knocked at the door and told Mrs Strehlow that she could come and take her last look at her late husband. The sickroom had been completely tidied up. The dead man lay on the bed with all perspiration washed off him, covered by a clean white sheet.

His body was lying stretched out fully for the first time for over a month. With his arms folded

across his chest, he was reclining in an attitude of perfect peace. All signs of strain had vanished from his slightly bluish face: once more it looked powerful, manly, and resolute. Mrs Strehlow looked at him for some minutes and then turned to go, saying, "I only wish he had taken me with him to that peace that he has been granted at last." Theo, who had not been able to take his eyes off his dead father, was certain that his father's face was not merely peaceful but that it bore the look of someone who had known the joy of final triumph at the moment of death. He followed his mother out with a new sense of determination to face the challenge of life in the indomitable spirit of his father.

Mrs Strehlow slept little during the night. It seemed to her that her life had lost its whole meaning and purpose with the death of the husband with whom she had hoped to go home at last to her own country. She reflected that her span of years had been a long series of tragedies and bitter hardships. She had been born at Geroldsgruen in Bavaria as one of the two children of a Franconian mine owner, whose family had been able to trace their descent - and their mine-ownership at Geroldsgruen - back to the first half of the sixteenth century. Her father had been the last of this long line of mine owners. The ore had given out when he was still a young man, and he had soon been plunged into heavy debts.

Before she had turned four, her father had died. Soon after her tenth birthday the death of her mother and the loss of the old family estate, which had been left to her stepfather, had forced her to leave her home. She had been for-

tunate in being taken into the care of relatives. But except for a short period in a technical college at Neuendettelsau she had been forced to earn her keep by serving in a clerical household. She had met her future husband briefly only during the Easter week-end before his departure to Australia. Though she had been only sixteen and a half years old at the time, she had fallen in love with him, and had followed him out to Australia three years later. She had always missed her homeland with its evergreen meadows, pine forests, and running brooks since her arrival in Australia. And now she was being forced to turn back alone and to leave her husband behind among the barren cliffs of Horseshoe Bend. She had looked forward for years to a quiet life in Germany in a manse with her husband upon his departure from Hermannsburg. That dream would never come true now; and she knew also that she would never again be the mistress of a home of her own.

Was this to be God's reward for her many years of heartache and loneliness at Hermannsburg? It was long after midnight before she was able to recall without bitterness the words of Loehe's motto for deaconesses which she had treasured ever since her brief period in the technical college at Neuendettelsau. She had had it framed and had often looked at it in the dining-room of her home at Hermannsburg. She had never stood in greater need than now of the plain-spoken exhortations which it contained for all those women who purposed to dedicate their lives to God's service: What do I want? I want to serve.

Whom do I want to serve? The Lord, in His poor

and needy.

And what is my reward?

I serve neither for reward nor for thanks, but
out of gratitude and love: my reward is that I
may serve . . .

When the darkness eased in the eastern sky,
she had at last been able to regain control over
herself and her emotions.

Her faith had stood the test.

Saturday, the twenty-first day of October, 1922

LIGHT CLOUDS had begun spreading over the sky during the hot and stifling night that followed. They had served to shut in and to conserve the heat of the preceding day like layers of insulating material thrown over a pre-heated surface. For the second night in succession no one at Horseshoe Bend had slept much. The choking air had allowed no one to relax completely; and through the stillness of the dark hours there had sounded from time to time the subdued wailings of the dark women in the camp, carrying out their age-old traditional lamentations for a loved kinsman whom death had suddenly torn out of their midst. Each burst of wailing began on a high-pitched note and descended by degrees, in a series of musical sobs, to the lowest note of the tonal pattern used for these lamentations. All the lost hopes of mortal mankind and all the desolation of the great wastes of the Centre seemed to find their expression in these infinitely sad protestations of grief for the departed. According to the time-honoured Southern Aranda explanation, the Central Australian folk had wailed for their dead in this manner ever since that fatal dark dawn when the two Ntjikantja brothers had first pronounced their grim curse upon the stricken Tangka host at Uralterinja.

Long before sunrise the burial preparations began. White-bearded Jack Fountain, with the assistance of one of the three-quarter white Elliot sons, went to the station store and set to work constructing a coffin. Almost immediately afterwards echoing noises made by picks and crow-

bars which rang back from the low, barren hill-side north of the station proclaimed that a mixed group of grave-diggers, too, had decided to get a start on their back-breaking task of making an excavation in the rocky ground alongside the grave of Sargeant senior.

Jack Fountain's task was by far the lighter of the two. He and his assistant had soon found four long dry gum saplings which had originally been chopped down for roofing purposes. These were cut into suitable lengths. Then some old whisky cases were ripped up, and their boards nailed to these gum saplings to form a stout bush coffin. No other timber was available at Horseshoe Bend. But when the coffin had been completed, its weight was found to be excessive. Stolz was called and informed that it would be advisable in view of the overweight of the dead man's body to take both the coffin and the body to the grave separately. Stolz's permission having been obtained, Fountain and his assistant accompanied Stolz back to the hotel in order to take Strehlow's body off his bed and lower it on to an iron stretcher for easier carrying. With two additional helpers, who had been summoned from the hotel staff, the party entered the room where Strehlow had died. Mrs Elliot was also asked to come to the bed. The sheet was lifted carefully off the face of the dead man but was pushed back again quickly. When the body, completely swathed in the top and bottom sheets that had formed its final bedclothes, was lifted up by four strong men, the lower linen sheet was ripped by the weight: the sheet was an old one, and it had already become saturated by its contact with the body. More sheeting had

to be placed underneath before the body could be lowered on top of the stretcher.

The sound of the shuffling feet of the struggling men brought in Mrs Strehlow from the adjoining room. "Please let me have a last look at my Carl before you put him in his coffin," she pleaded and advanced toward Jack Fountain.

Quickly Mrs Elliot put her arm around her and restrained her. "Please, Mrs Strehlow, you mustn't look at him again," she explained. "You see, it's been a hot night . . . And your husband's condition has made things worse. Just try to remember his face as you saw it last night." The older woman did not reply at first, but stared almost vacantly at the covered body on the stretcher, feeling completely stunned. Then she turned to leave the room. "I understand," she whispered to Mrs Elliot, "thank you." As soon as she had left, the stretcher was moved out and set down on the verandah.

The grave-diggers meanwhile toiled and sweated in temperatures that soon left the century mark far behind. Though the rocks at the foot of the ridge were of the softer types, they still offered stubborn resistance to the cutting edges of picks and crowbars. Only the use of the heaviest crowbars enabled the toilers to maintain a reasonable rate of progress. Nor could any explosives be used because of the proximity of the new excavation to Sargeant's grave. In the end most of the able-bodied male population of Horseshoe Bend, both white and dark, came out and took turns at excavating the hole while the sun rose higher and higher in the sky. The light clouds were beginning to thicken; but though their shade was greatly appreciated,

the increase in the humidity of the air made the toil of the diggers just as unpleasant as it would have been had the day been hot and cloudless. At length, at half past ten in the morning, several of the men returned to the hotel to announce that the grave was ready; and four of them volunteered to take the heavy coffin over first. Since the ground on which the hotel stood was separated by a rough watercourse from the bare hillside where the grave had been dug, the coffin-bearers lurched and stumbled along in almost drunken fashion before they reached the hole. After the coffin had been set down, virtually all of the grave-diggers were summoned to the hotel verandah. It took six sweating men at a time to carry the heavy iron stretcher with the overweight body to the grave.

Most of the bearers had to be relieved by others before they had reached their destination. The hard, uneven ground, with its sharp slopes down into the watercourse and again up from it, and the loose pebbles on the far side, made the task of the stretcher-bearers a particularly difficult one. But eventually they reached the graveside without any mishap; and the body was safely taken from the stretcher and lowered into the coffin. And now an unpleasant discovery was made by the funeral party. The oversized coffin, when placed over the grave on two saplings, proved to be an excessively tight fit for the narrow hole dug out for it. It became clear that the rough lid, if nailed down on the coffin, would not go past the edges of the grave. Widening the hole would have entailed at least a further hard hour's toil for the exhausted grave-diggers, whose torn and blistered hands were

beginning to bleed in many places. After a short consultation between Stoltz and the weary men it was agreed that the lid should be left off, so that the coffin could be successfully forced and squeezed down as far as possible into the narrow grave. An empty candle-case was finally jammed down to give secure protection to the face of the dead man. After that the useless lid was thrust into the grave as far as it would go. Finally the coffin and the lid were hidden under a thick layer of green gum tips thrown over them.

The funeral procession now left the hotel. It included all the white folk staying at the hotel, all the dark and coloured men on the station, and many of the dark women and children from the camp. Mrs Strehlow and her son were escorted by Heinrich, Mrs Elliot, Jack Fountain, Harry Tilmouth, Snowy Pearce, and a couple of other white men. In addition there stood at the grave-side Jakobus, Titus, and Hesekiel, with about a dozen dark and part-coloured Horseshoe Bend men. Victoria and Lill, the two half-caste kitchen women, stood in the front rank of the female mourners.

The order of the funeral service had necessarily to be modified to suit the unusual situation and the unconventional congregation. The greater part of the service was conducted in English.

The two psalms read as lessons seemed singularly appropriate to the tragic events of the previous day. The first was the twenty-third psalm with its note of deep trust: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want..."

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art

with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." The concluding verses of the other psalm (the hundred-and-twenty-sixth psalm) struck a confident note for the future: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." For the benefit of the widow, however, the benediction of the body was pronounced in German, and the first part of the service was concluded by the singing, in German, of two verses of the hymn O Gott, Du frommer Gott, with its final prayer:

Let me depart this life confiding in my Saviour;
Do Thou my soul receive,
That it may live for ever;
And let my body have
A quiet resting-place
Beside a Christian's grave;
And let it sleep in peace!
And on that solemn day
When all the dead are waking,
Stretch o'er my grave Thy hand,
Thyself my slumbers breaking;
Then let me hear Thy voice,
Change Thou this earthly frame,
And bid me to rejoice
With those who love Thy name!

After some biographical details relating to Strehlow had been read out, Stoltz gave a short address in which he stressed the single-mindedness and devotion to duty of the deceased - how he had left his homeland, given himself wholly to his task, and remained faithfully at his post till death had relieved him. He had been able to do these things only because

of the rock-like strength of his faith. A few words were added for the benefit of the dark people present: the man they had come to bury was someone who had devoted his life to teaching them that God and His heaven existed not only for the white people but also for the dark folk.

The congregation, during both the English and the German parts of the service, stood around the grave in attitudes of deep reverence for the deceased and warm sympathy for those who had survived him. Mrs Strehlow stood her ordeal with calm courage and dignity, trembling only when the hard lumps of earth and stone fell with a clatter on to the green gum branches shading the coffin, while Stolz pronounced the familiar words: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes dust to dust..."

Only twice was the full congregation called upon to join personally in the service - during the praying of the Lord's Prayer and during the singing of the grave-side hymn. The selection of the latter for a congregation that knew and cared little about church worship or hymn-singing had given Stolz a great deal of headache. After discussion with Mrs Elliot he eventually decided on "Rock of Ages": this was felt to be the most likely hymn whose tune might be known to most of those present. In the absence of hymn-books it was given out to the singers line by line:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,

Cleanse me from its guilt and power.
Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

When the service had ended and most of those present had dispersed, the grave was filled in. Then Heinrich set up a wooden cross at the head end of the new earth-mound and placed on it the initials "C.S." neatly, in smooth water-worn stones.

It was the hour of high noon.

After returning to the station buildings, the men and women who had stood at the grave-side still sensed the presence of the man they had just buried. The Horseshoe Bend telephone was kept busy sending out death announcements by telegram to friends and acquaintances far and near, and receiving condolence messages in return. Stolz, who had decided to wait at the hotel till Gus Elliot's return from Charlotte Waters, wrote up his notes on his trip north from Oodnadatta and the final events at Horseshoe Bend; for he wanted this first account to catch the return camel-mail from Horseshoe Bend to Oodnadatta. Mrs Elliot sat for some hours with Mrs Strehlow while the latter was waiting for the arrival of Constable Macky, the police trooper stationed at Alice Well police station, twenty six miles north-west of Horseshoe Bend. It was Macky who had the duty of preparing the police report on Strehlow's death. In normal circumstances this report would have been made by Macky and submitted to his superior officer,

Sergeant Stott at Alice Springs, before the funeral; but because of the hot weather Sergeant Stott, as soon as he had received the telephone message about the death on Friday night, had personally given permission over the telephone for the body to be buried before Macky's arrival. Since Macky was unable to leave Alice Well before eleven o'clock on Saturday morning, he did not reach Horseshoe Bend till four o'clock that afternoon.

The dark folk in the camp sat and talked in low and depressed tones, carefully avoiding the name of the dead man.

All of them were full of sadness about his death. Not only the three visitors from Hermannsburg, but the Horseshoe Bend folk, too, were wondering what would happen to the Aranda people now that their one fearless white champion had died. Hermannsburg had become a symbol not only for aboriginal welfare but for aboriginal rights and aboriginal dignity under Strehlow's firm management. Would, or rather could, there ever be a successor to equal him?

Even the tough and hardened white bushmen at Horseshoe Bend had been deeply shocked by Strehlow's sudden death. During his twenty eight years at Hermannsburg he had become an institution, almost a legend, among the small white population of Central Australia. That this vigorous, fearless man should have been struck down before their very eyes in the full strength of his tough manhood before he had turned fifty-one, had come as a shattering blow to all of them.

It was a grim reminder to everyone of the power of death over all men, wherever they

might be, irrespective of strength, age, or importance.

In a land where every white person knew every other white person by name and reputation, a white person's death was always a catastrophe that deeply shook the whole white community. The attitude of the survivors to this catastrophe was determined by the traditions of the bush community: there had to be a Christian burial for the deceased, followed by a hard drinking bout on the part of the survivors so that the latter could get the taste of death out of their systems.

The attitudes and the conduct of the bush community on the occasion of a death hence bore a certain resemblance to the attitudes and conduct that were thought to befit the occasion of a birth. Both were occasions on which the services of the Church were seriously solicited, and both closed with drinking bouts.

The religion of the normal bushman of those times could have been summed up in a few brief injunctions. Every white child had to be baptized by a minister of religion at an early stage of its life: "We bush folk are, after all, Christian men and women, and not just heathens, like them niggers." Hence every priest, padre, or missionary, whose travels might have taken him through the Centre, was requested to baptize any of the children that had not yet received the first ministrations of the Church. No heed was paid to denomination, except for the broad distinction that had to be made between Catholics and non-Catholics. Thus a number of non-Lutheran white children born in the Centre had been taken to Hermannsburg for christening be-

cause of the infrequency of visits by clergymen belonging to other denominations.

There was similar feeling about the necessity for a Christian funeral - it was unthinkable that a white person should be buried unless someone either read or said a prayer over his grave. Police stations generally possessed Bibles and prayer-books. So did some of the most unlikely, hard-swinging bush characters: it was felt by many to be a wise plan to take out some kind of insurance policy against the accident of a sudden death.

In between these two major occasions both the Church and religion were avoided almost like the plague: in their "southern" city manifestations it was felt that neither the Church nor religion had anything of value to offer to the tough bush folk of the Centre, where men had their own moral code and their own traditional notions of right and wrong. And in one respect, at least, the bush folk regarded their code of conduct to be far superior to that of the "Southerners" - they were not hypocrites who went to church on Sundays and indulged in all manner of rottenness and swindling practices for the rest of the week. If God existed, then the average bushman felt that he would be able to face up to his final examination before the Almighty just as well as the pious wowsers, hypocrites, sneaks, tell-tales, and swindlers who had gone to church regularly every Sunday. And if "the Old Bloke in the Sky" should decide to boot them out after all, then they were prepared to take His punishment with the same unflinching stoicism with which they had faced up to hardship and death, sicknesses and accidents,

droughts and bad markets, during the whole of their lives.

In accordance with the customs of the country, the bar of the Horseshoe Bend Hotel was thrown open at about four o'clock in the afternoon after the burial so that the white mourners could drink to the health of the departed. Their torn and blistered hands and sore backs bore eloquent witness to their hard toil in the muggy heat of the morning. All of them felt that they had richly earned their liquid reward. Harry Til-mouth, generally known as "the Bony Bream", had been detailed to serve behind the bar in the absence of the licensee. As indicated by his nickname, Harry was a somewhat undersized man who was completely devoid of any surplus flesh on his rather slender bones. His shaggy, greying hair and straggling moustaches rarely had a comb run through them, and he shaved no more frequently than once a week. Bigger men enjoyed teasing him and making good-natured jokes about his skinny appearance and lack of inches. But Harry was as tough a stock-man as the best of them: he was hard and wiry, and could outstay and outlast most of his detractors in point of sheer doggedness and endurance.

Because of his late arrival at Horseshoe Bend, Constable Macky had spent only a few minutes with Mrs Strehlow. He had expressed his condolences to her and had then left her, after arranging to take down on the following morning all the details required for a Coroner's report. He quickly made his way to the bar, where he pushed his way forward through a row of toil-worn grave-diggers. "Shift your carcasses,

men," he said in a loud and commanding tone of voice, "and make room for the Law! "Noticing a few black looks coming upon the faces of the tired men, he added in a more conciliatory tone, "Let's have a round of whisky, boys, - let's drink to the memory of Mr Strehlow!"

"No, the first round's going to be on the house," retorted Harry, with a dead-pan expression on his face, "by orders of the missus."

"That'll do me," said Macky. "I'll pay for the next one."

The first round was poured out, and swallowed down with audible noises of relief and gurgling approval; and so was the second.

"That's the first time any of you blokes have ever drunk to the memory of a bible-puncher, I'll bet," commented Macky tersely.

"You're right," replied Jack Fountain, "never happened here before; and I've lived in this country longer than most."

"Agreed," added Snowy Pearce, the head stockman of New Crown Point Station, "and I've seen enough floods going down the Finke to start calling myself one o' the old hands in the country."

"Anyway, this one was different from most of them," mused Macky, holding up and examining carefully the last half-inch of whisky in his glass. "As a rule I must say I hate all pious, snivelling bastards. Most of them make no end of bloody trouble wherever they go. They come up from down south and make the most of our hospitality, and then they go back and fill the papers with all sorts of rubbish about us - talk about our 'farmyard morals', accuse us of prostituting the kwais, tell lies about the gambling, swear-

ing rotters of the Centre that are exploiting the poor bloody niggers, and so on. I tell you, the first time I had to go on patrol to The Mission, I was expecting to find the same kind of rotten, grog-sniffing hypocrite there - you know, one of them low bastards what shakes hands with you only to get close enough so's he can smell if you've just taken a nip from the old brandy bottle. And I tell you, I was all set to let him have a piece of my mind if he started on any of his bloody religious pap-talk with me. But somehow the old boy was different. The station was well-run, the niggers well-behaved, and as for the hospitality - boy, you should've seen it! I came away from The Mission thinking, well, perhaps there's good and bad among them bloody parsons too, same as the rest of us. "Yes, he was a good bloke," agreed Harry. "And absolutely dinkum too. Every time I went up to The Mission on the mail run, things were the same - never any different. Everybody worked hard - it was one of the best-run settlements anywhere in this country. And you could always get a bunk and a good feed there. There was always somebody about who'd offer it to you."

"Well, let's have another drink," interrupted Hughes, a thirsty prospector from Arltunga who was on his way south to Port Augusta. "Must be just about my turn for a shout now."

"Good on you, mate," called out Jack Fountain. "We've got to keep our whistles wet in this damn rotten hot weather."

A third round was poured out, and the glasses were drained with audible smacks of appreciation. Fountain pushed the tip of his white beard into his mouth and sucked from it some drops of

whisky he had spilled when drinking.

"When you blokes're ready for it, there'll be a second round on the house," promised Harry. "That's the stuff, Harry, old boy, keep her going!" called out Macky. "Perhaps it's a good idea having a bloody funeral every so bloody often - the Horseshoe Bend bar isn't as liberal as this as a rule."

"You should've seen it when old Ted Sargeant was buried," commented Jack Fountain drily. "The old pub sure turned it on then. Nothing like it ever been seen in this country before or after."

"Why, what happened?" queried Hughes. "Tell us all about it."

"You must be one of the few blokes around these parts what hasn't heard the story," replied Jack Fountain. "It's so bloody old by now that it's got white whiskers on it. But I'm no good at spinning yarns: ask Old Bony behind the counter - he was here that time just like the rest of us."

Harry Tilmouth at first tried to refuse telling the story, but was finally forced into relating the events of Sargeant's death.

"Well, it was like this," he began. "Ten years ago now, back in March nineteen-twelve - I just seen the date on the gravestone this morning - old Sargeant suddenly went down with the DTs. He and Gus Elliot owned this pub then, and Sargeant was the senior partner. Old Sargeant'd had the DTs a coupla times before. But this time he passed out altogether..."

"He 'lapsed into a coma', as an official police report would say," commented Macky drily.

"That's right, he passed out altogether," re-

peated Harry.

"And nobody had any idea what to do about him. No doctor, no medicines, no ice, no nothing, and the poor old bugger out to it like a bloody old bull knocked over in the killing pen. Couldn't use brandy to bring the poor bastard round - already had too much brandy in 'im. And his face was as red as tomato-bloody-sauce.

"Next morning after breakfast, the mob goes up, worried - like, to take a proper squint at him. All of a sudden one of them blokes standing round the old boy yells out, 'What about getting the old boy off the bed and sitting him up in a bath o' brandy?' Well now, that's something all of us could do..."

"But what'd be the good of a bath o' brandy?" queried Hughes. "What the hell could that do for a bloke with the DTs? Never heard of anything so bloody mad before!"

"There's nothing mad about a bath o' brandy," countered Jack Fountain haughtily. "In my young days mothers used to stick their babies into a bath o' brandy to stop 'em having convulsions."

Hughes laughed. "Sounds like a shocking damn waste of bloody good grog to me," he remarked. "Never mind, don't let's have an argument about it - another round of grog, Harry, and let's change over to brandy."

Harry poured out the ordered round of brandy and said with some asperity, "A bath o' brandy's nothing to laugh about - it's an old and tried bush remedy, only you young blokes don't know nothing about it. Shows what a bunch of bloody newchums you are! " Then he continued, in a

calmer tone of voice, "Well, to get back to the story - we got hold of a small washing tub, stripped the old boy right down to his birthday suit and sat him in the tub. A couple of us hung on to him so's he wouldn't fall over. After that old Gus, his partner, brings in a case of brandy. He opens bottle after bottle and empties the whole bloody lot over him. The rest of the mob stands round and watches . . ."

"I bet they all stood slobbering at the corners of the mouth like a mob of thirsty dingoes, while they were watching the brandy running down over the old boy," laughed Macky. "The most wonderful bloody sight I ever set eyes on in my life," continued Harry, disregarding Macky's jeering remark.

"We all felt sorry for the poor old bugger just sitting there not knowing he's sitting in a bath o' brandy with good grog running all over him. We knew he was in a desperate way - it was a toss-up whether even brandy'd save him now. "Then all of a sudden he just collapses in the tub, and we knew that was the end of poor old Ted. "
"What a time to kick the bloody bucket!" exclaimed Hughes, in mock indignation. "Couldn't he have come round long enough to lap up all that good grog first?"

Harry ignored the question, and went on in the same even, almost expressionless, tone of voice, "All we could do was pull the poor old bugger out and stretch him out on a bed. And some of the men was crying: seemed too terrible for bloody words. Others kept saying, 'What a glorious death - dying in a bath o' brandy!' Only the poor old bugger didn't know a flamin' thing about it! After that old Gus got to work on

the phone. We knew Mr Strehlow was somewhere on the road close to The Old Crown. Gus rang at eight in the morning, but he'd already left. When Gus heard the mission horses were all pretty well knocked-up, he sent down a team of fresh horses to meet the mission buggy. Told the boy to ride like hell and bring Mr Strehlow up that afternoon for the funeral. When he came, the whole bang lot of us went down to the grave, as is fit and proper. After that we all came back to the bar to drink to poor old Ted's memory. Needed it too: we'd had to listen to a good old hellfire sermon at the grave . . ."

"To hell with hellfire sermons!" exclaimed Snowy Pearce and thrust his empty glass before Tilmouth. "Here - fill 'er up quick! Got to put out that hellfire before the thought of it dries out the old tongue! This bloody place is hot enough today without Old Nick doing any stoking. And while you're about it, may as well fill up the rest of the glasses too! "

Tilmouth complied, and then continued, "Well, as I was saying, we all came back to the bar after the funeral. And when we're all standing up, tongues hanging out from thirst and that hellfire sermon, old Gus calls out, 'Well mates, as it's my poor old partner what's died, all drinks this afternoon'll be on the house while the brandy lasts'.

"Boy, did we have a time that afternoon! Brandy galore, as much as any man could swallow! By the time the brandy cut out there wasn't a man left what could stand up straight, and most of the bastards were stretched out on the floor around the bar, dead to the bloody world. Only old Gus kept his head - stuck to a few whiskies

and let us have as much brandy as we could pour down our throats.

"Next day some bloody bugger spoiled it all. Went up to old Gus and wanted to know where all that grog had come from. Reckoned Gus must've bottled up the brandy from the bathtub and served it out to the mob . . ."

"Stone the bloody crows! That means that you bloody shickered lot of silly old topers must've been closer to your 'dear departed friend' than any of you bastards guessed when you were drinking to him," yelled Macky, bursting into loud guffaws of laughter. "Anyway, it served you right for being nothing but a mob of common, greedy drunks!"

"Well, nobody could prove anything for sure against old Gus, of course," Harry concluded his recital. "He certainly poured all that grog out of bottles that afternoon. Only they all came out of a box standing on the floor behind the bar so nobody could tell if the bloody corks'd been pulled before or not. Well, Gus naturally denied everything, and nobody minded much about it next day. Too late anyway, and the grog had tasted all right - no doubt about that."

"They tell me that after Nelson died at the battle of Trafalgar, his body was taken to England in a cask of rum to preserve it for his funeral," commented Macky. "And when the body was pulled out, the cask was only half full of rum - some of the sailors keeping guard must've got thirsty in the night. At least old Sargeant had been pulled out of the tub as soon as ever he was dead - that brandy hadn't been swishing round his corpse for days."

"And the grog we're drinking today has come

out of bottles never opened before," added Hughes. "Since old Bony over there started telling his snake yarn, I've been watching all that grog carefully that's on the shelves behind the counter; and all the tops of the bottles are good and sound."

"Well, one more round of whisky on the house," concluded Harry. "And then we'll close the bar, or you blokes might start getting too noisy. Remember there's a woman just across the passage, and she's been crying her heart out in her room ever since the old man died. Let's give her a fair go and get out of the bar and back on the verandah."

The glasses were quickly emptied and put back on the bar counter, and then the men filed out quietly into the still, sultry air of the waning day. The clouds had thickened considerably during the afternoon, giving promise of yet a third oppressive near-sleepless night.

**Sunday, the twenty-second day of October,
1922**

THE DULL dawn of a listless Sunday morning broke over the stony, arid landscape, looking drab and almost colourless in the dust haze under lowering banks of clouds. After breakfast Stoltz held a brief devotional outdoor service for the Hermannsburg party. This service was attended also by Mrs Elliot and most of the dark population. It was an event of unusual interest in the lives of the latter; for it was the first church service of any kind that had ever been arranged for them at Horseshoe Bend.

After the service Mrs Elliot served morning tea under the verandah. She was determined that Mrs Strehlow should be drawn into the company of the tea party at least as a listener, so that her mind would be taken off her overwhelming sense of loss. She mentioned how her two half-caste kitchen women, Victoria and Lill, had often told her stories about Hermannsburg, and spoken with deep affection not only of the Reverend Strehlow but also of his wife. From these tales it had become evident that if Strehlow had come to be accepted as the great aboriginal father figure at Hermannsburg, then his wife had long since come to fill the role of the great mother at his side. A shy flush of joy came over Mrs Strehlow's wan and care-lined face. She had met both Victoria and Lill during her stay at Horseshoe Bend ten years earlier and had always taken a keen interest in their doings. Since the mail-man who came to Hermannsburg started his mail run at Horseshoe Bend, the Hermannsburg folk had always been kept well supplied with all the news - and all the gossip

too - relating to Horseshoe Bend and to its folk, white and dark.

In this way Mrs Strehlow had learned about the struggles that Mrs Elliot herself had faced when she first arrived at Horseshoe Bend as Gus Elliot's girl bride. Lill, the gentle and kindly, soft-eyed woman who had borne Gus three sons and a daughter, had been most indignant at being displaced from her honoured position in the Elliot household by the arrival of the young "white kwai", who had, in addition, insisted that Lill's children - some of whom were much the same age as the new Mrs Elliot - should change their surname from that of their father to that of their mother. The fiery-tempered and straight-speaking Victoria had taken Lill's part with rebellious vigour; and the dark stockmen had sullenly refused for a considerable time to accept the change in the names of their lighter-coloured mates from Bert, Sonny, and Jimmy Elliot to Bert, Sonny, and Jimmy Swan. But in the end Mrs Elliot had become accepted as the new white mistress of Horseshoe Bend; and both Victoria and Lill had been so won over by her kindness to the whole dark population that they had not only dropped their enmity towards her, but had come to treat her as a daughter who had to be helped and protected in the harsh land where she had made her new home. Both Victoria and Lill had had their three-quarter white daughters taken from them and sent south for their education. Victoria had in this way lost her two daughters Dolly and Florrie, and Lill her daughter Millie; and neither mother had ever become completely reconciled to her bereavement. Both women still hoped

that the time might come when they should at least be able to set their eyes once more on their grown-up daughters. In the meantime the "young white kwaii" had become a kind of daughter-substitute. The bond of affection that now existed between Mrs Elliot, Victoria, and Lill had a strength that was as admirable as it was touching: perhaps it was only Central Australia that could have united in such perfect accord three women whom social forces and influences in the more civilized South would have turned into lifelong antagonists.

When Stolz commented on the quiet efficiency with which Lill and Victoria were doing their work at the tea party and in the kitchen, Mrs Elliot replied, "Yes, they're both dears. I don't know what I would have done without them all these years. When Sheila was born, no one could've been more proud of the baby than they were - they treated her like their own child, and they couldn't fuss enough around me.

"They took me out after rains and taught me all about bush foods - the berries, the yalka, the yams; and whenever any native game was brought in, they always came along with some cooked meat for me too. And I got to like it in the end.

"But I appreciated their help most of all when I first came to The Bend. I was just a young city girl from Melbourne - a real newchum girl, frightened of centipedes, spiders, scorpions, and snakes; and there are plenty of those around here in summer, particularly after good rains. "I remember one afternoon, some months after I'd come up, having a bath in the rickety old bathroom off this verandah - just some posts

stuck in the ground and old packing-case boards nailed to them. The door was made of boards too, and wouldn't shut properly. Just as I was standing up reaching for the towel hanging on the door, I saw a big black snake wriggling underneath it. I can't tell you what a fright I got - I'd never seen a live snake in my life before. I just stood there in the bath and screamed my head off. As soon as I started yelling, the men came rushing out from the hotel. But when the first man pushed open the door, he stopped in his tracks as though that snake had bitten him; and he went back for his life. No one else would come near me. In the end Vic heard me screaming. One of the men told her what was going on. I can still see her coming in at the door, carrying a big waddy. She knocked that snake cold in a jiffy.

Then she took the towel off the door, put it around me, and gave me a good old scolding, 'Missy, you no gottem shame? Standin' dere and callin' out like that till all dem men come along, and see you standin' dere naked in the barss! Why you no sing out longa me first time? Me bin feelum proper shame longa you!' But she wasn't really mad with me - just thought that the missus shouldn't be seen like that by any of the hotel customers. She was really sorry for me."

When the laughter had died down, Stolz asked, "Do you have many snakes about here in summer?"

"Do we!" replied Mrs Elliot: "I'll say we have! And the trouble is they can slip in under most of the doors in the hotel, the kitchen, and the dining-room. On a hot night you've got to take a light wherever you go or you might step on one

of the blighters in the dark. Some of the men around here mightn't mind, but I do. And so do all the women. Tell you another snake yarn: do you remember old Fred Freer?" she asked, turning to Mrs Strehlow.

"Yes, I do," the latter replied. "He brought up our mail for quite a while. "

"That's right," agreed Mrs Elliot. "And in between the mail runs he was working here as the station cook. Well you know what old Fred was like. He hardly ever opened his mouth, and nothing could shift him before he was ready. About the slowest thing I ever saw in these parts, and that's saying something. But he was a good cook, and he used to bake the loveliest bread I ever tasted. Now Fred was a married man - rare thing in this country - and he'd brought his wife up with him. She hated the place and the bush and the folk up here, and in the end old Fred had to get back south, though he didn't want to leave The Bend. Mrs Freer used to spend most of the day gossiping, and at night she'd sit up reading in bed with a kerosene lamp alongside of her. One night she was reading in bed as usual, when she saw a snake crawling in under the door. 'Fred!' she called out, 'Fred! Come here! Quick! Fred!' Old Fred was out in the kitchen kneading the dough, his arms stuck in it right up to the elbows; and old Fred wasn't going to be disturbed. He was proud of his bread, and wasn't going to shift for anyone. Mrs Freer kept on yelling, 'Fred! Quick! Come here, Fred, I want you!' In the end even old Fred couldn't stand all that yelling any longer. 'I can't come,' he calls back, 'I'm just setting the bread. What is it?' Mrs Freer yells

back, 'Fred, come here quickly, there's a snake in the room.' 'I can't come now,' he grumbles in that slow old way of his; 'the snake will keep. Better still, it might go out. I'll come in a minute.' Mrs Freer keeps quiet a few minutes. Then she starts yelling for Fred again. 'What's the matter now?' he calls back. 'Fred, come quickly, the snake's still in the room - I can see it going under the washstand.' 'Well, put the light out, and you won't see it!' he yells back. After that he finished kneading the dough, tucked it up in the dish with a blanket, and put it next to the stove for the night. After he'd done everything as slowly as he could, he went and picked up a stick. The old snake was still crawling around in the room, and Fred knocked it over first hit. Mrs Freer was just about having hysterics by then; but Fred didn't mind. Nothing could upset him. If I'd been Mrs Freer, I tell you I'd've crowned him, good and hard!"

"What a man he must have been," Stolz remarked, laughing heartily. "Fancy being able to get away with a thing like that! Not many married men would ever try it out on their wives."

"There was no one who could shift Fred, as I told you before," countered Mrs Elliot, "neither man nor woman. He just wasn't natural. But he was a darn good cook, and we were all sorry when she made him leave the country. She was a match for him in one respect at least - he couldn't get away from her."

"I'm surprised to hear you have so many snakes around here in summer," commented Stolz, looking at the arid landscape. "You've got only barren hills near the station, and the Finke over there hasn't many big gums in it. Where do all

the snakes come from?"

"From the Finke mainly," Mrs Elliot replied. "And the Finke's never looked so poor as regards gums till that last big flood came down in it, beginning of last year. When I first came here, I often used to look at the beautiful big gums behind the yard, and on the other side of the river at the road crossing. And then the big rains came, late in nineteen-twenty. The Finke started running, and so did the Hugh, and so did the Palmer, and so did all the creeks on the Horse-shoe Bend run. They all run into the Finke above The Bend, and the Finke ran past the station for more than six months. I'd never seen so much water rushing past me all my life. The first flood got down here about a month before Christmas, nineteen-twenty, and it wasn't till late last year that the last trickles stopped running between some of the waterholes. That was after the heat-waves'd set in. The biggest flood came down in March last year. I remember standing out in front of the hotel. It had been pouring rain all night, and all creeks and gutters on the run were running into the Finke, and the flood reached from near the top of the bank behind the stockyard up to the box gum flats on the other side - about half a mile wide. All of a sudden we could hear something come roaring down from the west like a real tornado. It kept coming closer, and all the people in the camp and everyone in the hotel rushed out to see what it was. And then we saw it coming - it was a shock wave of water, about ten feet higher than the level of the flood. When it reached the station, the water went right through the yard and came up within half a chain of the hotel. On

the other side it spread right out as far as the sandhills. The Finke must've been about a mile and a half or two miles wide at this stage. Down went all the big gums, on both sides of the main channel. At sundown the only big trees still standing were what was left on the flood flats. That's why there aren't any big gums left all along that horseshoe bend along the eastern side of the Finke where the cliff walls are. All you can see now are a few young gums growing up out of the sand; but it will take twenty or thirty years before the Finke is going to look nice again at The Bend. I don't think I'll still be here to see it."

Loud shouts from the camp interrupted the conversation. "Boss comin' back," excitedly announced Victoria. "Dat's de buggy comin' down de hill now."

Gus Elliot had left Charlotte Waters on Friday night, soon after hearing of Strehlow's death. He had camped the first night at the Nine Mile, a flat between Charlotte Waters and New Crown Point, where there was plenty of feed for his team. This had been a "dry camp" for his horses, and he had paused at the Goyder soakage next day in order to give them a drink. After calling in at Old Crown Point, he had spent Saturday night in a grassy patch near Cunningham's Gap to give his horses a chance to have a good feed. For the country around Old Crown Point was, as usual, a powdered-up dustbowl, where hundreds of cattle, milling round the station well, had eaten the open country completely bare of its grasses and trampled down for square miles the once luxuriant cover of "old-man" saltbush found in the box gum flood

flats.

It was still only ten thirty in the morning when Elliot returned. His horses were weary, but Elliot himself looked surprisingly fit after his rushed hundred-and-sixty-mile round trip made in the scorching weather. He would not listen to any suggestions of taking even a short rest after his return. He was full of eagerness to learn all the details of Strehlow's last day and the funeral. His main regret was that he had not been able to pay his personal respects at the grave-side to the man with whom he had been acquainted for twenty eight years. When his wife told him about Strehlow's final request to have his bush friends rewarded after his death, Elliot declared energetically, "Ruby, I'll get those bottles up to old Allan and Bob with the next mail. Now about the men here: I'm going to put aside a whole case of free whisky. Anybody that's here now, and anybody that comes within the next fortnight, is going to get a free drink at the bar. I'll tell them that all the grog came from Mr Strehlow, but I'm only going to put a few bottles on his account. It was a real fine gesture from the old boy to think of us like that. Of course, it's just the sort of thing one might have expected from him. But I'm not going to take all that money from his widow - she'll need every penny she can hang on to. The mission staff never got paid much - it's a bloody shame how little the old fellow got all his life. But that's none of my business. Horseshoe Bend can stand a case of grog easier than the poor old boy's estate."

Elliot, feeling completely desiccated after his long, hot drive back from Charlotte Waters,

wasted no time in getting to the bar to relieve his own thirst. Then all white station hands and visitors were called in so that Elliot and the other white men present could drink a toast to the memory of the departed, according to the time-honoured traditions of the bush. When all had assembled at the bar, Elliot poured out liberal double-whiskies into the waiting array of glasses and said, "Well, mates, here's to Mr Strehlow - a man's man like the rest of us! " After the toast had been honoured with great fervour, he continued, "And that drink's not on the house either: the old boy specially wanted us all to remember him after his death the same way as we've always remembered our own mates after they've gone. He left a will that a case of whisky should be donated at his own expense so that we could celebrate things the right way, as is proper in the bush. We'll have three rounds this morning. After that anybody that comes here during the next fortnight is going to be included in the shout."

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Hughes. "Who'd've thought a bloody parson would've left any money behind for blokes like us to wet our whistles with? All the ones I've ever struck've been a mean lot of bloody wowsers - like Mack said yesterday, they'd start sniffing you up and down like dogs with runny noses as soon as you started shaking hands with 'em."

"This one was different," interposed Elliot with firm conviction. "He was the absolute boss on that station of his - make no mistake about that; and yet all the niggers in the country trusted him and would do anything for him. And, parson or no parson, the bush people, too,

grew to respect him - funny bloody thing, come to think of it! But he was honest. He was dinkum. He was a white man. He'd make any bush bloke welcome on the station. This is a man's country. Every white man on his station is the king of all he surveys, as the saying goes; and the old boy was a man's man. Everyone in this country agrees on that."

After the three rounds of free drinks the bar was shut; for Elliot had many other details to attend to in the store before Stoltz could leave Horseshoe Bend and continue on his way to Hermannsburg.

According to the new arrangements, Mrs Strehlow and her son, accompanied by Heinrich, were to resume their journey to Oodnadatta on the following morning in the van with fresh horses borrowed from Horseshoe Bend. Hesekiel was to be the driver of the van, while Titus would be in charge of the loose horses. Since a hurried dash would be necessary in order to cover the remaining two hundred and thirty miles to Oodnadatta in eight days, the Charlotte Waters telegraph station and the cattle stations lying on the travel route had to be contacted by telephone; for it was clear that additional fresh horses would have to be borrowed at each station further down the track to take the place of those that were unable to continue. This quick dash over the gibber country was necessary if the travellers were to stand any chance of catching the fortnightly train which would be leaving Oodnadatta on the last day of October. Horseshoe Bend was the only station along this track that had a store stocking the full range of provisions and general road requirements

needed by Central Australian travellers; and Elliot, with the assistance of Heinrich, carefully got ready all the goods needed on the two Hermannsburg vehicles during their separate journeys - both for the van which was continuing south to Oodnadatta and for the buggy which was returning north to Hermannsburg.

The latter was fitted out first, since Stoltz was due to leave immediately after an early midday meal. Stoltz spent over an hour after Elliot's return with Mrs Strehlow discussing her future and that of her son. He made it abundantly clear that her best plan would be to remain in Australia for the present and to send her son to the new secondary school that the Church was due to open in Adelaide at the beginning of the following year. While Stoltz could not give any definite financial undertakings, he promised to do his best to obtain the necessary assistance from the Church both for Mrs Strehlow and her son for at least the whole of the following year.

Theo, when called in and told of the new plans for his education, accepted them with pleasure; for they meant that he would not have to leave his homeland after all.

This conversation was interrupted by a telephone call from Alice Springs for Mrs Strehlow. Mrs Stott, the wife of Sergeant Stott, had rung to express her sympathy. "Dear Mrs Strehlow," she said, "I just felt I had to ring you even though my husband and I had already sent you that wire last Friday evening. We still can't grasp what's happened - your dear husband's death has thrown such a sadness into the police station, and we don't seem to be able to throw it off. To think that that was the end of the huge

sacrifice of life that the dear Reverend Mr Strehlow made! I suppose it's the will of God - certainly beyond my understanding. My husband and I cannot get over nor understand we will close the curtains on one of the best men in the country - most conscientious in his work and life, and respected by all." Mrs Strehlow was too overwhelmed by the obvious sincerity of this tribute to do more than stammer out a few broken words of thanks. She apologized for her inability to carry on a more coherent conversation.

"Don't worry, dear Mrs Strehlow," replied Mrs Stott, and her voice was full of warm sympathy. "There's just one more thing that my husband wants me to tell you about. It's about the half-castes here at The Bungalow. You know what a problem Mrs Standley and we are having with them. The Government certainly doesn't know what to do with them. That is why my husband and Mr Urquhart called on Mr Strehlow last July when he was so ill. Your husband didn't see how he could take the half-castes off our hands - we feel now that he was too ill to listen to our plans. But we hope to see the Reverend Mr Stoltz at The Alice, and we still hope The Mission Station will take them all. They do no good here. At the Mission Station they would at least learn to fear God and learn the higher ideals of life. We trust that The Mission will be pleased to take these poor foundlings - the surroundings here are against them."

Mrs Strehlow, who was well acquainted with Urquhart's and Stott's plan, remembered how alarmed her husband had been about it. He had felt obliged to oppose it because he could not

see how Hermannsburg could house two different sets of people in one small area - a legally underprivileged and segregated aboriginal population and a privileged half-caste school population that was to be trained for absorption into the white community. Ever since that evening in July he had been worrying lest the Government, offended by his refusal, should use the burden of the debt that was lying on Hermannsburg as an excuse for taking over the mission and turning it into a governmental half-caste settlement. It was a relief to Mrs Strehlow to learn that Urquhart's and Stott's plan had been based on genuine high regard for her husband as an educator, and on admiration for his standing among the aboriginal and part-aboriginal population of the Centre.

She thanked Mrs Stott for the tribute the latter had paid her deceased husband.

"Please don't thank me," replied Mrs Stott. "I'm only sorry your husband won't be at Hermannsburg if Mr Stoltz does accept the Government's plan. It will be a long time before Hermannsburg will see another man like Mr Strehlow."

Sergeant Stott added a few personal words of tribute to those of his wife; and then the conversation ended. The "uncrowned king of Central Australia" had paid his last respects to the man for whom he had come to feel the highest admiration towards the end of his long career at Hermannsburg. Other tributes were to come later to Strehlow from men holding higher public positions; but Stott's remarks set the official Central Australian seal of approval on one of Central Australia's outstanding men.

It did not take long to harness the Henbury don-

keys to the buggy after a rushed midday meal. Njitiaka and Lornie were to take Stolz back to Henbury, with Jakobus bringing up the loose donkeys behind them. From Henbury Stolz hoped to complete his trip to Hermannsburg with horses borrowed from Bob Buck. In any case, he knew that there would be the mission horses available which had been left behind at Henbury on the way down.

When the buggy was ready to leave, Njitiaka and Lornie said a sad goodbye to Mrs Strehlow and her son. After that it was Jakobus's turn to say farewell. He came up slowly, leading his horse by the bridle. Always a taciturn man, Jakobus did not make a long speech about his feelings; but his few short words were vibrant with emotion and unaffected in their sincerity. First he shook Mrs Strehlow warmly by the hand and assured her that neither he nor the rest of the Hermannsburg folk would ever forget their dead ingkata. Then he turned to Theo and appealed to him never to forget his own homeland and his own Aranda folk. "Your father now rests with us, here in the land of the Aranda people, and you too must return to us and to your own home of Ntarea after you have finished your schooling. Always remember us as we shall remember you - don't leave your own folk forever." He shook Theo's hand with honest, deep, heartfelt affection.

Then he turned, mounted his horse, and rode slowly to the yard to round up the loose donkeys. Njitiaka and Lornie called out to their team. Loud shouts of farewell rose from the circle of watchers, and the buggy moved forward, with Stolz waving a vigorous goodbye to Horse-

shoe Bend. The empty easy-chair which was being taken back on the buggy as a gift to Bob Buck was a poignant reminder of Strehlow's death journey. With plodding but resolute steps the donkeys moved down into the Finke and across the white river bed into the cane grass flats on the other side.

The white and the dark watchers dispersed and went back to their rooms and wurleys. Only Theo remained behind.

Shading his eyes with his right hand, he kept looking after the buggy till it had vanished from his sight in the distant box gum flats. A strong emotional reaction now began to set in in his mind; for the departing vehicle reminded him of the sudden and tragic end of the journey that had been undertaken with such great faith and courage to save his father's life. The vanished vehicle had suddenly come to seem to him like a token of the vanity of man's hopes - a symbol of the utter futility of all human endeavours when they matched themselves against a higher force that was outside human control. Many men and women had rallied to the assistance of his father after he had been stricken down by his last illness at Hermannsburg. Hesekiel's marathon walk to Alice Springs, Mrs Elliot's courageous ride to Idracowra, Gus Elliot's determined dash to Charlotte Waters: all of these had been, in a very real sense, heroic feats, taxing to the utmost the determination and the physical stamina of the persons who had in these exploits hurled themselves recklessly into this grim battle to save a human life. Wurst had not hesitated to risk his new car for the same unselfish purpose. Buck, Butler, and Breaden had offered

whatever means there had been in their power to supply. The population of the Centre, both dark and white, had been ready to rise to his sick father's assistance without any holding back of their private resources or stinting of their strength. And yet, all these high hopes had been blighted, and all this rugged energy and boundless enthusiasm had proved to be of no avail. The two cars sent north from Oodnadatta had both been stopped by the Alberga - the first by its sand and the second by its floodwaters; and most of the men and women who had heard of these events had accepted them in a spirit of fatalism as proofs that his father's hour of death had been fixed irrevocably. Stoltz and Mrs Strehlow had seen in these events the intervention of God, Who was summoning His tired servant to His side. The bush folk had been convinced that these happenings revealed the existence of something that could best be described as a blind Force akin to Fate. "When the game was up", men had to die. Or, as the men who had returned from the recent World War had expressed it, "No man can escape a bullet that's got his number written on it." Even Strehlow's death on a Friday fitted in with the old bush beliefs; for all the "old hands" in the country knew that Friday was a day of ill, a day of bad luck, a day of grim accidents, and certainly a day on which no new task should ever be started since it would be dogged by misfortune from the beginning to the end. Theo was too confused to be able to reason or argue clearly in his mind about these matters. He felt completely overwhelmed by a chaotic turmoil of conflicting thoughts, doubts, and anxieties. The only thing about

which he felt certain was that his father had died because he had been meant to die by a higher Power. But why should his death have had to happen now, and at this desolate spot? Why at Horseshoe Bend?

Now that the buggy had vanished from his sight, he was suddenly experiencing an overpowering sense of loss: his father was lying buried at Horseshoe Bend, the buggy with the familiar donkeys and three of his friends was returning to Hermannsburg without him, and an uncertain future lay menacingly before him. His mind began to be overcome by deep distrust for the new, white, southern world into which he would soon be making his entry: would he find in it such things as friendship, kindness, decency, or loyalty? His reading of books and magazines had given him no definite reassurances on these matters. During the war years many of the Adelaide newspapers and periodicals had conveyed to him a terrifying impression of the unreasoning popular hatred felt towards the Lutheran Mission at Hermannsburg. Again, the Lutheran Church itself and even its ministers had, he felt, let his father down badly during his last illness; and even the late efforts made by Stoltz and Wurst had not done much to dispel this unfavourable impression. But even stronger than these well-based feelings of anxiety was the natural fear of entry into a new and totally strange human environment. Up to this point in his life Theo had been a bush kid who had had to fight his battles in a completely isolated white bush community. The only playmates he had ever known had been dark boys and girls; and in all his relations with them he had been com-

elled to conform to the aboriginal norms of behaviour, since he had been the only white child among scores of Aranda youngsters. What would life be like in that distant coastal "South", about which his dark friends knew nothing and to which the white population of the Centre referred mainly in depreciatory, resentful, or sneering terms?

The white bush folk, who thought of themselves as strong, tough, honest, and virile types, had far too often referred to the "Southerners" as self-seeking, unfriendly, and hypocritical types in Theo's hearing; and their derogatory remarks had left a strong effect on the mind of the sensitive boy who could not correct these criticisms by any personal observations.

Theo felt that he could not return to the hotel - not just yet, anyway. He wanted to be alone. And yet not alone - merely out in the open, somewhere by himself in the Finke bed, looking upon its colourful bordering cliffs for the last time, undisturbed and unobserved. The Finke constituted the last link with his lost boyhood home. It was the ancient Lira Beinta, the greatest of all the sleeping Aranda rivers, famed and celebrated in the mythology of the Western and Southern Aranda regions. It came down from the distant MacDonnell Ranges, from the vast rocky slopes of Rutjubma and Ltarkalibaka; it swept past Ntarea to the very base of the red mountain mass of Lalkintinerama; and it rushed from there into its thirty-five-mile gorge south of Hermannsburg, on its winding way to Irbmangkara. Rutjubma, Ltarkalibaka, and Lalkintinerama - or as they were known to the white population, Mt Sonder, Mt Giles, and Mt

Hermannsburg: these were the three great mountains that had greeted his eyes at Hermannsburg every day that he could remember; and Ntarea was his own home - the birthplace that bestowed upon him his Aranda citizenship rights which no man could ever take away from him. The high mountain of Lalkintinerama, over whose red, pine-studded dome the baby Twins of Ntarea had wandered after leaving their birthplace in Palm Valley, the two desert oaks in the sandhills north of Hermannsburg which indicated the furthest point of their wanderings, the second pair of desert oaks on the southern bank of the Finke which marked the place where they had paused before diving into the deep pool of Ntarea, the rounded hill of Alkumbadora which had come into being when the frantic mother of the Twins threw away her pitchi upon seeing the foam flakes rising on the disturbed waters of Ntarea after her babies had leapt into it: all these sites were familiar to Theo, and the traditions connected with them were his birthright, though so far he knew the myth only in its barest outline and had not yet heard the sacred verses. The Lira Beinta was his own river: no matter what the future might bring, he would never cease to regard himself as one of the children of the Finke River.

He quickened his steps as he walked rapidly past the stockyard because the stench of stale blood and decomposing manure outside the killing pen was nauseating him. A flock of ragged, squawking crows abused him from the top beam of the gallows as he passed by. He did not heed them, but plunged down into the soft, clean sand of the Finke and plodded upward in the

river bed for several hundred yards till the station was out of sight, shut out by the high cliff bank of Pot'Arugutja. From this position Theo could look northward to the high red-and-white mass of Inggodna and southward to the bold cliff faces of Tnondakngara, Ndaterkaterka, and Gula. Though the sky was full of heavy clouds, the rich colours of these cliffs were unblurred by any dust haze. Their broad slopes of red, white, and yellow gave an air of rich and ageless beauty to this part of the Finke Valley - a beauty completely at variance with the drab barrenness of the rocky expanse on which the hotel and the station buildings were standing. These were the Painted Cliffs of Horseshoe Bend: Theo knew that he would never forget them. Their haunting beauty would mingle forever in his memory with the rough grave-mound on the slopes of the bare ridge north of the station. To whatever lands life might take him, the vision of these Painted Cliffs would accompany his steps, and their heavy shadows would fall across his path. Theo lay in the warm, white sand for well over an hour, watching, reflecting, and dreaming, before he felt calm enough to turn back to the station. He would gladly have stayed longer; but he knew that if he did so he would be missed at the station; and then men would be sent to search for him. He rose and shook the loose sand from his clothes.

Then he looked at his watch, realized with a start that it was three o'clock, and began hurrying back towards the hotel. He had not gone many yards before a distant roll of thunder came to his ears. Within seconds a violent north-westerly gale came sweeping down the

Finke Valley from the direction of Mborawatna, and the box gum and cane grass flats that lay across its course rapidly disappeared under huge clouds of grey-and-brown dust. The thunderclaps became more frequent, and their heavy rolling drew closer with menacing rapidity. It was as though the rain ancestresses of Mborawatna had become roused from their long sleep once more. Accompanied by a vast retinue of stormclouds and rain-clouds, they were bearing down upon Horseshoe Bend, with columns of red-brown dust whirling and billowing under them on the ground below. Attended by the terrifying fury of a rain-gale, the ancestresses were once more visiting the parched and suffering land lying south-east of their mythical home, affording it a welcome relief from the fiery heat that normally slumbered under its arid surface. The whole scene looked like a re-enactment of the original progress of the rain ancestresses at the beginning of time, as described in the ancient Rain Song of Mborawatna:

Let the stormclouds wander over the land!

Let the fury of the dust-storm wander over the land!

Let the stormclouds wander over the land!

Swelling rapidly, let them wander over the land!

Swelling rapidly, let them wander over the land!

Swelling rapidly, let their foreheads gleam white!

Swelling rapidly, let them wander over the land!

Swelling rapidly, let rain pour from them like water from pitchis!

Hardly had Theo reached the shelter of the hotel verandah, when the unnatural darkness that had fallen over the scorched and heat-baked

landscape was rent by a heavy flash of lightning immediately overhead. A deafening roll of thunder shook the building, and all its iron sheets resounded as though some huge, invisible boulder had rolled down upon them from the cliff walls east of the station. The heavy echoes of this clap of thunder reverberated in titanic cascades of sound that made the very ground under the whole station area quiver and quake before the deafening noise finally died down into a long series of low, eddying rumbles, many of which were still loud enough to make the hotel windows rattle. Even as the thunder was fading away into silence, the first heavy drops of rain began to pelt down upon the iron roof of the hotel. The unbearable tension in the air that had been raised by slow degrees to an almost unnatural level over a long series of days of fierce heat and sandstorms and nights of cloud-choked heaviness, seemed to have found its sudden release in that titanic crash. A wild rain-gale suddenly burst upon Horseshoe Bend in unbridled primal fury. As it hit the yard and the station buildings, the last crows flew screaming off their high perch on the central beam of the stockyard gallows. They flapped their way clumsily to the shelter of the Painted Cliffs, wildly tossed about by the mad gusts of the dust-laden hurricane, like black pieces of driftwood carried downstream by the roaring red-brown waves of a storm-flood at its first mad onrush.

And now the noise of a second thunderstorm could be heard exploding into life over the table mountain country south of Horseshoe Bend, where other huge stormclouds had been building up above the fire mountain of Mbalka.

Within minutes the two thunderstorms seemed to have joined their separate forces, and brilliant flashes of lightning began to writhe over Uralirbuka as well. The landscape on all sides vanished behind dense white veils of pouring rain. It was as though the whole country around Horseshoe Bend was passing again through that mythical deluge of rain which had quenched the bushfires of Mbalka at the beginning of time.

When the mischievous crow ancestor of Mbalka had awakened in the middle of the night, he had discovered that the two rain ancestors of Erea - a rain grandsire and his grandson - had succeeded in surprising him in his fiery lair at the foot of his mountain:

Grandsire and grandson: Io, they are covered in darkest darkness!

Grandsire and grandson: Io, they are covered with rain-drop eyes!

As soon as he had caught sight of his enemies, the wily crow ancestor had tried to escape from them by taking to his wings; but the torrents of water that burst in a deluge over Mbalka from their multi-tiered rain-clouds had soon put out his raging conflagrations and drowned him in a lake of hissing water at the foot of his own fire mountain.

Horseshoe Bend station seemed to be experiencing a similar downpour. The thunder above Inggodna was answered by the thunder above Uralirbuka and by the thunder above Mbalka. The clouded sky was ablaze with forked lightning. The ground, scorched and baked by a week of broiling, merciless sunshine, had its smouldering heat cooled down by broad sheets of water that quickly spread out over it every-

where. The whole air was resounding with the deafening noises of wind, rain, and thunder; and in every pool of water the multitudinous rain-drop eyes stirred up eddies which continued to widen out in great concentric ripples. The first wild fury of the triumphant rainstorm lasted for about half an hour. Then the terrifying madness of the gale began to ease, the day-bright lightning flashes stopped, and the reverberating claps of thunder lessened in violence and finally faded away. Only the sweet music of the quickening rain remained. The heavy drops still fell in steady showers which the thirsty land drank up greedily. The rich scent of the rain-soaked earth floated up from the cooled ground, and a delicious freshness spread through the fragrant air.

The whole hillside north of the station was now glistening with water. This barren rise represented the mythical windbreak of the two ntjira sisters of Pot'Arugutja, which they had left behind when they went east to Jitutna. As they departed, tufts of ntjira grass in full seed had sprouted from their hair, so that each of them appeared to be wearing a headgear of fire-red black-cockatoo tail-feathers. On the inner side of this deserted mythical windbreak lay the boulders that symbolized the bodies of the unfaithful fire ancestors from Rubuntja, who had here succumbed to their fatal draught; and on its outer side, facing the station, were located the graves of the two white men who had died and been buried at Horseshoe Bend. Gleaming rivulets of water running down this hillside now circled around the grave of Sargeant and the new earth-mound cast up over Strehlow two

days before.

As the dusk descended on the rain-drenched Finke Valley and the smell of the sodden brown earth filled the purified air, a sudden wave of joyful hope surged through Theo who stood on the hotel verandah, still gazing on the rapidly darkening cliffs and dune crests around him. No longer did he have to dread a lifelong exile in that far-away, foreign land from which his father had come. He felt certain that some day he would return to his own homeland and to those dark friends whose loyalty had brightened his whole boyhood.

From these pleasant considerations about himself his thoughts went back to the remark addressed to him earlier that afternoon by Jakobus, that his father would sleep forever in Central Australia. The more Theo reflected on those words, the more he became reconciled to the events of the past few days. His father had wanted to go back to the foreign country where he had been born, and had desired to be buried in a Christian cemetery. But was not his grave at Horseshoe Bend sited in much more appropriate surroundings? Instead of being taken out of the land to which he had given all his best years and instead of lying in isolation in a foreign cemetery, separated in death from the people with whom he had spent the whole period of his active life, he was now resting next to a pioneering cattleman, in open country unconfined by cemetery walls yet sheltered by the wind-break ridge of the ntjira sisters of Pot'Arugutja: through his unexpected and tragic death he had been united forever with the people for whom he had come to be a loved father figure.

In the white men's countries the dead had always been neatly buried in trim and tidy plots of ground, set apart completely from the cities, towns, villages, and dwellings of the living. In the Aranda country the dead shared the land of the living and the company of their supernatural beings, and their last resting places were to be found scattered throughout the timeless soil of Central Australia. Though Theo possessed only a vague knowledge of Aranda mythology, he was fully aware that every hill and mountain, every river and creek, every spring, rockhole, and waterhole, every plain and clay-pan, and all the highest dune crests in the sandhill areas, bore names of their own, and that they derived these names from the sacred myths and songs of the Aranda people. Theo also knew that every man, woman, and child, including himself, was linked indivisibly with one special site in the country of his birth. He knew that his father had preserved many of the Aranda sacred myths and songs in his scientific writings; and, curiously enough, the most southern of the Aranda traditions he had recorded - that of the two Ntjikantja brothers - had belonged to the Horseshoe Bend area. Theo himself had been allowed to view earlier that year, in deep secrecy, a large number of wanninggas and tjurunga objects which had been brought to his father by the older men of Hermannsburg at the end of March and the beginning of April. Now that he no longer had to go overseas, he could at least entertain the hope that some day he might return to his own Aranda country and steep himself in its ancient traditions. The Aranda folk of Central Australia had always lived and died secure in the belief

that their immortal totemic ancestors, too, were living and sleeping in their very midst in this Eternal Land whose geographical features they had created at the beginning of time. To the Aranda, Central Australia had been the Land of Altjira, the Land of Eternity. As the dusk grew deeper, Theo knew that this storied land would provide a far finer last resting place for his father than he could ever have found in some conventional cemetery in that distant country from where he had first come. At Horseshoe Bend he was not sleeping alone: here he had joined forever the great company and congregation of the countless thousands of Aranda men, women, and children, who had lived and died in this Eternal Land for hundreds, and perhaps for thousands, of years past. Yet this Eternal Land was in no sense a cemetery: the Aranda had never considered their land to be the land of death but rather the land of life. Even such an accursed site as the Land of Death at Uralterinja had always been regarded only as a tiny island in the vast land of life; and there had been men born in the Uralterinja region who had been regarded as the living reincarnations of the two Ntjikantja brothers, since these had left behind a part of their living essence in the two serpents that could not be finally destroyed. Men, animals, and plants might indeed die and turn into dust; but the earth which absorbed their dust yielded new grasses and flowers, new trees and shrubs, fresh food for men and all other living creatures; and, according to Aranda belief, the second souls of all unborn children, too, emanated from the sacred soil of Central Australia. The existence and the continual re-creation of

all these forms of life depended on the fertilizing and quickening power of rain. The long droughts, the devastating bushfires, and the spells of grim and deadly heat which periodically ravaged this tough and unconquerable land could never wholly destroy its plants, animals, or human beings; for heat, fire, and drought lost their menace and their power once the clouds poured down their life-giving showers on the tortured and apparently dying landscape below. Rain had hence come to be regarded as the visible symbol of life in Central Australia; for it was after its quickening showers that the earth grew green, that the insects multiplied, and that the land suddenly became filled with birds and animals as though by the mysterious processes of magical increase.

And now came the darkness of a dying day. The rain was still falling down from the heavy clouds, but its music had become gentle and soothing, like a song sung by a mother to put to sleep her unquiet child. Theo gazed calmly at the hillside where his father's earth-mound was beginning to fade out into the featureless blackness of a rain-wet night. Could death ever do more than destroy the temporary embodiments and manifestations of life? Plants, animals, and men all transmitted their life to their own seeds, their own young, and their own posterity before death came to claim them.

Though death kept on stalking over the earth, the world of plants, animals, and men remained vigorously and gloriously alive. And to what limitations was the spirit of man subject? Was not man superior to all other living things only because of his spirit - because of his power of

speech and thought that enabled him to probe deeply into the mysteries of the universe and the enigma of his own existence? Did man's personality survive death? His father had implicitly believed in the truth of the ancient words of the Preacher about the nature of death: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God Who gave it." Since the age of thirteen Theo had often been troubled by secret doubts about the absolute truth of many of the beliefs that had been inculcated into him by his parents from the earliest days of his childhood. The events of the past six weeks had shaken and shattered his faith to its very foundations. And yet he felt strangely reassured as he peered out into the deepening, wet gloom outside. In a few days from now green shoots of grass and herbage would be peeping out from the clay soil between the broken stones of the mound under which his father was sleeping his last sleep.

To the boy the rain that was falling on his father's grave had come to represent the symbol of life, the promise of life, the assurance of life, and the certainty of life. Life could not be finally conquered by death; for the power of life was greater than the destructiveness of death. Life was from eternity to eternity.



The Strehlow Research Centre shares a building with the Museum of Central Australia, which features an exhibition on the work of the late Professor TGH Strehlow. The Centre houses the Strehlow Collection in a highly secure and climate-controlled environment. Staff members and consultants carry out conservation and preservation of Collection items. Aboriginal liaison involving men from Central Australian communities is an ongoing process to ensure that the wishes of the Aboriginal men concerning the sacred material are honoured. Advice from the broader Aboriginal community is also sought concerning the overall management of the Collection. Communication with the wider research community is effected by the publication of an Occasional Papers series and general liaison activities.

The Centre honours the memory of the late Professor TGH Strehlow. A seven-member Board conducts the operations of the Centre through the activities of four research staff members. Aboriginal interests on the Board are represented through a fluent Arrernte speaking non-Aboriginal man with extensive networks among the Arrernte people of Central Australia.



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