

SCRAPS FROM WHITE MAN'S TABLE

BY J. STEVENS
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In the dark of a winter's morning the wasted figure of a 14-year-old dark-skinned girl rose at 4 o'clock to the whirr of the alarm clock she had learned to detest. With half-frozen fingers she went and milked a dozen cows.

Then she cooked breakfast—a meal she wasn't allowed to eat. Her food for the day was scraps from the white man's table.

ALL day she toiled in the house and on the farm. She was allowed to go to bed when the last member of the household had gone. Her average night's sleep was four hours.

Her life was drudgery; her reward 1/6 a week (held in trust); cast-off clothing to wear and inadequate food — she would still be eating the Sunday joint the following Thursday.

So she ran away, but was taken by the police, returned to the farm and ordered to stay.

Her mistress flogged her almost to insensibility with a stick or this. She went back to her wretched, unlovely life until a year later she ran away again, and this time she found another job.

Maybe you think this story was lifted from the pages of "Uncle Tom's Cabin?" Well, it isn't. It is stated to have happened right here in Australia, in New South Wales. It doesn't always happen that way, but the system that permitted it to happen continues.

The story is from the case book of 39-year-old William Onus, an aboriginal who, with his lifelong friend Douglas Nicholls, is leading a campaign for the better treatment of aborigines.



BILL ONUS, Justice of the Peace, State President of the Aborigines' League, and skilled boomerang thrower, who is prominent in the fight for better conditions for natives.

footballer. His ~~flashing~~ way for Fitzroy and Victoria is remembered by countless followers of the game.

Onus started from scratch, too, shearing, laming wheat, cutting sleepers. Later he was actor, author, journalist, press photographer, and during the war, made documentary films of the aboriginal war effort. Today he is a professional boomerang thrower.

His work made him a wanderer, and he has always been fascinated by the native problem. Time and again he has gone to the authorities to plead justice for a fellow native, and most often he had his way.

Onus has seen, he says, punch-drunk aborigines from Queensland to Port Pirie — boys of splendid physique and ability who fell into the hands of unscrupulous fight promoters, and, under the influence of flattery and a supply of cheap wine, were exploited, ruined and discarded

behind a motor truck as punishment.

There are details about shameful treatment of native women.

"Many people have tried to play down the facts of exploitation of aboriginal women," says Onus, "but the half caste problem speaks for itself. It is living evidence which cannot be explained away."

He says the apprenticeship system in NSW, by which native children are forced into semi-slavery, is better policed since aboriginal representatives have been included on the State Control Board.

There is no such system in Victoria, but Onus is bitter against the rate of 3d. an hour paid for labor on Government mission stations in this State.

If the natives don't like it they can lump it, he says. When they leave the missions they fall easy prey to the viciousness of "de-tribalised whites."

Going Downhill

TOO many aborigines have gone downhill. The industrial slums of the big cities contain natives who are itinerant, drink, and are all-round poor citizens, according to Onus.

Even if there is no hope of redeeming them, their children are entitled to a better life. Onus on the principle that self-respect makes good citizens, advocates for these children education to a higher level than their parents. They should be given adequate facilities for technical learning, he says, and if they show the requisite ability, be sent to universities.

That the aboriginal can absorb higher education is proved by several examples of full-blooded natives graduating from the universities, but very few have had the opportunity to attend them.

Doug Nicholls and Bill Onus believe the first practical step to improvement would be Federal control, and that any Federal control body must have aboriginal representation.

Both have won good places in life for themselves since those distant days at Cummerajunga mission station on the Murray and both are fighting hard to earn for their people a worthy place in the community.

Pitiful Cases

HE has other well authenticated cases which add up to a savage indictment of white rule for the original Australian—cases of exploitation, maltreatment, neglect and even murder.

The story of Bill Onus and Doug Nicholls goes back to the first World War — back to the mission station of Cummerajunga, north of Echuca, on the Murray.

Here the two lads grew up, roaming the billabongs and river, fishing and trapping duck, and other game. They got the standard aboriginal education — a much lower standard than the white man's. But they were fortunate in their teacher.

He was a Mauritius Indian, named Thomas James, who sensed unusual intelligence in young Nicholls and Onus; gave them special tuition, and introduced them to good books. By reading and private study, both today are educated men. Onus is a Justice of the Peace, and Nicholls an ordained minister of religion.

They are respectively State president and secretary of the Aborigines' League.

Doug Nicholls was helped to his success by being a champion