

UNITY

By CYNTHIA M. SKRINE.

WONGA the Kangaroo peered through the tall spinifex at the man who, halted in his climb, appeared to be admiring the scenery.

Wonga thought he showed good sense, for the view was sublime.

Wonga did not have to turn his head to recollect the wide, sweeping valley, hemmed in by ragged hills, the ranges beyond, opalescent in the early light, or the far-distant mountains that would be a clear, vivid pink as the sunlight reached them; and, far beyond all, the blue distance which gave an illusion of the sea.

The man raised a box-like contraption to his face, and there was a faint click.

Wonga sighed with relief and stood up straight. It was all right. This man used no stick-that-kills.

Wonga had seen such men before—hunters who collected no corpses, unless they found them readymade; but, on the other hand, clicked their little black boxes, or gathered leaves, flowers and pieces of rock, which they laid away tenderly in special receptacles.

Of all the strange habits of the white man, Wonga found these the hardest to understand, and the easiest to condone.

"Hullo, old man!" exclaimed the Hunter, catching sight of Wonga. "You're a fine specimen, all right. Come out from behind that bush, though. Come on, old chap! How about posing for your portrait?"

The voice being friendly and mild, Wonga hopped into the open and stood motionless—a fine, up-standing Centralian kangaroo, posed against the magnificent scenery of his natural habitat.

"Wonderful!" breathed the Hunter, raising the camera.

It clicked once, twice, three

times before Wonga moved.

"Thanks, pal!" said the man, sitting down to change a film.

Wonga nibbled some delicate leaves of a sprawling plant, with one eye on the Hunter.

He seemed an understanding chap, thought Wonga—the kind of fellow one could talk to.

Wonga was short of intelligent companions, for men carrying the stick-that-kills had combed the country the previous season and wrought havoc among his friends.

"A penny for your thoughts, old man," said the Hunter. "Or don't you think?"

"All animals think," said a new voice, and the Hunter swung round to face a tall tribesman carrying spears and boomerangs, who had approached noiselessly, after the manner of his kind.

"Oh, hullo, Bungal! How come you're about at this time of day? Got a holiday?"

Bungal shrugged.

"Tired of work," he explained. "I've gone walkabout."

Bungal and the Hunter were old friends. They had first met soon after the aborigine left the mission where he had spent his childhood and received an education, before going to work on a station.

Although he was educated and intelligent, Bungal would be subject all his life to the primitive laws of his race.

Periodically, he would lay aside shirt and trousers, high-heeled boots, and the high, wide hat with silver trinkets around the crown, and go walkabout.

He could not adapt himself to a schedule. When restrictions irked him, he stepped out of them as he did out of his clothes.

After a few weeks in the wilds, he returned to take up once more his work of droving, breaking-in horses, and repairing fences.

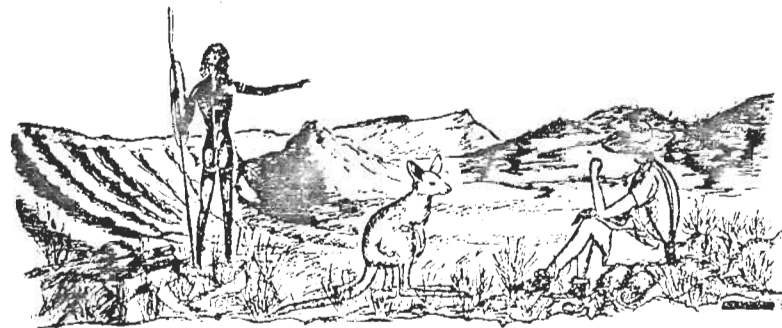


Illustration by Shirley Mott.

All the station blacks did the same thing; it was an accepted practice.

"So you reckon all animals think?" said the Hunter. "What's this chap thinking about now, for instance?"

"He'll tell you if you have a listening ear," said Bungal.

"I'm lonely," said Wonga, "and that is a bad thing. Here, where I have spent my life and where every creature, every bush and every black man is my friend, I'm lonely. Because of men of your tribe, Hunter."

"I'm terribly sorry," murmured the Hunter.

"If they were all like you, it would be all right," admitted Wonga, and the man smiled his thanks. "But they come with their sticks-that-kill, and only the fleetest or most cunning of us escape."

"But it isn't only the white man who kills kangaroos," protested the Hunter. "I'll bet Bungal has bowled a few of your friends over in his time."

"That's different," said Wonga. "Every creature recognises the elementary laws of life. One must eat to live. In order to eat, one must sometimes kill. That is understood."

"But the black man doesn't kill merely to fill himself up with kangaroo-tail soup or a tender steak, or to flay the skin off a scarce-dead carcase in order to fill his own greedy pocket.

"And the black man doesn't slaughter the doe with a little one in her pouch, so that two perish at the one time. It is only the white man who does these things."

"I've done my best to stop it," muttered the Hunter.

"Yes, you're a good man," said Bungal. "It's a pity there aren't a great many more like you. I have read what you have written for other white men to read. But your people are so stupid; they will not learn—not even from disaster."

"Long ago we thought to teach Man a lesson," went on Wonga, speaking almost to himself.

"Throughout the ages, various animals have thought to teach him. Once it was the tigers. In far-off India they organised a man-hunt. They killed a few grown men and some men-children, but the sticks-that-kill made it very bad for the tigers—very bad indeed.

"Another time it was the elephants—that was in Africa. Some of the herds went on the rampage, destroying villages and towns and camps. But they stopped short on the outskirts of a city, bewildered by the strange surroundings.

"Then the white men organised, and the outcome of it was that many elephants were killed, and the slayers had a fine haul of ivory. It was most unfortunate.

"Even our own dingoes put up



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a fight on behalf of the rest of us once. There were very few white men here then, but they were too many for the dingoes."

"That's true," said Bungal, taking up the tale. "Besides hunting the animals, they used to hunt my people."

"More than once they herded hundreds of us into pens and shot us down in cold blood."

"One such shoot took two days—two days of slaughter, with men, women and piccaninnies lying dead and wounded inside a compound, or fighting to get out. The screaming and the blood—it was terrible! The white men thought it great sport."

"It makes me sick and ashamed to think of it," said the Hunter, bowing his head in his hands.

"You wouldn't have done such a thing," said Bungal, laying a consoling hand on his friend's shoulder. "Please don't think I hold it against you."

"Thanks!" said the Hunter, putting his hand over the black one.

"Then the animals realised that small, individual efforts were useless," continued Wonga, "and that we'd have to unite the world over if any worthwhile result were to be achieved. So we held a conference."

"Where?" asked the Hunter, deeply interested.

"Nowhere. We don't have to gather in crowds to hold conferences as you do. No! We talk over great distances without making a sound. Thoughts fly from one to the other. It's quite simple."

"Must be," remarked the Hunter, completely puzzled.

"It was all very difficult," Wonga told him. "We felt that, where tigers and elephants had failed, others wouldn't have much chance. Finally, it was the smallest of us who made the great effort—the fleas."

"Fleas?" queried the Hunter.

"Yes. They made a suggestion to their carriers, the rats, and the rats agreed to co-operate."

"They infested themselves with fleas and boarded thousands of ships, and were carried to all parts of the world. Then the fleas spread the plague, and men died in great numbers."

Wonga smiled happily at the recollection.

"It was rough on the rats," he admitted gravely, "but they volunteered cheerfully to make the sacrifice on behalf of us all. But it was no use in the end."

"Man devised a means of keeping rats off ships, and one can't cross the seas without transport. It's all very sad. Divided, we certainly fall. United, we can only stand against Man for a little while."

He sighed and was silent.

"Cheer up, brother!" cried Bungal. "Things aren't as bad as you think. Leave Man alone, and he'll destroy himself in time—that is, if he keeps on as he's going now."

Wonga looked interested.

"Man uses the sticks-that-kill on himself, too," explained Bungal.

"He has killing sticks that are enormous. Their bullets travel great distances. A man could fire one of these guns from here and hit a kangaroo on the second range of mountains."

Wonga stared at the ranges whose wild sunrise colors had toned to a rich blue, and shook his head unbelievably.

"From their aeroplanes—the big birds that fly with a great noise," explained Bungal, "they drop bombs that could destroy this mountain in a moment."

"You don't say!" gasped Wonga.

"It's a fact," declared the aborigine. "But their last invention is their best. You know the great hole in the desert where the meteorite fell many years ago?"

"I do," said Wonga, gazing southward and seeing it with his mind's eye.

"Well, the white man has a new bomb that makes a hole compared to which the one out there is a mere scratch on the surface."

THIS YEAR...

Fever

It was necessary to save carefully and to spend it wisely. It is now.

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"In the blinking of an eyelid, it wipes out a city."

"A city?" asked Wonga. "And all the people in it?"

"I'm afraid so," sighed the Hunter.

"I think the yellow men may have this weapon, too," said Bungal. "The black man is too ignorant for such things—may all his shades be praised! But there is no knowing where the madmen may drop their new bombs. They fall on white, yellow and black without discrimination."

Wonga stared in horror.

"They kill their own kind, even when they are not hungry? Why? Is it for sport?"

"It's through ignorance," said the Hunter. "Stupid, wanton

ignorance. And not knowing when to stop."

"So don't worry any more," continued Bungal soothingly.

"Avoid the haunts of men, because they drop bombs only on their own kind.

"Leave Man alone, and in time he will destroy himself. All races appear to be united in this one aim."

"In time, Man will destroy himself," murmured Wonga, gazing far over the sun-filled plain, the jagged hills sharp against a turquoise sky, the far blue ranges, and the wraith-like pink ones, beyond which stretched a calm, limitless ocean of country.

"It's all very sad," remarked Wonga.

And he smiled contentedly.

PERFUME OF WATTLE

THE shadows lengthened from the cropped tussocks pimpling the hillsides. Perfume of wattle bathed approaching evening in delight. The bright landscape danced in air translucent and dazzling. The westering sun, laying vesper offering on the rim of day, melted sky and mountains into a glory of filtered light, and retreated to the core of a continent over which as yet man has no sure dominion. A land of distances, a land dependent upon distances for preservation; a land gorgeously empty and with none of the accumulations of centuries of human occupation; a continent surveyed, fenced, patrolled and policed by the nucleus of a nation analogous to a patriarchal with unwieldy wealth. "Australia, the incredible feat!" he chanted.—Miles Franklin in "All That Swagger."

* * *

"No Failure Save In Giving Up"

Then take this honey for the bitterest cup

There is no failure save in giving up.

No real fall, so long as one still tries,

For seeming setbacks make the strong man wise.

There's no defeat in truth, save from within.

Unless you're beaten there, you're bound to win.—Anon.

* * *

SOME years ago a distinguished churchman stopped on his journey to speak to the Maoris in a settlement. Before leaving for the meeting he asked his host, a Maori chief, whether it would be safe to leave his personal belongings in the pa.

"Oh, yes," replied the chief, "there is not a white man within miles!"