

## **'DOCTOR DO-GOOD'?**

# **CHARLES DUGUID AND ABORIGINAL POLITICS, 1930s-1970s**

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## Part 2 Introduction

### 'BEHIND EVERY GREAT MAN ...'

In 1951, a reporter for *People* magazine described a day in the life of Charles Duguid thus:

[He] is probably Adelaide's busiest man ... His work in the neat surgery on North Terrace accounts for only part of his day. When he leaves there he motors to his large Magill home to the start of another day's work. A half-caste girl answers the door, greets him cheerfully, and gives him any messages. He goes to the study at the back of the house to tackle his correspondence.

At night, when all work is finished, the big Scot will sit in the huge living-room with his wife and munch toast. He will report the doings of the day, the promises and the plans, the victories and the set-backs. Mrs Duguid will listen, debate, criticise and advise. After 16 years of activity she knows the Aboriginal question backwards. For that 16 years she has stood resolutely at her husband's side tasting his every failure, contributing to his every success. Says Duguid, "I could not have done it without her".<sup>1</sup>

Charles Duguid lived his cause: at work and at home, in the mornings and at night, on weekends and on holidays, his passionate concern for the welfare of Australia's Aborigines was all consuming. At the Duguid house 'it was Aborigines for breakfast, dinner and tea, and for supper too if you were around for supper', Nancy Barnes, the 'half-caste girl' referred to above, has recalled.<sup>2</sup> Duguid did more than bring his work for Aborigines home: he turned his home into his work, transforming it over time into a place where Aborigines were welcome to visit and to stay, where a sympathetic ear was guaranteed, and where it was known that action against discrimination would be taken.

For Duguid, bringing Aborigines into his home was a matter of practising what he preached and leading by example; a task made infinitely less onerous by Phyllis' love and support.<sup>3</sup> 'Behind every great man is a great woman', or so it is often said. It would be equally true to say that 'behind every great person are other great people' for no-one works

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<sup>1</sup> 'Dr Duguid—champion of the dark skinned underdog', *People*, 14 February 1951, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Barnes, *Munyi's daughter: A spirited Brumby*, Seaview Press, Henley Beach, 2000, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> In 1954, Charles Duguid explained that: 'For many years my wife and I have proclaimed that the mental potential of the Aborigines of Australia is no whit behind that of the white race, and that when the natives are given full respect and opportunity their practice will not be behind. After a time we both felt we should take the lead in according that respect and providing the opportunity. So for ten years we have had Aborigines living in our home as full members'. C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia* (an address to the Annual Meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society, June 1954), Anti-Slavery Society, London, 1966, p. 10.



entirely alone, however, in Charles Duguid's case the cliché holds true. As well as helping with Charles' campaigns—drafting letters, editing articles and debating ideas—Phyllis Duguid acted as 'temporary mother' to the Aboriginal children who stayed in their home, 'mistress' to the Aboriginal servants they employed, and 'confidant/friend' to the numerous Aborigines who passed through their home, some staying for days, weeks, months and even years.<sup>4</sup> But Phyllis was much more than Charles' helper. Drawing on her experiences in the home, she became a leading advocate on behalf of Aboriginal and mixed-descent women, and a leading proponent of Aboriginal 'advancement' during the second world war.<sup>5</sup> After the war, Phyllis turned her attention to mothering a six year old Aboriginal boy, Sydney James Cook, who lived with the Duguids for six years between 1944 and 1950.

Companion to the previous section, this section examines the Duguids' domestic and working arrangements in the period 1938-1950. The home and all things pertaining to the home—cooking, cleaning and the raising of children—was typically the domain of women, otherwise known as the 'private sphere'. The 'public sphere'—work, politics and finance—was the domain of men. The Duguids' combined efforts on behalf of Aborigines blurred this distinction: the public became the private and the private became the public, but the sex-role stereotyping that underpinned the ideology of separate spheres remained. Thus, when Phyllis Duguid entered the public sphere, she entered as 'Mrs C. Duguid ... the wife of Dr C. Duguid whose interest in the welfare of Aborigines is well known'.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, her work for Aborigines was directed mainly, although not exclusively, at helping Aboriginal women and children, considered by men and women alike as the proper preserve of the female reformer.<sup>7</sup>

Whether luxury or burden, the social and sexual conventions that bound European men and women to separate spheres did not apply to Aborigines. Every aspect of their lives from birth to death was public: they were studied, sorted into categories and administered by the state; their work, their movements and their relationships were regulated; their children were removed. What were Charles and Phyllis Duguids' views on the increasingly interventionist policies and practices of the state? How did they feel about Aboriginal child removal? To what extent were their views shaped by contemporary racial theories, as opposed to lived realities as experienced in their home? Their 'adopted' Aboriginal son was a 'full-blood', and therefore an anomaly in white society. What difference did this make? By focussing on these lesser known aspects of the Duguids'

<sup>4</sup> See Barnes, *Munyi's daughter*, pp. 65-72.

<sup>5</sup> See Alison Holland, 'Post-War Women Reformers and Aboriginal Citizenship: Rehearsing an Old Campaign?' in Joy Damousi and Katherine Ellinghaus (eds.), *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives*, the Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1999, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> 'Tackling Problem Of the Half-Caste Girl', *News*, 5 August 1938.

<sup>7</sup> See Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines'. The White Woman's Crusade. A Study of Gender and the Australian Frontier, 1920s-1960s', PhD thesis, School of History, The University of New South Wales, 1998, p. 10.

activism, centred largely around the home, this section seeks to broaden historical understandings of both Charles and Phyllis Duguids' campaigning. Theirs was not a popular cause. What drove them to act? What did they hope to achieve? With the controversy surrounding the 'stolen generations' still raging, the Duguids' views on Aboriginal child removal remain problematic today, although for very different reasons. How should their efforts to 'rescue' Aboriginal children be understood? In asking and answering such questions, this section sets the scene for Part 3: Assimilation—a topic about which unanswered (and unasked) questions abound.



### Chapter 3

#### PHYLLIS DUGUID

#### 'Even might itself has not the power of gentleness'

In 1987, one year after Charles Duguid's death, Phyllis Duguid received a Medal of the Order of Australia for her services to Aboriginal welfare.<sup>1</sup> Upon her death in 1992, her ashes were scattered over Charles' grave at Ernabella mission. Phyllis' headstone, placed directly below and at a right angle to Charles', looks up at his, symbolically supporting and reflecting him in death as in life. It reads, 'Even might itself has not the power of gentleness', a fitting epitaph for both of them, for where Charles was 'courageous', 'arrogant' and often 'impossible', Phyllis was 'dignified', 'gracious', and 'calm'.<sup>2</sup> She was the 'gentleness' to his 'might': the 'calm centre around which the turbulent whirlwind of [his] activities revolved, and were held together'.<sup>3</sup> And Phyllis Duguid was also an important campaigner for Aborigines in her own right.

Phyllis Duguid's work for Aborigines is much less well known than her husband's.<sup>4</sup> While partly a reflection of the smaller scale of her activities—Phyllis wrote less and published less than her husband, hence fewer records remain—the lack of interest in her activism can also be attributed to her own reticence to acknowledge it. Phyllis saw herself, and represented herself, as helping with her husband's cause. Although, as this chapter will show, Phyllis was much more than Charles' helper, her support *was* essential. This chapter begins, therefore, with a study of Charles and Phyllis Duguids' working relationship. Did Charles support his wife's endeavours? How was their collaboration expressed? It then examines Phyllis' efforts to help Aboriginal and mixed-descent women, before addressing the issue of Aboriginal child removal; a topic about which Phyllis had surprisingly little to say, especially in contrast to Charles whose (now controversial) views will also be examined.

<sup>1</sup> 'Residents win Australia Day honours', *Eastern Suburbs Messenger*, 11 February 1987.

<sup>2</sup> These impressions were gained through talking to people who knew Charles and Phyllis Duguid. Personal communication with Andrew Duguid, 1 February 2000; Rosemary Douglas, 24 August 1999; Nancy Sheppard, 6 and 17 January 2000; Dr Basil Hetzel, 27 January 2000; Nancy Barnes, 6 and 15 January 2000; Bill Edwards, 6 January 2000; Dr Barbara Bray, 13 January 2000; Helen Burns, 14 January 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Barnes, *Munyi's daughter: A spirited Brumby*, Seaview Press, Henley Beach, 2000, pp. 66-67.

<sup>4</sup> While there has been much scholarship on the role of white women in Aboriginal politics, it has tended to focus on the inter-war period. A notable exception is Alison Holland, 'Post-War Women Reformers and Aboriginal Citizenship: Rehearsing an Old Campaign?' in Joy Damousi and Katherine Ellinghaus (eds.), *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives*, the Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1999, pp. 20-29. Phyllis Duguid is also mentioned in Heather Radi, 'A Note on Jessie Street's Interest in Aboriginal Welfare', in H. Radi (ed.), *Jessie Street: Documents and Essays*, Women's Redress Press, Marrickville, 1990, pp. 257-258.



## I. Partners in the cause

Phyllis Evelyn Lade (1904-1992) came from a prominent Adelaide family. Her father, a noted scholar and Methodist minister, was principal of the Wesley Theological College, while her mother, a home-maker, came from a wealthy Melbourne family.<sup>5</sup> Both her parents had strong views on the importance of education for girls. Phyllis attended Miss Henderson's school for girls—'a very fine little private school'—before finishing her secondary education at the Methodist Ladies College in Adelaide. In 1922 she won a bursary to attend the University of Adelaide where she studied classics, English language and literature. On completion of her four-year honours degree, Phyllis worked as a tutor in the School of English, before accepting a full-time position at the Presbyterian Girls College in Adelaide where she taught senior English for three years before marrying Charles in 1930. 'In those days', Phyllis reflected, 'you would need to have been extremely keen about your career to have postponed marriage, or put it aside altogether.' Believing that she had to choose between marriage and a career, Phyllis chose the former, although in her eyes 'marriage [was] a career'.<sup>6</sup>

Looking back on her life, Phyllis felt that perhaps she should have made better use of her degree. Despite feeling 'quite confident that [she] was doing what [she] was supposed to be doing' by getting married and having children, Phyllis nevertheless wondered whether she should have been more 'responsible'. 'Except in [her] own personal life, of course', Phyllis felt that she had not made sufficient use of her degree. This, however, was to seriously underestimate the importance of her 'personal life'. Phyllis' personal life revolved around helping others. In addition to her work for Aborigines, she was a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Women's Non-Party Political Association—an organisation devoted 'to equal status for women'—and was a long serving member of the South Australian government's Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board.<sup>7</sup> In 1944, Phyllis wrote and published a booklet entitled *The Economic Status of the Homemaker* in which she put the case for paying home-makers a regular wage, thereby joining a long line of distinguished Australian and international feminists who had called for the same reform.<sup>8</sup> Equal representation

<sup>5</sup> Barnes, *Munyi's daughter*, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> Alison Mackinnon, *The New Women: Adelaide's early women graduates*, Wakefield Press, Netley, 1986, pp. 165-173. I am indebted to Mary Hutchison for this reference. Hutchison interviewed Phyllis Duguid for Mackinnon's book in 1984. The lengthy transcript contained in this book provides otherwise unobtainable insights into Phyllis' early life.

<sup>7</sup> Mackinnon, *The New Women*, p. 165-73.

<sup>8</sup> From Rose Scott's paper on 'The Economic Independence of the Married Woman' presented in 1903, to Jessie Street's pamphlet, *Income for Wives How It Can Be Managed or The Economic Independence of Married Women*, published in the late 1930s, Australian feminists 'have long championed economic independence for women'. See Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The history of Australian feminism*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1999, pp. 5, 87-109. See also Phyllis Duguid, *The Economic Status of the Homemaker*, Hunkin, Ellis and King, Adelaide, 1944, Phyllis Duguid Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide (hereafter Phyllis Duguid Papers).



for women in parliament was another of Phyllis' causes: how can Australia be 'truly democratic', she asked in 1940, 'when one half of our population is not thoroughly represented'?<sup>9</sup> In her later years, Phyllis fought against the legalisation of prostitution, seeing it—and the 1970s women's movement that supported it—as 'incompatible with human dignity'.<sup>10</sup>

Phyllis' feminist ideals, so important in her work for white women, were less so in relation to her work for Aborigines.<sup>11</sup> As a woman, Phyllis believed that she had a 'duty' to help Aboriginal women, but it was a duty motivated by gender affinity, Christian morality and guilt more than feminism, although feminism was also important. In one of her many radio broadcasts for the WCTU, for example, Phyllis described the Aboriginal woman's plight as 'an abiding reproach to us as women, [for] instead of helping the Aboriginal woman to develop and attain a status akin to our own, we have remained indifferent or at least voiceless while she has been degraded'.<sup>12</sup> Phyllis felt similarly responsible for the deplorable state of Aborigines in general. In the same broadcast she argued that:

If they are a dying race it is because in past days we actually encouraged their extermination and in present days are indifferent to it. We have been told that their passing is inevitable. It is not. If they die we are their murderers.<sup>13</sup>

Although, like Charles, Phyllis cautioned against dwelling 'too long on [Australia's] unhappy past', it being 'one for which we, as individuals, [could] hardly feel direct responsibility', her words told a different story.<sup>14</sup> Phyllis felt a deep, almost overwhelming, sense of shame at Australia's 'tragic' and continuing error. In taking up the cause of Aborigines—men, women and children alike—Phyllis sought to 'make amends': she wanted 'to atone for the past and bring about better times for the Aborigines'.<sup>15</sup> Feminism, and the feminist movement of which Phyllis was a part, gave her a forum in which to voice her concerns about Aborigines, but Phyllis was not a 'feminist activist'. She was a feminist *and* an activist on behalf of Aborigines. This distinction is important and necessary for several reasons.

In *Getting Equal: The history of Australian feminism* (1999), Marilyn Lake has acknowledged that 'feminism has its limits as a politics of emancipation'. In a

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- <sup>9</sup> P. Duguid, untitled transcript of radio broadcast, 20 May 1940, Phyllis Duguid Papers.
  - <sup>10</sup> P. Duguid, 'Traffic in persons—A Human Indignity', unpublished address, [1977], Phyllis Duguid Papers; P. Duguid to Barbara Jones, 25 June 1978 and 2 March 1980, Letters from Phyllis Duguid, State Library of South Australia, Mortlock Collection, D 7277 (L).
  - <sup>11</sup> The reforms that Phyllis advocated for white women—economic independence and equal representation in parliament—found little expression in her work for Aboriginal women and men who were denied the basic tenets of citizenship.
  - <sup>12</sup> P. Duguid, untitled typescript of radio broadcast, 2 April 1939, Phyllis Duguid Papers.
  - <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
  - <sup>14</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Responsibility of Nation Building', *The White Ribbon Signal*, May 1941, p. 72.
  - <sup>15</sup> P. Duguid, untitled typescript of radio broadcast, 2 April 1939; P. Duguid, 'The Future of the Aboriginal', *The White Ribbon Signal*, March 1942, p. 24.



contemporary context, Lake observes that 'Indigenous women ... might find other issues more pressing [than feminism]: for example, land rights and the reconstitution of family, culture, languages and community life'.<sup>16</sup> Transposed to the inter-war period, these concerns of Aboriginal women—or non-feminist issues—remain remarkably pertinent, yet Lake represents as 'feminist activists' white women who campaigned on these and other non-gender specific issues.<sup>17</sup> While presumably it was their focus on the rights of Aboriginal women that made their wider concerns 'feminist' in Lake's view, issues such as Aboriginal health, education and citizenship were also tackled by white men and women who were not feminists. In *Loving Protection? Australian Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Rights 1919-1939*, Fiona Paisley has argued that white women's campaigns during the inter-war period were not 'inherently feminist', or, more precisely, that it is not 'adequate' to claim that they were.<sup>18</sup> However, it is feminism that distinguishes the 'pro-indigenous' women activists in her book from the (largely absent) humanitarian men. According to Paisley, women's politics and humanitarian (men's) politics were different: although they 'existed alongside' each other and shared some features and some members, the humanitarian lobby 'lacked the women activists' focus on the right of Aboriginal women to independent lives'.<sup>19</sup>

While acknowledging that many 'key white women reformers', including Phyllis Duguid, were 'deeply committed' to feminist ideals, Alison Holland has argued that much of what they campaigned on 'was part of a broader, well-established humanitarian critique'; a critique dominated by male campaigners, hence the vital importance of 'recovering women's contribution' to it.<sup>20</sup> For Paisley, however, this is not enough. In her view, studies which incorporate women's campaigns into 'existing humanitarian frameworks' run the risk of 'subsuming their agenda under that of pro-indigenous men', thereby obscuring 'the distinctiveness of their self-consciously women's voice on Aboriginal policy'.<sup>21</sup> Without denying the importance of women's voices, Holland's thesis—"Saving the Aborigines". The White Woman's Crusade—points out the limitations of studying humanitarianism from a purely female (or male) perspective. To 'reveal the connections between women and men reformers' is to recognise the high degree of 'productive collaboration' between them, she has argued, thereby necessitating a broader approach to the study of both.<sup>22</sup> For not only were white women reformers 'generally supported and encouraged by the leading male humanitarians', many prominent women activists 'were [the] wives of ... leading scientific

<sup>16</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-135.

<sup>18</sup> Fiona Paisley, *Loving Protection? Australian Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Rights 1919-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2000, p. 147.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Holland, "Saving the Aborigines". The White Woman's Crusade. A Study of Gender, Race and the Australian Frontier, 1920s-1960s', PhD Thesis, School of History, The University of New South Wales, 1998, pp. 10, 363.

<sup>21</sup> Paisley, *Loving Protection?*, p. 144.

<sup>22</sup> Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines', p. 16.



men', Holland has observed, citing by way of example 'Constance Cooke, Mrs Harvey Johnston, Mrs Strehlow, Mrs C. P. Mountford and Mrs Duguid'; all of whom utilised the work of male anthropologists, scientists and campaigners, including their husbands, in their work for Aborigines.<sup>23</sup>

Rather than claim for women reformers a (false) 'distinctiveness' based on feminism, Holland sought to locate their work 'within the context of both feminist politics and humanitarianism', thereby expanding on, and departing from, the work of Paisley and Lake. Finding Paisley and Lake's claim for a 'distinctive feminist response' to Aboriginal welfare reform too heavily reliant on the Western Australian campaigner, Mary Bennett's significant contribution, Holland has argued that it was only by dissolving 'Bennett's distinctive, even radical humanitarian agenda into that of the feminist reformer' that Paisley and Lake could demonstrate their claim.<sup>24</sup> That Mary Bennett was, as Paisley has observed, 'a key figure in ... the political lives of other activist women', and that she 'corresponded with many activist women' is undeniable.<sup>25</sup> However, Bennett was also important in the political lives of many activist men, including Charles Duguid, with whom she corresponded regularly from the mid 1930s. Indeed, with the exception of one letter addressed 'to the Duguids' and one to Phyllis herself, all Bennett's remaining correspondence with the Duguids is addressed to Charles, with 'kindest remembrances and best wishes' to Phyllis expressed at the end.<sup>26</sup>

Unless feminism is defined so broadly as to be meaningless, its usefulness as an analytical tool—or descriptive political agenda—is limited, and limiting, with regard to Phyllis Duguid's work for Aborigines. To focus on her self-consciously feminist activities, namely her work for Aboriginal women, would be to misrepresent the full depth and breadth of her concerns. Like most women activists, Phyllis did not confine herself to helping Aboriginal women. Instead, in articles such as 'The Responsibility of Nation Building' (1941), 'The Future of the Aboriginal' (1942) and 'The Atlantic Charter and the Aborigines' (1944), all published in *The White Ribbon Signal*, official organ of the WCTU of Australia, Phyllis sought to educate white women about their responsibilities towards Aborigines.<sup>27</sup> Of all her published articles on Aborigines, only one dealt mainly with

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 44.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Paisley, *Loving Protection?*, pp. 10, 15.

<sup>26</sup> See Duguid Papers, National Library of Australia, MS 5068 (hereafter Duguid Papers: 1), Series 11; Mary M. Bennett to P. Duguid, 9 October 1948, Phyllis Duguid Papers. In bringing Charles Duguid to the notice of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) in London, Bennett stated that: 'He and his very able wife ... are friends of mine and among the most valiant champions the Aborigines have'. Bennett to Miss Allen, general secretary NCCL, 20 August 1946, Records of the NCCL, National Library of Australia, Australian Joint Copying Project, M 2659.

<sup>27</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Responsibility of Nation Building', *The White Ribbon Signal*, 15 May 1941, pp. 72-73; P. Duguid, 'The Future of the Aboriginal', *The White Ribbon Signal*, March 1942, p. 24; P. Duguid, 'The Atlantic Charter and the Aborigines', *The White Ribbon Signal*, March 1944, pp. 17-18.



Aboriginal women. Entitled 'The Australian Aborigines—III: A Woman's View', it was part three in a series of articles published by *The Australian Intercollegian* in 1940, the first two of which were written by Charles. In part two, Charles indicated that his wife would deal with 'matters cognate to native women in a subsequent article', and she did, although not before 're-emphasis[ing] certain truths about the people as a whole'.<sup>28</sup> These 'truths' were about Aborigines' culture, intelligence and adaptability; they were about Aboriginal men and were based on the 'unchallengeable' authority of two white men, her husband and Professor A.P. Elkin. Thus, while it was feminism—or Phyllis' belief in equality—that encouraged her to voice her concerns about Aborigines and to believe that her 'woman's view' mattered, Phyllis' 'woman's view' was not necessarily a 'feminist view'. For the most part, Phyllis' views were the same as Charles'—and Charles' the same as Phyllis'.

Of the collaboration between Charles and Phyllis Duguid, Holland has described 'theirs [as] a partnership of which the humanitarian movement had many examples'.<sup>29</sup> Following Holland, I argue that Phyllis' work for Aborigines cannot be understood without reference to Charles', and vice versa. Charles' frank admission that he 'could not have managed without her' is no exaggeration.<sup>30</sup> When he returned home from his trips to Central Australia, brimming with anger, frustration and idealism, it was Phyllis in whom he confided: she was there to listen, counsel and console. When Charles learned of the Australian Inland Mission's misappropriation of the Smith of Dunesk Bequest, it was Phyllis who undertook the laborious task of writing the Bequest's history, trawling through the archives in support of her husband's claim.<sup>31</sup> When the controversy regarding John Flynn's alleged anti-Aboriginal remarks erupted, Phyllis' declaration of support—I was never more behind you in anything you have done since I married you than in this—strengthened Charles' resolve.<sup>32</sup> Likewise over the rocket range, Phyllis' support, and her active participation in campaigns against the project through the WCTU, was essential.

The following poem, lovingly and skilfully crafted at Phyllis' hand, provides otherwise unobtainable—and therefore precious—insights into the nature of her relationship with Charles. Simply entitled 'To Charles', Phyllis wrote:

<sup>28</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—II', *The Australian Intercollegian*, July 1940, p. 90; P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—III: A Woman's View', *The Australian Intercollegian*, September 1940, p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines', p. 361.

<sup>30</sup> See 'Dr Duguid—champion of the dark-skinned underdog', *People*, 14 February 1951, p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> According to Charles, 'The task of going through so many volumes was beyond me, unless I gave up my work, so my wife generously took the task in hand'. C. Duguid, address entitled 'I wish to speak to the Smith of Dunesk Report', March 1941, p. 2, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 6. The result was P. Duguid, *A Brief Account of the "Smith of Dunesk Bequest"*, [1937], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 9.

<sup>32</sup> C. Duguid to John MacKenzie, Moderator General Presbyterian Church, 11 February 1937, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.



You might have sought a milder wife  
 Who never would have caused you strife  
 You might have wed a clinging vine  
 You would have loved her—man of mine!  
 But she who travels by your side  
 Has sometimes sought to be a guide  
 And this perhaps is only fair  
 As she will all your burdens share.<sup>33</sup>

Phyllis was a talented wordsmith, she loved language, words and poetry. To bring light relief, laughter and happiness through comical verse was her great joy. Family and friends looked forward to receiving her personalised poems on birthdays and other special occasions.<sup>34</sup> Charles was in the throes of writing *No Dying Race* when Phyllis delivered this next one:

Though you're attached with dismal rage  
 And long to tear each written page—  
 Your cameras, slides and films to hurl  
 And watch them in the furnace curl  
 And shrivel in the ghastly flame—  
 Yet may I hope your wrath to tame  
 To lead you gently by the ear  
 And love you through another year.<sup>35</sup>

Was Phyllis Charles' guide? Did she lead him 'by the ear'? Or were these satirical devices meant to imply the opposite? Phyllis was certainly no 'clinging vine', but nor was she as self-assured as a literal interpretation of her verse would suggest. Perhaps it is unfair or unwise to read too much into Phyllis' poems? However, when read in conjunction with the testimony of family and friends who knew her best, it would seem foolish not to consider their deeper meaning.

Andrew Duguid, Charles and Phyllis' son born in 1931, told me that his father 'had a drive and intensity, plus a serious commitment to social issues' that his mother 'lacked', but it was not a lack he regretted. Phyllis, Andrew explained, was 'more balanced', 'more critical minded' and 'more cautious' than Charles. As her 'family poems' attest, Phyllis was 'very much a family person', according to Andrew, whose 'light fun side ... nicely balanced her deep seriousness'.<sup>36</sup> Rosemary Douglas, the Duguids' daughter born in 1934, made

<sup>33</sup> P. Duguid, untitled and undated poem, Phyllis Duguid Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication with Nancy Sheppard, 17 January 2000.

<sup>35</sup> P. Duguid, untitled poem, [1961], Phyllis Duguid Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication with Andrew Duguid, 1 February 2000.

similar observations of her parents. 'Mum had an amazing mind', Rosemary told me: she was 'thoughtful and caring' where Charles was 'spontaneous and brash'. Rosemary recalled having disliked Aborigines as a child because of the time her father spent with them. That she expressed no such (understandable) resentment on account of her mother's work for Aborigines is suggestive of Phyllis' lesser involvement. But not so, according to Rosemary, who insisted that Phyllis was 'equally as involved and passionate about the cause' as Charles. However, 'it was *his* cause', Rosemary stressed: Charles assumed public prominence while Phyllis stayed 'more or less on the sidelines'.<sup>37</sup>

Dr Barbara Bray, a friend of the Duguids' and member of the South Australian Aborigines Advancement League (SA AAL) from the late 1960s, believed that Phyllis 'kept herself deliberately back', while Nancy Sheppard, a former teacher at Ernabella and close friend of Charles and Phyllis in their later years, doubted Phyllis' 'authority to speak her mind'.<sup>38</sup> Both agreed that Phyllis 'was an extremely intelligent woman' with 'a great mind' and 'well integrated personality'. Bray even went so far as to claim that Phyllis was 'the brains behind Charles' campaign'; a claim often heard of the wives of famous men.<sup>39</sup> So why did Phyllis hold herself back, if indeed she did? Bray attributed this to Phyllis being 'very proper'. When speaking and writing of her husband, Phyllis 'always referred to Charles as the "Doctor"', Bray explained; even in casual conversation she would call him 'Doctor', thus reinforcing his superior public role. At SA AAL meetings, Bray continued, 'the women wore hats and gloves and called each Mrs so and so—never first names—while they spouted revolutionary ideas'. Bray's image of Phyllis—'most proper but also radical'—embodied this duality, for although Phyllis was 'very forward looking', Bray discerned a limit, set by Phyllis' own sense of propriety, as to how far she could go.<sup>40</sup>

Phyllis may indeed have kept herself back, and she was doubtless 'very proper', but it would be a mistake to assume, on the basis of this, that she was any less effective or committed a campaigner. Phyllis gave as much time and energy to the Aboriginal cause as she felt she could, and should, without sacrificing time with her family. Charles, in contrast, sacrificed almost everything; 'he lost patients, money and family time'.<sup>41</sup> Thus, if it is only in contrast to Charles' high public profile that Phyllis' seems low, and if it is only when measured against his efforts to help Aborigines that hers seem less, then the problem lies with the comparison. Whether consciously drawn or not, it is the comparison with Charles that gives rise to the notion of Phyllis' lesser role. His passion was so great, his commitment so boundless and his efforts so highly regarded, that when considered alongside Charles, Phyllis pales in comparison. For the 'greater good', which included the good of her family, Phyllis assumed a lesser role in the fight for justice for Aborigines:

<sup>37</sup> Personal communication with Rosemary Douglas, 24 August 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication with Dr Barbara Bray, 13 January 2000 and Sheppard, 17 January 2000.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Personal communication with Bray, 13 January 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Personal communication with Sheppard, 6 January 2000.



she moulded herself to suit her husband's needs without any expectation of reciprocity, but it was a sacrifice willingly and consciously made. It did not diminish her capacity to fight, nor does it diminish her importance as a campaigner, or the importance of the battles she fought. Rather than set Charles and Phyllis against each other, it is far more beneficial, and appropriate, to see the differences between them as enabling the cause.

On a basic, yet fundamental level, Phyllis' role as wife and mother, her place in the home, care of the children and supervision of household tasks facilitated Charles' campaigning by freeing his time. But Phyllis was much more than a home-maker. With an honours degree in English literature, Phyllis was also 'chief-editor' of Charles' writing. According to Andrew, Phyllis was largely responsible for 'cleaning up' if not writing much of his father's work on Aborigines.<sup>42</sup> Nancy Barnes, an Aboriginal woman who lived with the Duguids for five years, has recalled many an instance of Phyllis checking Charles' impulsive outbursts:

"Now Charles, are you sure? Would it not be more accurate to state it so?" she would say to him. He might protest that he had the matter in substance, while she held out for the most accurate recall possible.<sup>43</sup>

By the consistency of depictions alone, it seems clear that Phyllis tempered Charles' fiery spirit, making him a better and more effective campaigner. No doubt Phyllis was, as Dr Basil Hetzel, a colleague and friend has attested, 'a remarkable wife and woman', all the more so for having 'coped with Charles amazingly'.<sup>44</sup> However, rather than Phyllis leading Charles 'by the ear', or Charles leading Phyllis, they need to be understood as a partnership, working together to achieve their aims, the personalities, skills and temperaments of each complementing the other.

Phyllis travelled by Charles' side; that she 'sometimes sought to be a guide' she saw as 'only fair' for all his burdens did she share. They 'sparked off each other', Rosemary has recalled of her parents, discussing ideas and solving problems together.<sup>45</sup> Neither Charles nor Phyllis doubted, however, that the cause was 'his'. According to Phyllis, she joined the WCTU because 'they were one of the few groups that were the least bit interested in justice for the Aborigines', and this appealed to her, she explained, 'because of [her] husband's interest'.<sup>46</sup> In 1938 Phyllis journeyed to Alice Springs with M.E. Eaton, president of the South Australian branch of the WCTU, to investigate the condition of Aboriginal and mixed-descent women. That Phyllis wanted to 'see the situation for herself' Charles later acknowledged in *Doctor and the Aborigines* (1972), but at the time found it more fruitful to reconcile Phyllis' solo trip with the telling explanation that 'my wife did my

<sup>42</sup> Personal communication with Andrew Duguid, 4 November 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Barnes, *Munyi's Daughter*, p. 66.

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication with Dr Basil Hetzel, 27 January 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Personal communication with Rosemary Douglas, 24 August 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Mackinnon, *The New Women*, p. 170.



trip this year'.<sup>47</sup> In *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Charles recorded Phyllis' interest in Aboriginal issues thus:

Phyllis was to identify herself completely with *my* cause, "speaking out" to many groups and above all creating in our home a centre of mutual respect between Aborigines and ourselves.<sup>48</sup>

As the parenthesis on 'speaking out' suggests, Charles likely saw this aspect of his wife's campaigning as something novel, perhaps even something quite daring. Although he supported her endeavours and, by all accounts, was immensely proud of her achievements, Charles would perhaps have preferred his wife to confine her efforts to helping him from home, for it was in the home, according to him, that Phyllis' greatest impact was felt.

Along with many other male humanitarians, Charles Duguid believed that women were best suited to help other women.<sup>49</sup> As Holland has observed, this demarcation of roles 'was symptomatic of the lingering Victorian sexual ideology concerning the 'separate spheres' that underpinned white gender relations, and women's involvement in public life at this time'.<sup>50</sup> Thus, according to Charles, the best way for white women to 'help raise' Aboriginal women was to do as Phyllis did in the home. Her 'handling of half-white girls' employed by them was a lesson to all, he claimed, for rather than 'din into them with deprecating tone and looks that they mustn't speak to boys', Phyllis faced 'reality'. She invited the 'half-caste girls' in their employ 'to bring their boyfriends to the home rather than to walk the streets' with the following heartening results:

Invariably at first the invitation causes amazement and the lads, to begin with, are more shy than the girls, but a fire and a supper prepared by themselves, with no interference beyond one's presence in a nearby room, soon creates a healthier outlook.<sup>51</sup>

By demonstrating the 'proper' way to entertain, and by demonstrating trust, Phyllis sought to foster 'self-respect' in her young domestics, and 'mutual respect' in the couple. Other than Phyllis, however, and the WCTU of Adelaide which Charles 'commended for the work of this nature it [was] doing through its Aboriginal Girls' Club', Charles was

<sup>47</sup> C. Duguid to Sir John Harris, secretary Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, 28 November 1938, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1 (emphasis added).

<sup>48</sup> C. Duguid, *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Rigby, Adelaide, p. 94 (emphasis added).

<sup>49</sup> During his 1936 patrol through Central Australia, Charles found it 'difficult to get near the women ... of the far out-bush'. Finding it less difficult to approach 'missionised' Aboriginal women, he praised 'Christianity [for having] given woman her status', and made note in his diary of 'a great field of work for the women of the South'. C. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 2.

<sup>50</sup> Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines', p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> C. Duguid, *The Future of the Aborigines of Australia*, Presbyterian Board of Missions, Adelaide, 1941, pp. 17-18.



'astonished at the number of Christian women who [did] not care to be associated with Aboriginal women'. Did this mean, he wondered, that women were 'more susceptible to colour prejudice than men?'<sup>52</sup> Certainly not, Charles hoped, but the apparent indifference, even antipathy, of white women towards Aboriginal women could not be ignored.

## II. 'Essentially women's work': The League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women

To reach the women of Australia, Phyllis Duguid had to venture beyond the home. Her journey to Alice Springs with WCTU president, M.E. Eaton, in July 1938 marked the beginning of this. After a very 'watery parting' in Adelaide, for which Phyllis later apologised—'I never used to be like that', she told Charles, '[its] sickening'—the journey by train to Alice Springs was like stepping 'into a different world', according to Phyllis, one in which only those going 'right through' were seen as living 'close to the raw'.<sup>53</sup> With its 'miles of flat stony country', 'red dust' and 'awful ... lack of trees', the Interior was a masculine, alien world. For the final two weeks of their month-long sojourn, the two women visited Ernabella mission, a gruelling two day journey by car which sorely tested Eaton's strength and Phyllis' resolve: 'I should never have brought [Eaton] out here at all', Phyllis complained.<sup>54</sup> In her letters home to Charles from Ernabella, Phyllis expressed a deep sense of unease at 'being so shut off' from civilisation: 'I get horribly panicky' and 'I get all sorts of fears', she admitted.<sup>55</sup> It was Ernabella's beauty that finally settled Phyllis' nerves. Everywhere she looked, Phyllis saw beauty: the Aborigines were 'quite naked and so beautiful', she marvelled, while the countryside with its 'masses of lavender pea shaped flowers' was 'perfectly beautiful'.<sup>56</sup> Despite its isolation, or perhaps because of it, Ernabella's beauty stood in marked contrast to the ugliness Phyllis witnessed in Alice Springs.

Alice Springs was to help Phyllis 'grow a thicker skin'. Although it was 'strenuous going', by the end of her first week away Phyllis 'began to see daylight': '[I] have set some tiny wheels going this week', she told Charles, 'there is so much to be done up here—surely my coming will accomplish something'.<sup>57</sup> Phyllis' main purpose in visiting Alice Springs was to investigate the living conditions and 'future prospects' of Aboriginal and mixed-descent women and girls. Her first stop was the Alice Springs Police Station

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> P. Duguid to C. Duguid, 7 July 1938, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>54</sup> P. Duguid, 'Diary of journey to Alice Springs, Hermannsburg and Ernabella Missions', July-August 1938, pp. 1-4, 37, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>55</sup> In fact, Phyllis was so desperate 'to come home' that she considered leaving Eaton behind. See P. Duguid to C. Duguid, 24 July 1938, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>56</sup> P. Duguid, 'Diary of journey', pp. 40-42; 'Natives Allowed to Remain Naked', *News*, 6 August 1938. See also P. Duguid, *An Impression of Ernabella*, Presbyterian Board of Missions, Melbourne, 1938.

<sup>57</sup> P. Duguid to C. Duguid, 7 July 1938; P. Duguid to C. Duguid, undated (from Alice Springs), Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.



where a young woman, Ann Smith, formerly of the 'half-caste' home at Quorn, was being held awaiting trial for forgery.<sup>58</sup> Before leaving Alice Springs, Phyllis learned that Smith was pregnant; 'a pitiful complication' that might 'save her from gaol', Phyllis reflected, 'but [would] probably mean life for some years in the half-caste home and after that what?' Phyllis believed that girls like Smith desperately needed 'some deep interest in life'. However, her suggestion of a social club—'a place where half-caste and native girls could spend their spare time under proper care'—found little support among Alice Springs residents. It came as something of a shock to Phyllis to learn that even members of the Country Women's Association—otherwise 'quite good people'—had 'strong anti-half-caste feeling[s]'.<sup>59</sup> Following talks with sympathetic residents, Phyllis concluded that:

The antipathy of so many white women of the district is rooted in the unpleasant knowledge that fathers, uncles and even husbands have bestowed their names on half-caste off-spring. Thus Mrs John Smith has her charming baby Mary-Jane in the [AIM] hostel, while half-caste Ann Smith carries her unborn infant in Alice Springs lock up.<sup>60</sup>

The prevailing attitude, 'give them an outside room and shut your eyes', encapsulated the problem for Phyllis.<sup>61</sup> Clearly it was no secret what was going on and yet 'nothing was being done—even by the Churches—to provide for [the 'half-castes'] happy acceptance into the society of which they had become a part'.<sup>62</sup>

Immediately upon her return to Adelaide, Phyllis set about interesting 'women's organisations in the future of the half-caste girls'.<sup>63</sup> She wanted 'the women of Australia [to] take the cause of the half-caste girl to heart, and [to] provide her with a place in the national life'.<sup>64</sup> While by no means ideal, Phyllis believed that the 'half-caste boy' posed less of a problem, for he 'found his natural place in station life, and fitted in much more easily'. The 'half-caste girl', in contrast, had no such place; a place for her had to be found. The obvious choice was in the home, for as Phyllis herself had proved, 'half-caste girls were excellent in the house'. Unfortunately, however, 'bringing them to the city as domestic helpers produced all sorts of problems', according to Phyllis, 'they needed to be taught the

<sup>58</sup> To protect the privacy of this woman and her descendants, her name has been changed. Charles and Phyllis Duguid were anxious 'to help the girl up'. Following Phyllis' visit, they sought leave to 'sponsor' Smith in Adelaide for 'such period as might be fixed' to save her from gaol. C. Duguid to Judge Wells of the Supreme Court, 8 August 1938 and J.W. Nichols, Clerk of Court, to C. Duguid, 2 September 1938, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>59</sup> P. Duguid, 'Diary of journey', pp. 27-31.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32. All names in this passage have been changed. The surnames Phyllis gave for the white woman and the Aboriginal woman were the same.

<sup>61</sup> P. Duguid, 'Diary of journey', p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> P. Duguid, 'Early History of Our League', *Aborigines' Advancement League Newsletter*, June 1965, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> 'Tackling Problem of the Half-Caste Girl', *News*, 5 August 1938.

<sup>64</sup> 'Making Places for Half-Caste Girls', *Advertiser*, 5 August 1938.



use of money and to be given proper recreation and interests if they were to lead good lives'.<sup>65</sup>

It was through having 'half-caste girls working in her home' that Phyllis became 'interested in their problems'; problems which she saw as peculiar to them, and which she sought to solve first by changing white society's attitude towards them, and second by changing them.<sup>66</sup> Phyllis firmly believed that 'proper recreation', such as her proposed social club, 'would help greatly in providing them with interests and keeping them [away] from bad influences', namely bad white men.<sup>67</sup> While in Alice Springs, Phyllis learned that 'not one illegitimate baby [had] been born' to a particular group of 'half-caste girls' who had been warned of the dangers of contact with white men.<sup>68</sup> In her mind, therefore, it was not just the attitude and behaviour of white men that needed to change, it was also the attitude of the 'girls' they exploited. 'Half-caste girls' needed to be shown a better way, according to Phyllis, they needed 'to be given a real understanding of themselves with the self-respect which would follow. They [needed] adequate education, cultural opportunities, and above all an ideal'.<sup>69</sup> Although no elaboration on 'ideal' was offered, none was required. The life that Phyllis enjoyed was the 'ideal'. In order to find 'a place in our civilisation'—a place that Phyllis was adamant they deserved—'half-castes girls' needed to become more like white women; educated, aware, self-respecting and chaste.

Phyllis' call to the women of Australia resulted in the formation of a women's lobby group that was dedicated to securing 'an honourable status for Aboriginal and half-caste women'.<sup>70</sup> Provisionally called the Council for the Welfare of Half-Caste and Aboriginal Girls, by the end of November 1938 the group's name had been changed to the League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women.<sup>71</sup> Comprised of representatives from various women's, church and humanitarian groups in Adelaide, the League for Aboriginal Women boasted several high profile campaigners. Among these two names stand out, Constance Ternent Cooke and Ada Bromham, both because of the wealth of experience they brought to Phyllis' new League—Cooke was convenor of the Aborigines' Welfare Committee of the Women's Non-Party Association, while Bromham was secretary of the WCTU and had strong links to the Women's Service

<sup>65</sup> 'Tackling Problem of the Half-Caste Girl', *News*, 5 August 1938.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> 'Making Places for Half-Caste Girls', *Advertiser*, 5 August 1938.

<sup>68</sup> P. Duguid, 'Diary of journey', p. 27.

<sup>69</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—III: A Woman's View', p. 127.

<sup>70</sup> Minutes of the League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women (hereafter League for Aboriginal Women Minutes), 4 November 1938, Papers of the Aborigines Advancement League (hereafter League Papers), State Library of South Australia, Mortlock Collection, SRG 250, Series 2/1.

<sup>71</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 21 October 1938, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/1; League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 24 November 1938, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.



Guilds in Western Australia—and because their executive membership of this League has been largely overlooked by historians.<sup>72</sup>

As influential feminists and Aboriginal rights activists, Cooke and Bromham feature prominently in Marilyn Lake's *Getting Equal* and in Fiona Paisley's *Loving Protection?*, yet neither historian mentions their involvement in Phyllis' League.<sup>73</sup> From Lake we learn that Bromham and Cooke were 'friends and political allies' of Mary Bennett, and that Bromham 'was smart, good looking and articulate. With her shingled hair, simple dress and Oakland car, purchased in 1916, she presented the image of a thoroughly modern woman'. Cooke, we are told, was a Justice of the Peace and a founding member of the Aborigines Protection League, but no mention is made of either her or Bromham's involvement in the League for Aboriginal Women, or of the League itself, in Lake's book.<sup>74</sup> To the best of my knowledge, Alison Holland is the only historian to have written, in any detail, about the League for Aboriginal Women. Demonstrating something of its importance in the Australian context, Holland likened the League for Aboriginal Women to the North American Women's National Indian Association, suggesting that it represented a first attempt to unify Australian women's Aboriginal campaigns.<sup>75</sup> Although short-lived—in 1946 the League for Aboriginal Women merged with the Aborigines Protection League and became the South Australian Aborigines Advancement League, thereafter opening its membership to men and women—its eight year existence as a 'women's only' lobby group raises certain questions. What did the League for Aboriginal Women stand for? How successful was it? Did its methods differ from other organisations? Why has its existence been overlooked by feminist and other historians?

Initiated and presided over by Phyllis Duguid, the League for Aboriginal Women was primarily called into existence to make her goal of a social club for 'half-caste and native girls' in Alice Springs a reality.<sup>76</sup> Immediately, the League faced criticism from the Reverend J.H. Sexton, secretary of the Aborigines' Friends' Association (AFA), who argued that there was already a surplus of organisations working for the Aborigines in Alice Springs. In addition to the three churches and the Salvation Army, Sexton's Association funded a travelling missionary, E.E. Kramer, who worked out of Alice Springs. Moreover, as there were already several groups working for the Aborigines in Adelaide, Sexton saw no need for another group. Defending her initiative, Phyllis argued

<sup>72</sup> For a short biography of Constance Ternent Cooke, see Paisley *Loving Protection?*, pp. 21-22. For Ada Bromham, see 'Bromham, Ada', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 7: 1891-1939, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1979, pp. 421-22.

<sup>73</sup> Given Paisley's focus on the inter-war years, it is possible that Cooke and Bromham's involvement in the League for Aboriginal Women simply fell outside her purview. However, as one of only two white women appointed to the South Australian government's Aborigines Advisory Council, Cooke's membership of that Council until 1940 is mentioned, as is her retirement from public affairs in 1963. See Paisley, *Loving Protection?*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>74</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, pp. 53-54, 111.

<sup>75</sup> Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines', pp. 10-11.

<sup>76</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 22 September 1938, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/1.



that 'no definite welfare work' such as the League for Aboriginal Women contemplated was being done in Alice Springs, while Cooke maintained that the other Adelaide based organisations, including the Aborigines Protection League (APL), were not interested in 'this kind of work at all'.<sup>77</sup> Under Charles Duguid's Presidency, the APL focussed its efforts on 'protecting the myall Aborigines, leaving the detribalised natives to other societies, but helping them whenever possible', while the AFA's practice of making small grants to missions and societies 'working for the native people' inspired little confidence.<sup>78</sup>

More importantly, according to Phyllis, the kind of work she proposed was 'essentially women's work'; it was work for women by women.<sup>79</sup> Her colleagues agreed, pointing out that their League was:

for native women and girls, that its service in this regard was the sole aim of this group and not one of many activities, [and] that matters had been left too long to those who had not recognised the rights of Aboriginal women.<sup>80</sup>

The League for Aboriginal Women's constitution, finalised in November 1938, reflected these aims:

Purpose: A society to secure an honourable status for Aboriginal and half-caste women and girls.

- (1) By insisting on adequate protection for the sanctity of their person.
  - i. The appointment of Women Protectors.
  - ii. Enforcement of Protective Legislation.
  - iii. By maintaining that the Law shall in all particulars give at least the same protection to Aboriginal women as to white women.
- (2) By securing facilities for their gradual development through:-
  - i. Suitable Education.
  - ii. Adequate medical care.
  - iii. Provision of recreational and cultural opportunities.
- (3) By ensuring economic security for the race through:-
  - i. Provision of suitable land.
  - ii. Just remuneration for work.<sup>81</sup>

What made the League for Aboriginal Women different from other groups was its exclusive focus on Aboriginal women, and its inclusion of *all* Aboriginal women and girls,

<sup>77</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 21 October 1938.

<sup>78</sup> Minutes of the Aborigines Protection League, 14 February 1940, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 1/1; Reverend W. Morley to J.H. Sexton, 19 February 1937, Duguid Papers, Series 1.

<sup>79</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 21 October 1938.

<sup>80</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 24 November 1938 (original emphasis).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*



whether 'tribal', 'detribalised' or 'half-caste', within its purview. From the outset, members 'hoped that with an awakening conscience among women of other states' the League would spread nation-wide, enabling the group to express a 'united voice on the question of the treatment of Aboriginal and half-caste women and girls'.<sup>82</sup>

In its first year of operation, the League for Aboriginal Women attracted 205 members, each paying 1/- a year in fees. However, most of the League's work was undertaken by 'a keen executive of about twenty women' who met monthly to discuss ideas, draft resolutions, deal with correspondence and plan 'educational events'.<sup>83</sup> In 1942, it was decided to regulate these executive meetings by the phases of the moon; henceforth they were held 'in the evening two nights before the full moon'. Larger meetings to which all members were invited were held once a year. At the League's first annual meeting in November 1939, Phyllis Duguid stated that:

the executive had met ten times during the year; that although nothing spectacular had been done, she believed [that] the League had justified its existence by a great deal of educational work, and by its contact with our own and federal governments.

The educational work to which Phyllis referred included asking the Council of Churches to set apart 'one Sunday a year ... as Aboriginal Sunday'.<sup>84</sup> This was not a new idea, for as Bain Attwood has observed, '[a] day of this nature seems to have been first suggested by humanitarians at a conference of government, missionary and other organisations in 1929'. According to Attwood, it was the Aboriginal activist, William Cooper's call for an 'Aborigines' Day', to be held every year on the Sunday closest to Australia Day that ultimately came to be known as 'Aboriginal Sunday'.<sup>85</sup> However, whereas Cooper saw Aboriginal Sunday as a day of protest, the League for Aboriginal Women embraced it as an 'educational day', seeing it as an ideal opportunity to show-case 'a constructive policy for natives and half-castes'.<sup>86</sup>

The League for Aboriginal Women believed that their 'first duty [was] to save the race by compensating them for the means of subsistence' white society had 'taken from them'.<sup>87</sup> As well as attempting to secure the same maternity, invalid and old-age benefits for Aboriginal women as for white women, the League sought a more long-term solution in the training of Aboriginal women as teachers and nurses 'who could attend to their own

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> P. Duguid, 'The League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women', *Aborigines' Friends' Association, Quarterly Review*, September 1940, p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 16 June 1939, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.

<sup>85</sup> Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003, pp. 70, 359 (see footnote 42).

<sup>86</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 16 June 1939.

<sup>87</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 2 November 1939, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.



people'.<sup>88</sup> The League found the attitude of the Education Department and the Nurses Board most discouraging in this regard, for although '[no] real objection' was made to their suggestion, they were 'left in some doubt as to whether [the] girls would be really welcome as trainees'. Phyllis put this down to 'groundless prejudice', a problem whose only solution lay in 'further education of the white race'. Towards this end, League members addressed mother's clubs, women's organisations and church guilds 'on the subject of the Aboriginal race'.<sup>89</sup> The League also hosted large public meetings, such as the one in 1939 at which an illustrated lecture on 'The Aboriginal Woman of Australia' was given by Professor Harvey Johnston (see Plate 6). According to Holland, four hundred women attended this meeting, and Lady Muriel Barclay-Harvey was 'presented with a rug made by Aboriginal women at the Mt. Margaret Mission, donated by Mary M. Bennett'.<sup>90</sup> In the following year, Bennett herself addressed the group, treating the League's executive to a 'vivid word-picture of conditions' in Western Australia.<sup>91</sup>

Apart from its educational work, the League for Aboriginal Women enjoyed little in the way of success. Its two main goals—the 'provision of recreational and cultural opportunities' via the establishment of a social club in Alice Springs, and the appointment of women protectors—were hampered by the onset of war.<sup>92</sup> According to Phyllis, the executive put a great deal of time and thought into plans for the social club, only to have their proposal dashed by the 'intervention of war'.<sup>93</sup> Having initially requested a grant of five hundred pounds from the federal government towards the purchase of such a facility, and appreciating the 'difficulties rising out of the war situation', the League proposed renting a club room instead, but to no avail. Despite finding favour among leading bureaucrats, including the Federal Director of Native Affairs, E.W.P Chinnery, funding for such a project was simply unavailable.<sup>94</sup> Accepting that certain sacrifices were inevitable during war-time, the League agreed to leave this project in abeyance, but not so the appointment of women protectors. As far as the League was concerned, the increased military presence in Alice Springs and Darwin made the appointment of women protectors essential.<sup>95</sup> Following reports that the 'half-caste' girls compound in Darwin had been broken into by the military, resulting in high number of pregnancies, the League for Aboriginal Women called on the federal government to 'appoint without delay suitable

<sup>88</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 22 May 1939 and 2 November 1939, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.

<sup>89</sup> P. Duguid, 'The League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women', p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines', p. 184.

<sup>91</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 15 February 1940, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.

<sup>92</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 4 November 1940, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.

<sup>93</sup> P. Duguid, 'The League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women', p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 6 October 1939 and 2 November 1939, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2. See also Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines', pp. 184-85.

<sup>95</sup> P. Duguid, 'The League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women', p. 6.



women protectors of Aborigines with police powers—two at Alice Springs and two at Darwin'.<sup>96</sup>

The League for Aboriginal Women was not alone in their push for war-time women protectors. The Association for the Protection of Native Races in Sydney, the APL in Adelaide and women's groups throughout the nation lobbied government on this issue. Phyllis was acutely aware that many 'national organisations' had been appealing for women protectors 'for years, but so far without effect'. To her, it seemed 'so obvious a reform that it [was] difficult to understand the government's reluctance to grant it'. Particularly since many Aboriginal women—with good reason—'distrust[ed] all white men', Phyllis argued that it was 'impossible for a man to do the best work, however good his intentions'.<sup>97</sup> Chinnery, however, could not be persuaded. According to Holland, Chinnery was wary of granting direct power and responsibility to women, preferring instead to see women 'acting in wifely, facilitatory roles'.<sup>98</sup> Ideally, and somewhat ironically, Chinnery believed that the most suitable women protectors would be those experienced in running hostels for Aborigines and 'half-castes'. He therefore declined to recommend the appointment of women protectors until money was available for the establishment of hostels in Alice Springs and Darwin, pointing instead to the adequate and praiseworthy work already being performed by missionary women and the wives of certain protectors.<sup>99</sup>

It was perhaps with this in mind that the League for Aboriginal Women petitioned to have one of their members, Bertha Strehlow, wife of patrol officer T.G.H. Strehlow and resident of Jay Creek (near Alice Springs), appointed a woman protector. In October 1941, the League requested that Bertha be granted the status of protector with just remuneration for her work, only to receive the terse reply that 'Mrs Strehlow [herself] would not consider her appointment in this capacity'.<sup>100</sup> Whereas the League assumed that Bertha would relish such an opportunity and so failed to ask her before approaching government, it seems that Bertha had no such desire. Quite the contrary, in fact, for far from wanting to be made an official protector, Bertha wished to be relieved of all such duties. Claiming to speak on his wife's behalf, T.G.H. Strehlow informed Chinnery that the sort of voluntary work Bertha did while he was away from Jay Creek, such as issuing rations and attending to the sick, caused her great worry. If being an official protector meant supervising Aboriginal and 'half-caste' women at Alice Springs, then Bertha was definitely not interested.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 4 November 1940.

<sup>97</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—III: A Woman's View', p. 127.

<sup>98</sup> Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines', p. 192.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>100</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 24 October 1941 and 14 March 1942, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.

<sup>101</sup> Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines', p. 195. See also Barry Hill, *Broken Song: T.G.H. Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession*, Random House, Milsons Point, 2002, pp. 299, 307-309, 322.



Soon after making its failed bid to have Bertha Strehlow appointed a woman protector, the League turned its attention to the plight of two 'half-caste' girls, Lena and Biddy, whom they deemed in urgent need of removal. In April 1942 Phyllis Duguid reported that:

two girls [Lena and Biddy] were living with their mother and stepfather in the district of Cooperpedy [sic]. The latter was acting as the girls' stepfather and was a most undesirable person. It was felt that in the interests of the girls steps should be taken to remove them.<sup>102</sup>

Subsequently, Ada Bromham moved that:

a letter be written to the Aborigines Department asking that some arrangements be made to remove these children and that a woman police [officer] be employed to convey the children to another more congenial locality.<sup>103</sup>

In June 1942 the League received a reply from the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board (APB) 'stating that the children [were] living in unsatisfactory conditions [but] that their removal [could] only be effected if it [was] possible to place them in a home'. Owing to the 'extremely serious nature of the case', the League deemed 'it advisable to have the children removed from their present environment immediately'.<sup>104</sup> Having received no further word on this matter by November 1942, and believing the 'stumbling block' to be the lack of a suitable home, League members resolved 'to provide a home' for the girls themselves.<sup>105</sup>

Whether Lena and Biddy were removed is unknown: there being no further mention of them in the League's minutes it seems unlikely. However, whether they were removed or not bears little impact on the League's intentions. The League for Aboriginal Women was so determined to have Lena and Biddy removed that members were prepared to provide a home for the girls themselves. This is the crucial and telling point, for if Lena and Biddy's case was as serious as the League feared, then what about the mother? Having subjected her daughters to an 'undesirable' man and 'unsatisfactory' living conditions, was her cause considered lost? Was she even considered? The League's priority, it seems, was to save the girls, not the mother and certainly not the family. Could the case of Lena and Biddy explain the lack of interest that feminist and other historians have shown in the League for Aboriginal Women? A more likely explanation is that historians have not

<sup>102</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 30 April 1942, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 26 June 1942, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.

<sup>105</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 19 November 1942, League Papers, SRG 250, Series 2/2.



known about the League for Aboriginal Women's existence. Knowing about it means re-thinking certain ideas about white women activists' views on the removal of Aboriginal children.

### III. 'Rescuing' Aboriginal children

There has been much scholarship of late on the question of white women's role in the 'stealing' of Aboriginal children.<sup>106</sup> That many white women were involved in, or responsible for, the removal of Aboriginal children from their families is undeniable. However, that some also fought against this policy cannot now be disputed. Thanks to the work of Paisley and Lake among others, compelling narratives of white women activists' struggle against Aboriginal child removal have emerged. To know that this policy was contested by earlier generations of white Australians, including women, shows as 'palpably false' the conservative political rhetoric of past acceptance which emerged in the wake of *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*.<sup>107</sup> However, there is nothing to be gained by ignoring the complexity of views and approaches on this issue.

Not all white women activists who campaigned against Aboriginal child removal were constant in their opposition. In 1934, for example, Ada Bromham addressed a Royal Commission conducted by Henry Moseley on the condition and treatment of Aborigines in Western Australia. Against the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their mothers, Bromham argued that Aboriginal mothers should be granted custody rights over their children for 'under the law the mother has no right over the child'.<sup>108</sup> According to Lake, 'Bromham was a champion of mothers' rights and women's equality of status as mothers and certainly saw the removal of Aboriginal children as a denial of their mothers' natural rights'.<sup>109</sup> Yet, less than ten years after the Moseley Royal Commission, Bromham was the person who initiated the League for Aboriginal Women's motion to have Lena and Biddy removed to a 'more congenial locality'. Seemingly a direct reversal of Bromham's earlier views, what did this change mean? Was Lena and Biddy's case exceptional, or were only some Aboriginal mothers deserving of custody rights?

As evidence of white women's opposition to the policy of Aboriginal child removal, Paisley and Lake cite the testimony of 'feminist' reformers, including Bromham, at the

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Holland, 'Wives and Mother Like Ourselves? Exploring White Women's Intervention in the Politics of Race, 1920s-1940s', *Australian Historical Studies*, No. 117, October 2001, pp. 292-310; Ann Curthoys, 'Refiguring Histories of Women and Children', *Australian Historical Studies*, No. 117, October 2001, pp. 334-337; Lake, 'Women and Whiteness', *Australian Historical Studies*, No. 117, October 2001, pp. 338-342; Holland, 'Mary Bennett and the Feminists: A Response', *Australian Historical Studies*, No. 120, October 2002, pp. 398-400.

<sup>107</sup> See Anna Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, pp. 340-41.

<sup>108</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 126; Lake, 'Women and "Whiteness"', pp. 339-340.

<sup>109</sup> Lake, 'Women and "Whiteness"', p. 340.



Moseley Royal Commission. The problem with this, according to Holland, is that concern over the removal of Aboriginal children was raised only 'in response to specific questions being asked of them by the Commissioner ... It was not germane to their concerns'.<sup>110</sup> With the exception of Mary Bennett whose passionate advocacy of the rights of Aboriginal mothers set her apart, Holland has argued that other white women reformers were more interested in the status of 'half-caste' children than their mothers: they saw the 'half-caste problem' as a matter of dealing with the increasing number of 'illegitimate half-caste' children, not custody rights.<sup>111</sup> Thus, Ada Bromham could observe the shocking truth that Aboriginal mothers were denied custody rights in 1934, and effectively sanction the lack of this right by calling for Lena and Biddy to be removed in 1942.

In *Loving Protection?* Paisley has argued that Mary Bennett 'was one of the few critics of Aboriginal policy in Australia to insist upon the extreme cruelty of child removal'. Yet this telling observation is overshadowed by Paisley's greater claim for inclusivity: white women's campaigns 'remain remarkably pertinent', according to Paisley, 'perhaps most powerfully so because members of their network articulated arguments against the removal of Aboriginal children which have been reiterated in *Bringing Them Home*'.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Lake has argued that 'feminists were the first organised political group to oppose the removal of Aboriginal children from their mothers'. Certainly some opposition was expressed, however Bennett's insistence that 'no department in the world [could] take the place of a child's mother', and that 'no valid justification' existed 'for the official smashing of native family life and community life' brought about by child removal, was not matched by other testimony at the Moseley Royal Commission.<sup>113</sup>

In her 1930 publication, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, Bennett argued that 'half-castes' needed 'to be given back what they [had] lost—human ties':

They need *fellowship*, and they will get it only among the mother's people, the Aboriginal tribes, or, if these no longer exist, among other half-castes in Missions which *do* hold up an ideal of love and service. They need *their* homes, *their* families, and not to be interfered with.<sup>114</sup>

Where it was possible to leave 'half-caste' children with their mothers, Bennett saw this as the best possible outcome for all concerned. Against the assumption that Aboriginal

<sup>110</sup> Holland, 'Wives and Mother Like Ourselves?' Exploring White Women's Intervention in the Politics of Race, 1920s-1940s', in Martin Crotty et.al. (eds.), *A Race for a Place: Eugenics, Darwinism and Social Thought and Practice in Australia* (Proceedings of the History and Sociology of Eugenics Conference, University of Newcastle, 27-28 April 2000), Faculty of Arts and Social Science, the University of Newcastle, 2000, p. 202; See also the revised version of this article in *Australian Historical Studies*, No. 117, October 2001, pp. 292-310.

<sup>111</sup> Holland, 'Wives and Mother Like Ourselves?', *A Race for a Place*, p. 204.

<sup>112</sup> Paisley, *Loving Protection?*, pp. 3, 81.

<sup>113</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, pp. 14, 129.

<sup>114</sup> Mary M. Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, Alston Rivers Ltd, London, 1930, pp. 119-20 (original emphasis).



mothers suffered little from the loss of their children, Bennett argued that they were 'utterly wrapped up in their children'. Indeed, she claimed to know Aboriginal mothers who lived in constant fear of their children being removed, and whose 'agony of fear' was replicated in the suffering of their children.<sup>115</sup> Despite Bennett's passionate appeals, Holland's research suggests that few white women reformers fully understood or agreed with her position.

Phyllis Duguid listened to and respected much of what Bennett had to say. She was particularly taken with Bennett's book and, like many other campaigners, male and female, she borrowed certain of Bennett's ideas, but not all. Following Bennett, Phyllis argued that Aboriginal women had 'the same human affection as ourselves, the same joy of motherhood, and the same power of suffering'.<sup>116</sup> Unlike Bennett, however, Phyllis did not link this to child removal. Instead, her purpose was to show as false the idea that Aboriginal women "'don't feel things as we do". Never believe it', she declared. Because the idea of Aborigines as "'little better than animals" ... [had] been devastating for the women', Phyllis hoped that emphasising their humanity would aid in their 'social uplift'.<sup>117</sup> Reading her work on Aboriginal women (and men), one could be forgiven for (momentarily) forgetting current concerns over the 'stolen generations', for the question of Aboriginal child removal, so important an issue today, is almost entirely absent in Phyllis Duguid's writings.

During a 'round-table talk' for Aboriginal Sunday, broadcast on local Adelaide radio-station 5DN, an Aboriginal woman, Ivy Mitchell, bemoaned the loss of Aboriginal culture among children separated from their parents.<sup>118</sup> Around the table with Mitchell were League for Aboriginal Women members, Mrs Herbert, Burnard and Duguid. Immediately following Mitchell's sad declaration that 'too many' Aboriginal myths and legends had been lost because 'too many little Aboriginal children [had] been separated from their own mothers and so [had] never heard the age-old fairy-tales of our race', Herbert asked Mitchell if she thought 'detribalised' Aborigines should become full citizens, to which Mitchell answered 'yes'. Thus missed, the opportunity to discuss the implications of Aboriginal child removal did not reappear during the broadcast. No more conspicuous than her fellow League members reticence, Phyllis Duguid's silence on this issue was complete.<sup>119</sup> Aboriginal child removal was not something Phyllis spoke about. It was not something she wrote about. It was certainly not something she campaigned against. There being no evidence to suggest otherwise, it seems likely that Phyllis Duguid agreed with her husbands' views on this matter.

<sup>115</sup> Cited Paisley, *Loving Protection*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>116</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—III: A Women's View', p. 126.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> 'Round Table talk for Aboriginal Sunday', broadcast on 5DN, [early 1940s], Phyllis Duguid Papers.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*



Until the early 1950s, Charles Duguid strongly supported the removal of 'half-caste' children. In newspaper articles such as the 'Future of Half-Caste Children' and the 'Lot of the Half-Caste in Service', he made his thinking clear. Charles wanted 'as far as possible, to prevent half-castes from coming into the world', but in the meantime argued that it was 'essential to do what we [could] for the children already born'.<sup>120</sup> Since 'half-castes' were 'half-white', this meant sending them 'in for education' so as to fit them for their proper place in white society.<sup>121</sup> Charles was proud of the role he played in 'rescuing' such children. In a letter to the editor of the *Adelaide Advertiser* in 1936, he recalled a family of three 'half-caste' girls he had met in the north of South Australia the previous year. One was now 'with the rescued children at the Colebrook home', while the other two were 'living far apart in different camps, separated from father and mother and one another'.<sup>122</sup> As a consequence of Charles' campaigning, in 1937 the two remaining girls, aged eight and five, were 'rescued' and reunited with their sister at Colebrook. According to Charles, the mother, found to have given birth to another child, 'begged that the baby'—a girl aged under 2 years—'should not be taken from her and, even after giving her consent, broke down and wept bitterly'. He was, however, 'glad' to report that all three children had been successfully 'brought in'.<sup>123</sup> No longer 'destined to work for the rest of their lives for food and a dress', under the 'happier conditions ... prevailing at Colebrook', they would be 'trained to lead a useful life'.<sup>124</sup>

As objectionable as Charles Duguid's views on the removal of 'half-caste' children may appear today, it is important to realise that during the 1930s and 1940s they went largely uncontested. What criticism Charles faced came mainly from white settlers, prospectors and doggers who resented his vilification of them—and his naming of them—as the exploiters of Aboriginal women, and the fathers of 'half-caste' children. In 1936, a concerned friend warned Charles never to 'go into the Musgrave country again. If you do ... you'll never leave it alive'.<sup>125</sup> Such threats only confirmed Charles' fears for the safety and welfare of the children left behind. Charles sincerely believed that 'half-castes' belonged in white society: he also believed that they were 'happier' there. His uncharacteristically dispassionate description of the wretched unhappiness Aboriginal mothers suffered at the loss of their children suggests, however, that happiness was not his

<sup>120</sup> C. Duguid, 'Future of Half-Caste Children', *News*, 13 March 1936. See also, 'Lot of the Half-Caste in Service', *News*, 31 January 1936, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 3, Clipping Book 1, p. 66.

<sup>121</sup> C. Duguid to H.S. Hudd, Commissioner for Public Works, 14 August 1936, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>122</sup> C. Duguid to editor, *Advertiser*, 23 July 1936, Charles Duguid Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide, since deposited at the National Library of Australia; C. Duguid, 'Future of Half-caste Children'.

<sup>123</sup> C. Duguid to H.C. Matthew, Secretary Presbyterian Board of Mission, 23 February 1937 (enclosed 'a short note regarding recent rescues'), Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1. The sister at Colebrook was probably Nancy Barnes. See Barnes, *Munyi's daughter*, pp. 37-39. See also chapter six.

<sup>124</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines', *Aborigines Protector*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1936, p. 15; 'Lot of the Half-caste in Service', *News*, 31 July 1936.

<sup>125</sup> 'Dr Duguid—champion of the dark-skinned underdog', p. 45.



only concern. 'Rescuing' Aborigines of mixed-descent was not only for their own benefit, according to Charles, it also kept the 'far north ... solely for the unspoilt native'.<sup>126</sup> By cutting 'down the production of the these unfortunates ['half-castes'] to a minimum', and by 'totally' discouraging 'the marriage of half-castes with blacks', Charles sought to preserve the 'racial purity' of Aborigines of full-descent.<sup>127</sup> Whatever unhappiness 'full-blood' Aboriginal mothers suffered at the loss of their 'half-caste' children was clearly outweighed, in his mind, by the greater need to ensure the continued existence of an 'unspoilt'—meaning uncontaminated by 'white-blood'—Aboriginal race.

In the early 1950s, Charles Duguid reversed this opinion. After seeing 'half-caste babies in their cots' at the Aborigines Inland Mission in Darwin in 1951, he found himself torn: 'I am not satisfied we are right in taking such young babies from their mother', he wrote, for 'it leaves the mothers broken hearted and it cannot be in the interests of the children to become institutionalised so soon'.<sup>128</sup> In a rare moment of contrition, Charles acknowledged that he had been wrong:

There was a time when I considered it in the interests of the half-caste children to bring them into our civilisation under mission care and I voted that way in a Mission Board decision. The tribal mother of that child was inconsolable and although she has had full-blood children since, she still sorrows for the loss of that child. ... Never again has any half-caste child been removed from its full-blood mother in that part of the country.<sup>129</sup>

Charles Duguid's changed views on the removal of Aboriginal children will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five. For now it is sufficient to note that despite his changed views, Charles continued to believe it unwise to start 'a run of part-Aborigines in a tribal area' such as at Ernabella. He continued to believe, in other words, that Aborigines of mixed-descent belonged in white society.<sup>130</sup>

Other than Lena and Biddy, Phyllis Duguid did not actively advocate Aboriginal child removal. Nor did she speak out against it. Given her husband's strong views and boastful style of campaigning, Phyllis certainly knew about the practice. Did her silence signify complicity? By not opposing the practice, did she lend it her support? Part of the answer lies in the contrast between Phyllis' attitude towards Lena and Biddy, two 'half-caste' girls, and her attitude towards Nganyintja, a 'full-blood tribal' girl, who spent three

<sup>126</sup> C. Duguid to Hudd, 14 August 1936.

<sup>127</sup> C. Duguid, 'Future of Half-caste Children'; C. Duguid to W.H. Kitson, Chief Secretary, Western Australia, 19 September 1938, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 11.

<sup>128</sup> C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Darwin and the Tropic North*, The Advertiser Printing Office, Adelaide, 1951, pp. 10-11.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> C. Duguid to Ronald Trudinger, superintendent Ernabella Mission, 9 February 1954, Records of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, South Australian Assembly, State Library of South Australia, Mortlock Collection, SRG 123/300.



weeks with the Duguids in Adelaide after being 'rescued' and before being returned to her family in 1943.<sup>131</sup> Coming so soon after the attempted removal of Lena and Biddy, Nganyintja's case demonstrates the importance of 'race' in Charles and Phyllis Duguid's thinking about Aboriginal child removal. According to Charles, 'full-blood tribal Aborigines [were] happier with their own people and should never be taken from them'.<sup>132</sup> Phyllis agreed. In describing Nganyintja's triumphant return to 'her own people—back to the glowing camp fires, the nights under the stars and the days filled with hunting and play', Phyllis made it clear that Nganyintja was back where she belonged.<sup>133</sup> Unlike Lena and Biddy, Nganyintja had a recognised 'people' and 'way of life' to return to. It was not from them that she was 'rescued'. Instead, Nganyintja was 'rescued' from a certain fate that needed no explanation once the circumstances of her predicament were known.

Ernabella mission was Nganyintja's home. In June 1943, a 'tribal sister' who worked for a white man, F. Quinn, offered to take Nganyintja, aged 13, for a 'short journey' in Quinn's car, and then to bring her back again. According to a reporter who covered Nganyintja's story for the *Adelaide Mail*, she was taken instead 'to an outstation near Coober Pedy, 400 miles from her own home and in a country where her own language was not spoken'. As an 'unprotected black girl on the outskirts of a white settlement', Nganyintja's future looked bleak. 'Even if she met some friendly white person, she could not have appealed for help', the reporter explained, 'for she knew no English'. However, having spent a year learning to read and write her own language under Ronald Trudinger's tutelage at the Ernabella school, Nganyintja took matters into her own hands.<sup>134</sup> She obtained paper and pen and 'wrote in her language to her teacher, telling him of her trouble'.<sup>135</sup> Accompanied by a covering letter which explained where Nganyintja could be found, her letter was sent first to Ernabella, and from there to Adelaide where Trudinger was undertaking a refresher course.

As translated by Trudinger, Nganyintja's letter read in part:

My elder tribal sister took me away to Coober Pedy ...

When we first arrived, we two, we stood outside, and then we went into the house, where the man slept.

The man—I don't know his name—I cannot understand him, so I am writing this letter ...

<sup>131</sup> The spelling of Nganyintja's name has changed. In the 1940s, Charles and Phyllis Duguid spelled it Nganyintjanya. The shorter version has been used since the 1960s and is probably more accurate.

<sup>132</sup> C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met' (1946), in C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia: Broadcasts and an Address*, Reliance Printing Company, Adelaide, 1946, p. 33.

<sup>133</sup> C. and P. Duguid, *Nganyintjanya: An episode in the life of an Aboriginal Girl*, Presbyterian Board of Missions, Melbourne, 1943, p. 9.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>135</sup> C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', p. 31.



[I] have been crying, day in and day out, I cut my hair off and I am  
sad all the time ...  
I sleep by myself in a bed in the house ...  
I have been weeping for my best friend and for my elder tribal  
brother ... and I have been weeping for my mother and father.  
What are you going to do?<sup>136</sup>

Upon receiving Nganyintja's letter, Trudinger immediately sought and was granted leave to travel north and 'rescue' her. With him he carried a letter from the APB to Quinn expressing the Board's displeasure. Since there were no circumstances under which Quinn could have 'custody [of] a full blood female Aboriginal child', the Board regarded his 'conduct in agreeing to such a removal as extremely foolish'. In directing Quinn's attention to Section 34A of the *Aborigines Act, 1939* which made it an offence for 'any male person, other than an Aborigine ... [to] habitually [consort] with a female Aborigine; [keep] a female Aborigine as his mistress; or [have] carnal knowledge of a female Aborigine' if not legally married to her, the APB left no doubt as to its impression of Quinn's character and intentions.<sup>137</sup>

Trudinger's mission was successful, and Nganyintja was brought to the Duguids' house in Adelaide until arrangements could be made for her safe return to Ernabella. There was never any thought of keeping Nganyintja in white society. As W.R. Penhall, secretary of the APB explained, 'all [his] thought was centred on returning the child to Ernabella unharmed'.<sup>138</sup> It was to Aboriginal children of mixed-descent, not those of full-descent, that administrators of Aboriginal policy increasingly looked to solve the 'Aboriginal problem'. Nowhere was this more evident than in Western Australia where the goal was to 'breed-out' Aboriginal colour and identity through controlled miscegenation (or the promotion of marriages between Aboriginal women of mixed-descent and white men), otherwise known as biological absorption.<sup>139</sup> In 1937, A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, explained that his government's policy was:

<sup>136</sup> C. and P. Duguid, *Nganyintjanya*, p. 4.

<sup>137</sup> Aborigines Protection Board to Quinn, 21 June 1943 and 30 July 1943, State Records of South Australia (hereafter SRSA) GRG 52/1/1943/16. According to the APB, to Trudinger and to Charles and Phyllis Duguid, Nganyintja was 'rescued' from certain danger, but not so according to J.R.B. Love, superintendent at Ernabella mission. Had anyone bothered to consult him on the matter, Love claimed that he could easily have 'given the information that would have obviated all the publicity connected with this incident'. According to Love, Nganyintja had willingly accompanied her 'tribal sister' and Quinn 'on a holiday, expecting to return [to Ernabella] for the shearing'. At the beginning of September 1943, Quinn and Nganyintja's 'tribal sister' returned to the mission as planned, and would have brought Nganyintja with them had she not been removed to Adelaide. Conceding no reason for Nganyintja's 'rescue', Love maintained that the 'aspersions' cast on Quinn's character were quite unwarranted. J.R.B. Love to W.R. Penhall, 6 September 1943, SRSA GRG 52/1/1943/16.

<sup>138</sup> Penhall to Love, 15 September 1943, SRSA GRG 52/1/1943/16.

<sup>139</sup> Holland, 'Wives and Mothers', *Race for a Place*, p. 201.



to send them ['half-caste girls'] out into the community and if a girl comes back pregnant our rule is to keep her for two years. The child is then taken away from the mother and sometimes never sees her again. At the expiration of two years the mother goes back into service so it really does not matter if she has half a dozen children.<sup>140</sup>

Despite supporting the removal of 'half-caste' children himself, Charles Duguid described Neville as 'strangely unmoved by the human appeal of the family—husband to wife and parents to children and vice versa'. In Charles' view, 'breeding the dark colour of the natives out of the state population' seemed to be Neville's only 'guiding motive'.<sup>141</sup> Phyllis Duguid was equally incensed. That Neville's government 'actually allow[ed] and encourage[d]' such 'appalling conditions' left her incredulous. 'Surely', she declared, 'Western Australian policy as outlined by Mr Neville is not considered a worthy one for the whole of Australia'.<sup>142</sup> Yet it was not the taking of the children that alarmed Phyllis, it was the means of their production.

That 'a very great many ... half-castes [were] children without legal parents, children who [were] cared for in government institutions until old enough to work on stations or in private homes', worried Phyllis, but it was their lack of 'protection or supervision' once employed that most concerned her. In particular, the 'difficulties and dangers' which lay in the path of 'the half-caste girl [sent] out to work for strangers who may or may not treat her with respect'.<sup>143</sup> In 'The Australian Aborigines—III: A Woman's View', Phyllis described the average life of a 'half-caste girl' thus:

Brought up in a government institution or on the outskirts of station or township she generally goes to work as a domestic at the age of sixteen or so. Her conditions of work are not supervised and her nearest neighbours are rarely within walking distance, so if she should find herself amongst people who do not treat her with respect her plight is pitiable.<sup>144</sup>

By way of example, Phyllis relayed the fate of six such girls who, 'during the first nine months of 1936, [were] returned to the Alice Springs Institution either pregnant or with disease or both'. It was to stop the sexual exploitation of 'half-caste girls' and the 'ever increasing number of illegitimate half-caste children' that Phyllis advocated the appointment of women protectors and the provision of recreational opportunities. What

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in P. Duguid, untitled radio broadcast, 2 April 1939; 'Aboriginal Welfare—Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, Held at Canberra, 21 to 23 April, 1937', Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1937.

<sup>141</sup> C. Duguid to Kitson, 19 September 1938.

<sup>142</sup> P. Duguid, untitled radio broadcast, 2 April 1939.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—III: A Woman's View', p. 127.



happened to 'illegitimate half-caste' children concerned her only in so far as the 'unhappy social environment which we [made] for them' fostered the means of their production, for unless something was done to quell the tide, they too would grow up to produce 'illegitimate half-caste' children.<sup>145</sup>

While in Alice Springs in 1938, Phyllis visited the Bungalow, a home for 'half-caste' children. Originally consisting of three iron sheds situated behind a hotel in town, the Bungalow was moved to the Old Telegraph Station, five kilometres from Alice Springs in 1932. By 1939, one year after Phyllis' visit, conditions there were so appalling that one official was moved to write: 'I went very carefully through this building this week and to use entirely unofficial language, the whole place stinks and is in an exceedingly bad condition'.<sup>146</sup> Phyllis made no such observation. Instead, she recorded meeting the matron, Mrs McCoy, and seeing 'one of the premature twins who [made] up 15 of a family' then housed at the Bungalow.<sup>147</sup> Later, Phyllis reflected on the circumstances that had produced these 'fifteen half-white children':

The first children were born on a station and the little family was well cared for till the advent of a white wife meant that the Aboriginal woman must go. This particular native woman was to some extent provided for—but nothing could alter the fact that she was turned adrift from the home and affection to which she had responded. And what has been the result? Ten or eleven children more with different fathers. The old code gone forever, she sees no code in the white man's treatment of her. How must she feel?<sup>148</sup>

The 'old code' to which Phyllis referred was the Aboriginal code, a code of 'tribal customs' and beliefs which, while 'hard indeed' on Aboriginal women, was 'at least [one] she knew and understood'. The new code, 'our code', 'should have given her greater protection', according to Phyllis, but 'instead we have degraded her life still further'. The fate of the Aboriginal woman with 'fifteen half-white children' was the fate of every Aboriginal woman 'taken away from her tribe [only] to be flung aside later when she no longer pleases': had Nganyintja not been 'rescued', it would have been her fate too.<sup>149</sup> Whether such women suffered as a consequence of having their children removed was not something Phyllis wrote about. In her view, their suffering was wrought through cruelty and exploitation at the hands of white men, and was manifest in the form of 'half-white'

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Rowena MacDonald, *Between Two Worlds. The Commonwealth government and the removal of Aboriginal children of part descent in the Northern Territory*, IAD Press, Alice Springs, 1995, p. 26. See also Tony Austin, *I Can Picture the Old Home So Clearly: The Commonwealth and 'Half-caste' Youth in the Northern Territory*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989, pp. 155-174.

<sup>147</sup> P. Duguid, 'Diary of journey', p. 26.

<sup>148</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—III: A Woman's View', p. 126.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*



children. Viewed as the product of Aboriginal women's suffering, 'half-white' children had little right or recourse to their mother's 'human affection'.

Although fundamentally opposed to biological absorption, Charles and Phyllis Duguid shared many of the assumptions on which this policy was based. At the very corner-stone of arguments in favour of biological absorption was the theory of racial relatedness. Based in large part on the observation that the descendants of unions between Aborigines and whites did not 'throw back' to the Aboriginal colour, but became lighter skinned with each successive generation, the idea that Aborigines and whites hailed from the 'same root stock' became widely accepted in scientific circles during the 1920s. It was this theory of racial relatedness, or proto-Caucasian theory, that underpinned Neville's absorption proposal.<sup>150</sup> As will be discussed in chapter four, proto-Caucasian theory also figured large in Charles Duguid's arguments in favour of social advancement. To him, however, it was proof of Aborigines' capacity to 'rise' to the same level of civilisation enjoyed by white Australians, not to become *white* Australians.

Also central to Neville's promotion of absorption was his belief that the 'white blood' in 'half-castes' would facilitate their mergence into white society, both by making them less physically different to white people, and by reducing the incidence of racially or biologically inherited Aboriginal traits. While Phyllis agreed with Neville's assertion that the 'white blood' in 'half-castes' made them more amenable to assimilation, she fundamentally opposed his policy of 'breeding-out' the colour and thus the identity of Aborigines. Colour prejudice was not a problem to be solved by ridding Aborigines of colour, according to Phyllis, but by ridding white Australians of their prejudice. Finding colour prejudice 'at the root of much suffering', she argued that the 'social stigma' of being descended from Aborigines imprinted 'itself indelibly upon the half-caste mind with the result that they are inclined to despise the Aboriginal blood instead of being encouraged to preserve the best that that race has to give'.<sup>151</sup> Where others saw 'Aboriginal blood' as the curse that held 'half-castes' back, Phyllis' belief in the extraordinary 'powers', 'gifts', 'graces' and 'intelligence' of 'full-blood tribal' Aborigines led her to argue otherwise. Phyllis may not have opposed the removal of 'half-caste' children, but she was definitely opposed to their being encouraged to forget, or forced to forgo, their Aboriginal identity.

As for the view that 'half-castes' inherited the worst traits of both races, Phyllis argued that this was 'simply a myth'. Her contrary view, that half-castes 'often [had] gifts from both races', aimed to overturn this negative stereotype. However, rather than deny the transmission of character traits through blood, she inverted this phenomenon.<sup>152</sup> Like

<sup>150</sup> Russell McGregor, 'Representations of the 'Half-caste' in the Australian Scientific Literature of the 1930s', *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 36, 1993, p. 55; Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2002, pp. 235-39.

<sup>151</sup> League for Aboriginal Women Minutes, 2 November 1939 and 26 June 1942, League Papers, Series 2/2.

<sup>152</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—III: A Woman's View', p. 127.



Charles, Phyllis believed that 'full-blood tribal' Aborigines '[became] mixed bloods' through the process of 'detribalisation'. In her mind, the problems of 'detribalised' Aborigines and 'half-castes' were linked; their imagined difference in terms of 'blood' or visible difference in terms of 'colour' being less important than what she saw as their shared 'loss' or 'lack' of Aboriginal culture. Yet Phyllis also maintained that life overall was 'worse' for 'mixed-bloods' than for 'detribalised' Aborigines. Her reasoning—that Aborigines of mixed-descent had 'lost the moral standards and strict training of their Aboriginal forefathers, [and had] never been properly trained and educated in the best traditions of their white ancestors'—contained its own cure. Descended from 'ourselves and the free happy Aborigines of less than 200 years ago', Phyllis believed that Aborigines of mixed-descent had the unique potential to harness the best of both races.<sup>153</sup> The actual parents of 'half-castes' mattered little in her equation, being merely the vehicles through which this potential was transmitted.

In taking up the cause of Aborigines, Charles and Phyllis Duguid had two main goals. Beyond saving 'the race from extinction', they wanted white Australians to 'learn to appreciate its gifts and use those gifts to enrich our nation's life'.<sup>154</sup> With the exception of a few missions, namely Ernabella and Hermannsburg, Phyllis lamented the fact that 'no attempt [had] ever been made to encourage the Aborigine in the development of *his own powers*—to accept the real contribution of his race and *weave* it into the stuff of our nation'.<sup>155</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s, this was how Charles and Phyllis Duguid understood Aboriginal 'advancement'. To them, 'advancement' meant helping Aborigines and 'half-castes' to develop their own unique skills for life in a modern world. As the nation's principle agents of socialisation, Phyllis urged the women of Australia to 'grasp the situation, fraught with difficulties as it is, believing that the Aboriginal race has a future and that *the nature of that future lies with us*'.<sup>156</sup> For Phyllis, 'with' meant social, political, legal and economic equality between Aborigines and whites: it did not mean biological sameness. This qualification notwithstanding, a more assimilatory statement would be difficult to imagine, yet Holland has argued that Charles and Phyllis Duguid 'repudiated an assimilationist or absorptionist framework because it was understood to hasten detribalisation'.<sup>157</sup>

While the problems associated with detribalisation—rapid or otherwise—certainly caused the Duguids alarm, Holland's conflation of absorption and assimilation is misleading; the former sought an end to the 'Aboriginal problem' through biological means, while the latter was more often social in emphasis. The Duguids definitely

<sup>153</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Atlantic Charter for all Australians', radio broadcast, 30 October 1944, Phyllis Duguid Papers.

<sup>154</sup> P. Duguid, 'Neglected Opportunity', radio broadcast, 29 January 1945, Phyllis Duguid Papers.

<sup>155</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Responsibility of Nation Building' (emphasis added).

<sup>156</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Future of the Aboriginal'; P. Duguid, 'The Atlantic Charter and the Aborigines', *The White Ribbon Signal*, March 1944, p. 18 (emphasis added).

<sup>157</sup> Holland, 'Saving the Aborigines', p. 333.



repudiated absorption, but they were strong supporters of assimilation. In the 1930s and 1940s, however, it was not assimilation they called for but 'advancement'. Holland has argued that Charles and Phyllis Duguids' 'promotion of advancement was a direct ideological challenge to the view of inevitable loss and decline' encouraged by supporters of segregation. It was, however the same can be said of Paul Hasluck's promotion of assimilation.<sup>158</sup> Introducing the concept of assimilation to the House of Representatives in 1951, Hasluck described a radical departure from the policy of segregation. Whereas previously it had been accepted that Aborigines would 'live a low and primitive life until his race died out', with assimilation it was 'expected that all persons of Aboriginal blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like white Australians do'.<sup>159</sup> Echoing Phyllis' words from a decade prior, Hasluck declared: 'Their *future lies* in association *with us*'.<sup>160</sup>

Historians grappling with the complexities and often uncomfortable realities of assimilation appear too eager to label their subjects 'critics of assimilation'. Assimilation became a 'dirty word' in the mid 1960s and has remained so ever since.<sup>161</sup> To have supported assimilation (we now think) was to have condoned the disappearance of Aborigines as a distinct cultural and racial group, the forced removal of Aboriginal children and (cultural) genocide.<sup>162</sup> In this context, finding critics of assimilation is comforting for it means that not all white Australians wanted to be rid of Aborigines. But were the critics of assimilation really its critics, or did they mean by assimilation something other than what we now assume it to mean? In *Loving Protection?* Fiona Paisley has argued that white women reformers 'sought their own version of assimilationist outcomes'. However, as revealed by the title of her first chapter, she also maintains that they were 'Critics of Assimilation'.<sup>163</sup> This label is misleading, for like Charles and Phyllis Duguid, they were critics of biological absorption and critics of government, not critics of assimilation; what they wanted was their own version of social assimilation for Aborigines. If Phyllis Duguid did not see herself as a critic of assimilation, if she did not intend to criticise the policy, then what is to be gained by labelling her thus? More necessary than the search for assimilation's critics is the search for its different and shifting meanings, for only then can we begin to understand 'the profoundly problematic nature of Australia's experience of assimilation'.<sup>164</sup>

Building on this chapter's main themes, the following chapter examines Charles and Phyllis Duguid's efforts to help their 'adopted' Aboriginal son, Sydney James Cook, find a place within white society. It tests how successful they were in practising what they

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>159</sup> Paul Hasluck, *Native Welfare in Australia*, Paterson Brokensha, Perth, 1951, pp. 13-16.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6 (emphasis added).

<sup>161</sup> *Age*, 13 February 1965.

<sup>162</sup> See, for example, 'Assimilation', *Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Vol. 1, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1994, pp. 68-70; John Moriarty, *Saltwater Fella*, Viking, Ringwood, 2000, pp. 6-7.

<sup>163</sup> Paisley, *Loving Protection?*, p. 152.

<sup>164</sup> Anna Haebich, 'Imagining Assimilation', *Australian Historical Studies*, No. 118, 2002, p. 70.



preached, while also demonstrating the vital importance of 'race' and environment to the assimilation process. Assimilation/advancement was a two-way street. It could only work if Aborigines wanted to 'advance' and, more importantly, if white society was prepared to accept them as 'equals'. The lessons that Charles and Phyllis learned through having Cook—an Aboriginal child of full-descent—in their home were many. Cook was something of an anomaly: he was a 'full-blood' but not 'tribal'; he had never been 'tribal' and so could not really be considered 'detribalised'; he was not a 'half-caste'. In defying the Duguids' typology, Cook challenged all that Charles and Phyllis knew—or thought they knew—about Aborigines.



## Chapter 4

### SYDNEY JAMES COOK/DUGUID and (the problem with) social advancement

In June 1950, the newly elected Liberal member for Curtin, Paul Hasluck, delivered a speech in the Commonwealth House of Representatives in which he called for a 'new era' in Aboriginal welfare. The key to Hasluck's plan was 'social advancement'. According to administrative data, there were 72,000 persons classified as Aborigines in Australia in 1944, 'at least two-thirds' of whom, Hasluck explained, had 'already come so closely in touch with the ways of European life that their future [could] not be considered any longer as that of a primitive people'. Rather, Hasluck declared, their 'future lies in association with us':

We must either work for the social advancement of the Aborigines or be content to witness their continued social degradation. There is no possibility now of our being able to put at least two-thirds of the Aborigines back into bush life ... [T]hey must either associate with us on standards that will give them full opportunity to live worthily and happily or be reduced to the social status of pariahs and outcasts living without a firm place in the community.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1950, Charles and Phyllis Duguid sent their 'adopted' Aboriginal son, Sydney James Cook, a 'full-blood' aged twelve, to live with Aborigines at a remote Christian mission in the Northern Territory. In doing so, they did precisely what Hasluck, less than a month later, said could not be done. Having only ever lived with white people, Cook belonged with the two-thirds of Aborigines and 'half-castes' whose future, according to Hasluck, lay 'with the white community'.<sup>2</sup> This notwithstanding, Charles Duguid found Hasluck's speech in June 1950 particularly resonant with his own work published a decade prior: 'I was struck', he informed Hasluck, 'with the similarity of your words to mine as expressed in my address November 1941 on the 'Future of the Aborigines'".<sup>3</sup> Duguid, of course, was referring to Hasluck's views on social advancement. He was not referring to Cook's relocation. Yet, as this chapter will show, Duguid viewed sending Cook to live with Aborigines as essential to Cook's social advancement. He believed that Cook needed to learn how to 'be Aboriginal' in order to live in white society.

This chapter begins with a brief biographical and scene-setting sketch; its purpose to underline the circumstances surrounding Cook's placement in the Duguid home in

<sup>1</sup> Paul Hasluck, *Native Welfare in Australia*, Paterson Brokensha, Perth, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Duguid to Hasluck, Minister for the Territories, 23 May 1951, Duguid Papers, National Library of Australia, MS 5068 (hereafter Duguid Papers: 1), Series 1.



1944, aged six. It then examines Charles and Phyllis Duguids' understanding of what it meant to 'be Aboriginal'—in particular the similarities and differences they observed between Aborigines and whites, and between Aborigines and other Aborigines—before examining Cook's life with the Duguids until 1950. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to explain how (and why) Charles and Phyllis Duguid—both strong supporters of Aboriginal advancement, and later assimilation—came to send Cook to live with Aborigines and, perhaps more importantly, why they did not find in that action the repudiation of their own and Hasluck's assimilationism.

## I. 'Small black child of God'

On, or around, the 30 October 1937, an Aboriginal woman gave birth to a male child near a township called Cook on the west coast of South Australia. What happened next remains something of a mystery. According to the Reverend Tom Jones, organising missionary of the Bush Church Aid Society of Australia (BCA), the child was 'rescued ... from death from starvation when only a few hours old'.<sup>4</sup> Abandoned by his mother, 'the tiny black mite was picked up on the Nullarbor Plain' by a BCA worker and taken to the BCA hospital at Cook.<sup>5</sup> The child was named for the Society's Bishop, Sydney James Kirkby, and the township of Cook; Sydney James Cook.<sup>6</sup> Charles Duguid's account of Cook's separation from his parents was quite different. According to him, Cook was 'actually found ... in a sack on the kitchen floor of the Cook hospital and his navel cord had not been tied'.<sup>7</sup> In 1946, in an article entitled 'Aboriginal children I have met', Duguid described the circumstances of Cook's abandonment thus:

Eight years ago a tribe of Aborigines was forcibly chased from the neighbourhood of a town on the Transcontinental line ... During the upset a terror-stricken mother gave birth to a baby boy. Some hours later a sack was left in the kitchen of the local Mission hospital. A weak cry came from the sack, and inside was found a newly-born Aboriginal child—cold and nearly lifeless; and the mother's life must have been endangered too.<sup>8</sup>

That Cook was found 'in a sugar bag on the floor of a Bush Aid Hospital', Charles and Phyllis Duguid repeated in statements to the Northern Territory Welfare Branch in 1960;

<sup>4</sup> Reverend Tom Jones, organising missionary Bush Church Aid Society of Australia, to W.R. Penhall, secretary South Australian Aborigines Protection Board, 24 May 1944, State Records Office of South Australia (hereafter SRSA) GRG 52/1/1943/80.

<sup>5</sup> 'Sydney James Cook', *The Real Australian*, 14 November 1941, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Lockwood, 'He grew up in a white world', *Herald* (Melbourne), 26 February 1965.

<sup>7</sup> C. Duguid to Hasluck, 21 October 1953, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), Series A452/1, Item 1957/2566.

<sup>8</sup> C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met' (1946) in C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia: Broadcasts and an Address*, Reliance Printing Company, Adelaide, 1946, p. 33.



Phyllis adding that 'perhaps his mother died [in] childbirth' as the reason for Cook's abandonment.<sup>9</sup> According to the journalist Douglas Lockwood who met Cook in the Northern Territory in 1965, Cook's mother 'bundled him in a sugar bag and gave him away'.<sup>10</sup> Cook's own version, as told to the adventurer and writer Frank O'Neill in the early 1960s, was different again:

I was born into tribal life near Cook in South Australia ... I was only a few months old when my mother left me in the sand. She saw a group of white people and ran. She must have been frightened.<sup>11</sup>

According to Cook, one of the white people who frightened his mother was the Reverend Eric Constable, a Church of England Minister and BCA worker, who took him to the BCA hospital at Cook where he lived for the next four years.<sup>12</sup>

Was the BCA worker who 'rescued' Cook also responsible for chasing his mother away? Was Cook found in the sand or on the kitchen floor? Was he a few hours old, a few days old or a few months old? Did Cook's mother survive childbirth? Was there a sugar bag? Although ultimately unresolvable, the different answers to these questions suggest something of the respondent's agenda. Having 'rescued' Cook from certain death when only a few hours old, the BCA saw itself—and represented its workers—as the heroes of the piece. Cook, in contrast, blamed the BCA for his abandonment. In claiming that he was a few months old at the time, Cook created a narrative in which his mother both survived childbirth and loved him; it was not her intention to leave him behind. Charles and Phyllis Duguid portrayed Cook and his mother as victims of frontier violence. Although, like Cook, they blamed white society for his abandonment, the Duguids also sought to make it clear that the 'separation of [Cook] from his own folk was not [their] responsibility'.<sup>13</sup> Out for the most sensational story possible, Lockwood (and several other journalists who covered Cook's story in the mid 1960s) portrayed Cook as a 'foundling waif' who triumphed in the face of the greatest adversity—abandonment by his mother at birth.<sup>14</sup> The sugar bag, whether it existed or not, can be seen as a symbol of white society's corruption of Aboriginal culture. Emptied of its original sickness inducing contents and

<sup>9</sup> C. Duguid to H.C. Giese, Director of Welfare, 22 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820/197; Phyllis Duguid to Giese, 21 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820/193-96.

<sup>10</sup> Lockwood, 'He grew up in a white world'.

<sup>11</sup> Frank O'Neill, 'A native with a college accent', undated and unsourced newspaper clipping, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 3, Folder 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> C. Duguid to Pastor Samuels, secretary United Aborigines Mission, 5 December [1949], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>14</sup> In 1965, Cook was appointed the first 'full-blood' Aboriginal union organiser for the North Australian Workers Union. See 'Foundling Aboriginal New NAWU Organiser', *News* (Northern Territory), 11 January 1965; 'Foundling Aboriginal Gain Union Post', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 January 1965; Lockwood, 'He grew up in a white world'.



returned with a baby 'in a pitiful condition', the sugar bag was (and is) a metaphor for Aboriginal dispossession (see Plate 7).<sup>15</sup>

The 'true' story of Cook's abandonment will probably never be known. What is known is that Cook spent the first four years of his life in the BCA's care at hospitals at Cook and Penong. Regular articles in *The Real Australian*, official organ of the BCA, kept members informed of Cook's progress. With smiling face, neatly combed hair and starched white clothes, Cook's image regularly adorned the front page of the Society's newsletter (see Plates 8 and 9). Captions like 'Our Baby' left readers in no doubt as to the BCA's proprietorial feelings: Cook was their 'small black child of God' and members were asked to 'Pray earnestly for him as he climbs life's ladder'.<sup>16</sup> Under the BCA's care, Cook was lavished with attention and affection. As he grew older, however, it became increasingly difficult to care for him at the hospital. In 1941 it was suggested that Cook be adopted by an Aboriginal family, but, believing that 'God had given him to [them] for some special purpose', the BCA favoured a white family instead. After 'due consideration and prayer', the Reverend Eric Constable and his wife offered to provide a home for Cook 'until he was old enough to go to school'.<sup>17</sup> Cook lived with the Constables in Adelaide for two years before being transferred to Colebrook, an institution for Aboriginal children run by the United Aborigines Mission (UAM), in 1944. Anxious for the BCA to maintain its 'connection with the child', Jones arranged for Cook to remain at Colebrook at the BCA's expense.<sup>18</sup> Such an arrangement, however, was not Jones' to make. As an Aboriginal ward, all decisions regarding Cook's future resided with the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board (APB).

A year earlier, in June 1943, the APB had approved Cook's admission to King's College—a prestigious Adelaide school—noting at the time that it 'was intended to fit the boy ... for a professional career or any other for which he may show aptitude'.<sup>19</sup> Jones, in requesting that Cook be allowed to stay at Colebrook, advised the APB that 'the Kings school experiment [had] not worked out'. 'Kings College was tried ... with the best of intentions. Unfortunately, it was not successful', Jones reported.<sup>20</sup> The secretary of the APB, W.R. Penhall, thought otherwise. Having received a 'distinctly favourable' report

<sup>15</sup> A recent entry in the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, 'Hand, Christian and Her Son', painted by the artist Adam Hill, depicts the hand of God passing a bag of sugar to an Aboriginal child. *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award* (Exhibition Catalogue), Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2004, pp. 68-69.

<sup>16</sup> See *The Real Australian*, 1 March 1940, p. 1, and 24 February 1941, p. 14, and 1 July 1941, p. 1, and 14 November, 1941, p. 14, and 4 March 1942, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Cook had spent several weeks with the Constables over the previous summer. See 'Sydney James Comes to Town', *The Real Australian*, 24 February 1941, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Jones to Penhall, 1 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Aborigines Protection Board, 30 June 1943, Papers of Dr Charles Duguid, State Library of South Australia, Mortlock Collection, PRG 387 (hereafter Duguid Papers: 2), Series 2. If Cook boarded at Kings College, he did not board for long. His school report for term one, 1944, described 'a great change in Sydney's behaviour since he has been at home'. SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

<sup>20</sup> Jones to Penhall, 1 May 1944; Jones to Penhall, 24 May 1944.



from the headmaster at Kings College, A.M. Oats, Penhall was at a loss to understand Jones' impression of failure.<sup>21</sup> Cook's school report for term one, 1944, showed grades of C or better for each of his classes and was accompanied by the following words of encouragement from Oats:

I and my staff consider that there has been a very great improvement in Sydney this year—an improvement in attitude and general behaviour. We are therefore anxious that his undoubted ability be given a chance to develop in sympathetic surroundings.<sup>22</sup>

Needless to say, Penhall was very keen for Cook to continue his studies at Kings College. In practical terms, this meant that rather than Colebrook another white family would have to be found. Penhall already had a family in mind—the Duguids.

From their holiday house on Kangaroo Island, Phyllis Duguid wrote to Penhall regarding the 'difficult question of Sydney's future' on 15 May 1944. She had, she explained, 'given the whole matter a great deal of thought' and had decided that if it was 'in the interests of Sydney's development and future happiness to continue as he [was] at Kings College' then her family's home would be open to him. Phyllis made it clear, however, that neither she nor Charles could regard themselves as 'foster parents for other people'. 'We could only do our best for the child if we had complete responsibility for his future', she advised. By complete responsibility, Phyllis meant complete adoption, an action which would require Cook's exemption from the Aborigines Act.<sup>23</sup> Penhall readily agreed to Phyllis' conditions. On 17 May 1944, the APB unanimously resolved 'That Dr Charles and Mrs Duguid be authorised to legally adopt and have charge of Sydney James Cook'.<sup>24</sup> On learning of this decision, Jones expressed his Society's deep regret. The implications hurt the BCA considerably, Jones argued, for not only was their care of Cook—past, present and future—implicitly criticised by such a decision, they were to be denied continued access to him.<sup>25</sup> Jones' protestations at the end of May 1944 came too late. At Penhall's direction, Phyllis met Cook at the Adelaide Railway Station soon after the Board's ruling, and he was immediately put into her care.<sup>26</sup>

As a member of the APB, Charles Duguid was ideally situated to negotiate the matter of Cook's placement, yet his sole contribution seems to have been a post-script in the bottom corner of Phyllis' letter to Penhall in which he stated, 'I am entirely with Mrs

<sup>21</sup> Penhall to Jones, 29 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

<sup>22</sup> Kings College report on Sydney Cook, Term 1 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

<sup>23</sup> P. Duguid to Penhall, 15 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80. In this letter, Phyllis indicated that she and Charles would 'consider being [Cook's] foster parents for the Board' if the Board was unwilling to grant Cook's exemption. In other words, the 'other people' the Duguids refused to be foster parents for was the BCA.

<sup>24</sup> Penhall to C. Duguid, 17 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

<sup>25</sup> Jones to Penhall, 24 May 1944.

<sup>26</sup> C. Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949].



Duguid in what she has written'.<sup>27</sup> The weight of evidence suggests otherwise. Although legally authorised to adopt Cook, the Duguids never did. Particularly since Phyllis seemed so keen, and given Charles' uncharacteristic taciturnity, one has to wonder whether he was the reluctant party. If Charles' later accounts are to be believed, it would seem that he had serious reservations about Cook's place in his home, and in white society more generally, from the outset. By outside observers, Cook was viewed as a kind of experiment, a chance for Charles and Phyllis to prove their long standing argument that Aborigines of full-descent were capable of advancement. In 1949, Pastor Samuels, secretary of the UAM, criticised the Duguids for using Cook in this way, an accusation Charles vehemently denied: 'At no time was the question of experiment in our minds', he declared.<sup>28</sup> According to Duguid, 'it was only after the deepest consideration and prayer that [they] agreed to take [Cook] in and then only because of his need'.<sup>29</sup> Over the years, Duguid repeatedly named Cook's need, and Cook's need alone, as the factor that had decided the matter of Cook's place in their home. For example: 'Sydney was taken into our home ... because of his need'; 'Until we took him in at the age of 6 for his *need* he had been moved around from pillar to post without training or guidance for the future'.<sup>30</sup> Cook's need aside, Duguid's need to make this point is in itself significant. By emphasising Cook's need for stability and for the 'affection and discipline of family life', Duguid implied that Cook's need for a home was greater than his desire to provide it.<sup>31</sup>

What about Phyllis? Did she share her husband's reservations? Penhall believed that Cook needed 'a definite home' and the 'individual care of a good mother'. In assuring Jones that Cook would be 'happy' and well cared for with the Duguids, Penhall explained that Cook was 'very much attached to Mrs Duguid'.<sup>32</sup> Mrs Duguid, it seems, was similarly attached to Cook: she was also attached to the idea of Cook. Cook was not the first Aboriginal child to stay with the Duguids. A year earlier, in 1943, Charles and Phyllis had opened their home—and their hearts—to Nganyintja, a thirteen year old girl from Ernabella mission. Although, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Nganyintja spent barely three weeks with the Duguids, it was time enough for strong feelings to develop. With Charles at work and the Duguids' children, Andrew and Rosemary, at school, Nganyintja's days were spent with Phyllis, helping around the house, playing in the garden and teaching Phyllis her language. According to Charles, a special 'understanding between the child and my wife' developed which revealed that Nganyintja's 'love for [Phyllis] ... was very manifest'.<sup>33</sup> Phyllis' love for Nganyintja was equally apparent, yet her actions were at

<sup>27</sup> P. Duguid to Penhall, 15 May 1944. Charles Duguid was a member of the APB from 1940-47. See chapter two.

<sup>28</sup> C. Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949].

<sup>29</sup> C. Duguid to Giese, 22 May 1960.

<sup>30</sup> C. Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949]; C. Duguid to Giese, 22 May 1960 (emphasis added).

<sup>31</sup> C. Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949].

<sup>32</sup> Penhall to Jones, 29 May 1944.

<sup>33</sup> C. and P. Duguid, *Nganyintjanya: An episode in the life of an Aboriginal girl*, Presbyterian Board of Missions, Melbourne, 1943, p. 8.



all times tempered by the knowledge that she was Nganyintja's 'temporary mother' only.<sup>34</sup> In Cook, Phyllis saw a way to make this most unique and rewarding of experiences more permanent.

With the burden attendant upon receiving an Aboriginal child into their home lightened by Phyllis' enthusiasm—she was, after all, the primary care-giver—this alone was not the cause of Charles' reservations. Instead, what worried him was Cook's anomalous status as an Aboriginal child of full-descent in white society; according to Charles, 'full-bloods' belonged elsewhere.

## II. Being Aboriginal

Before examining Charles and Phyllis Duguid's relationship with Cook, it is necessary to consider how they might have viewed him: what they knew—or thought they knew—about Aborigines in general, and Aborigines of full-descent in particular. Charles Duguid prided himself on 'knowing' Aborigines. In his view, it was 'not the white man who live[ed] alongside the native who necessarily [understood] him best', for it was 'only when one [could] see with the native eye, hear with native ear and speak in the native tongue that one [could] fully appreciate the deep intelligence of the Australian Aboriginal'.<sup>35</sup> Is this how Duguid saw himself? Duguid's investigations into Aboriginal life took him to remote regions of South and Central Australia, to government settlements and missions, to cattle stations, railway sidings, dogging camps and townships in the interior. In the early 1940s, Duguid boldly asserted that 'there [was] no side of Aboriginal life that [he had] not investigated', and by the late 1940s he claimed unequivocally to 'know our native people'.<sup>36</sup> What did 'knowing' Aborigines mean? What did Duguid 'know' about Aborigines? How did this 'knowledge' affect his understanding of, and relationship with, Sydney James Cook—an Aboriginal child of full-descent who knew virtually nothing about 'being Aboriginal'?

As part of his efforts to persuade the Australian government, the Presbyterian Church and the public in general to concern themselves with the 'plight of the Aborigines', Charles Duguid journeyed to the Haast Bluff region west of Alice Springs in 1936. This was only the second time that Duguid had witnessed—or, as he later put it 'experienced'—Aborigines living in tribal conditions; the first time being his trip to the Musgrave Ranges the year before.<sup>37</sup> During his three-weeks stay in the Haast Bluff country, Duguid pondered the vexed question of what made Aborigines and whites different. 'The natives, among whom we are, have some very crude ways', he noted in his

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>35</sup> C. Duguid, 'Natives of the Interior', *Ladder*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1937, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> C. Duguid, *The Future of the Aborigines of Australia*, Presbyterian Board of Missions, Adelaide, 1941, p. 1; C. Duguid, *Aborigines Sunday*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1947, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> C. Duguid, *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1973, p. 119



travel diary, 'but how can they change unless they see something better? How can they learn without a teacher?' It seemed to Duguid that '[in] essentials there [was] no difference between the two peoples'.<sup>38</sup>

They have the same sense of humour, the same fundamental joys and sorrows, they laugh and cry just as we do, the children play and gambol as our children do ... And the men are similar to ourselves—the active man and the lazy fellow who for some reason or other prefers to stay in the camp. The women, however, are mostly workers, going off early with their digging sticks to bring in the days supply of yelka, yams, seeds and rabbits.<sup>39</sup>

A day later, having given the matter more thought but still unsure about the exact wording, Duguid hesitantly wrote: 'The great difference between the natives and ourselves is the ~~conditions under which we live~~ way of life. We have all the comforts and amenities of ~~Christian~~ European civilisation: they have heat and flies and no amenities'.<sup>40</sup>

Could it be that simple? While in the Haast Bluff country, Duguid met an eleven year old Aboriginal boy named Tjaruru. With great admiration, Duguid described how Tjaruru captured his attention through mimicry and held it through his 'thirst for knowledge'.<sup>41</sup> When Tjaruru's family moved away from Duguid's camp, Tjaruru stayed behind. 'He can't bear to miss anything', Duguid exclaimed: 'How is he going to find his people? He knows his father's footprints and he will follow them'. According to Duguid, Tjaruru showed 'leadership and ability ... in his every action'. He was inquisitive—'he wants to know about everything new, its names and its uses'—'mentally alert', 'lithe of limb [and] exuberant with life'.<sup>42</sup> It was with deep despair that Duguid imagined what would happen to this 'amazing boy' if and/or when his country was taken over by white men and cattle:

This is his country ... [He] will be brought into a sullen submission, or as is more likely, poor Tjaruru will rebel—he is too great to be an underdog—and he will be sent to gaol. The whole thing is utterly damnable.<sup>43</sup>

Duguid was fearful for Tjaruru's future. So fearful, in fact, that he wrote in his diary, 'I wish I could have the oversight of this boy for the next five years'.<sup>44</sup> Duguid's desire to

<sup>38</sup> C. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 2, p. 6. Duguid was probably influenced by Mary Bennett who argued that 'in essentials' the Aborigines were 'in no way inferior' to whites. See Mary M. Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, Alston River, London, 1930, p. 75.

<sup>39</sup> C. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8 (original emphasis).

<sup>41</sup> C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> C. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, p. 16; C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, p. 16.



provide Tjaruru with better prospects for the future notwithstanding, he would never have removed Tjaruru from his people or his country, for despite the hardships—the 'heat and flies and no amenities'—as well as the dangers of an encroaching white civilisation, Duguid firmly believed that 'full-blood tribal Aborigines [were] happier with their own people and should never be taken from them'.<sup>45</sup>

For Duguid, Tjaruru epitomised all that was good in Aboriginal society and all that was bad in white society's treatment of the Aborigines. In a series of radio broadcasts to Adelaide schools in the early 1940s, Duguid used Tjaruru's case to highlight the inequalities and perversities of contact. In doing so, he revealed how confused—and confusing—his thinking had become. After describing the myriad ways in which Tjaruru had proved his intelligence in his own culture and environment, Duguid claimed that if Tjaruru 'had had the least chance of education he would have proved his ability in our culture' as well. According to Duguid, 'brighter Aborigines' like Tjaruru needed to be given the chance 'of developing their brains so that they [could] raise their people to a higher level of civilisation'.<sup>46</sup> However, since Duguid also argued against removing such Aborigines from their people, how was this brain development to be achieved? Was it a matter of taking education to them, such as at Ernabella mission? To what end? If Tjaruru could 'prove his ability' in white society, was this where Duguid imagined he belonged?

Like many white campaigners, Duguid was torn between a romantic idealisation of 'tribal' Aboriginal life and a desire for something more—something better—for his Aboriginal 'friends'.<sup>47</sup> Underscored by fear, this tension (some might say paradox) lay at the heart of both Charles and Phyllis Duguids' campaigning. They feared that if something was not done to save the Aborigines they would die out, and yet they argued that the Aborigines were 'no dying race'; white society was to blame. They had (or appeared to have) a deep and abiding respect for Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people, and yet they wanted 'to change their ways by showing them a better life'.<sup>48</sup> They had (or claimed to have) no interest in turning Aborigines into white people, either biologically, socially or culturally, and yet nearly everything they did in the name of Aboriginal advancement drew attention to the biological, emotional and intellectual similarities—even sameness—of Aborigines and whites.

During the late 1930s and into the 1940s, Charles Duguid liked to open his articles and addresses with an origin story, either the story of how he became involved in Aboriginal politics (see Part 1: Introduction) or the story of how the Aborigines came to Australia, sometimes both. When combined, these stories served to reinforce Duguid's

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> C. Duguid, 'Bush Natives at Home', in C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia: Broadcasts and an Address*, Reliance Printing Company, Adelaide, 1946, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Duguid referred to Tjaruru as his friend. According to Duguid, Tjaruru and he exchanged names and that meant 'lasting friendship'. C. Duguid, 'Bush Natives at Home', p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> P. Duguid was quoted as saying this in 'Natives Allowed to Remain Naked', *News* (Adelaide), 6 August 1938.



point that 'the more one learns of the Aborigines the more one comes to the conclusion that in the past they have been more maligned and misrepresented than any race on earth', and were thus contrived to persuade white Australians to become involved in Aboriginal politics as Duguid himself had done.<sup>49</sup> Of greater significance here, however, is Duguid's understanding of the origins of the Aboriginal race for it formed the basis of his mind-set concerning the Aborigines' ability to 'advance'. Following Frederic Wood Jones, Professor of Anatomy at the University of Melbourne, Duguid asserted that the Aborigines were 'specialised as a race in the south of central India and migrated in very early days to the North-West of Australia by way of the islands that lie between'.<sup>50</sup> As to when this migration occurred, 'no one [could] really say', according to Duguid, 'but as the ordinary mortal measures time it was in the long ago'.<sup>51</sup> For Duguid, establishing the 'coming into being of the Aborigines as a definite race in Southern India, and the migration therefrom' paved the way for his principle arguments in favour of Aboriginal advancement: the Aborigines' ability to survive and prosper in 'the most inhospitable land on earth'; their equal but different intelligence; and their close racial (meaning blood) relationship to white Australians.<sup>52</sup>

On the Aborigines' prosperous life in Australia prior to the arrival of Europeans, Duguid had much to say, and most of what he said came directly from the writings of Mary M. Bennett and Wood Jones. In her 1930 publication, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, Bennett observed that in Australia

there are no indigenous animals than can be domesticated, and there are no indigenous plants that men can cultivate for food. You cannot "herd" kangaroos nor plough with them ... Under these limitations it was impossible for people to be pastoralists, agriculturists or city builders, but it is a mistake to assume that they did not make the best of their surroundings, or that they are not able to learn all that we can.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines', *Aborigines Protector*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1936, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> C. Duguid 'Our Natives and Their Future', *The Link*, 2 May 1938, p. 172. See also Frederic Wood Jones, *Australia's Vanishing Race*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1934, p. 11. Wood Jones offered a much more detailed explanation of the Aborigines' origins than used by Duguid, however, it is clear that Duguid based his argument on Wood Jones' account.

<sup>51</sup> C. Duguid, 'Natives of the Interior: A Doctor's impression'.

<sup>52</sup> C. Duguid, 'An Advocate for the Aborigines in England', *Aborigines Protector*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 1939, p. 6; C. Duguid, 'The Tribal Natives and Their Customs', in C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia: Broadcasts and an Address*, p. 6. Duguid believed that the Aborigines were a 'definite race', not because they differed biologically from white Australians, but because their history and 'way of life' made them different to white Australians.

<sup>53</sup> Bennett was expanding on S.D. Porteous' observation (1929) that 'only a highly civilised race could have survived' in a country such as Australia, 'probably the most inhospitable continent in the world'. Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, pp. 13-14.



In *Australia's Vanishing Race*, published in 1934, Wood Jones likewise blamed 'the very nature of his new home' for the Aborigines' inability to 'progress' beyond the 'stage of culture of a stone-age hunter':

Australia possessed no animals that could be domesticated and brought into the service of man as beasts of draught or burden; or even any that could be bred and conserved as a source of food. It possessed no native plants that were readily taken into cultivation for the benefit of the primitive agriculturalist ... We need not, therefore, place it to the demerit of the Aboriginal that he did not become a settled agriculturist and so take on an altogether different phase of culture from that in which he arrived upon Australian shores.<sup>54</sup>

Paraphrasing Bennett and Wood Jones, Duguid argued that when the Aborigines arrived in Australia there 'was no beast of burden, no animal that could give milk for human use, and no plant that could be coaxed into a fruit tree or a vegetable': 'You can't harness a kangaroo nor milk a wombat', he mused.<sup>55</sup> On a more serious note, Duguid pointed out that white Australians, even with their 'advanced scientific knowledge', had made no better use of the country's natural resources: 'We have to import all our needs', he reproached.<sup>56</sup> And yet, Duguid continued, 'in spite of the disabilities of the country these primitive people from India struck a balance with nature, increased in numbers and spread all over the continent'.<sup>57</sup> More importantly, they 'were healthy, happy and contented under an elaborate social organisation of their own until we came'.<sup>58</sup>

According to the Aboriginal activist and writer Joe McGinness, Bennett and Wood Jones' acknowledgment that Aborigines were hunters and nomads by necessity rather than disability marked an 'important step in the mental liberation of white Australians': it 'exploded' the myth of white superiority and signalled 'recognition by a few non-Aborigines that Aborigines were equal but different'.<sup>59</sup> Proving the 'potential equality of the Aboriginal race' through their equal but different intelligence was an important theme in both Charles and Phyllis Duguids' writings. At different times, each borrowed Mary Bennett's story of an Aboriginal boy who secured a fresh meal of honey by catching a bee,

<sup>54</sup> Wood Jones, *Australia's Vanishing Race*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>55</sup> C. Duguid, 'Our Natives and Their Future', p. 172; C. Duguid, 'The Tribal Natives and Their Customs', p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> 'Think for a minute', Duguid suggested, 'and you will realise that everything we white people have in the pantry has been brought into Australia from overseas - meat, milk, vegetables, fruit'. C. Duguid, 'The Tribal Natives and Their Customs', p. 6; C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines', *The Australian Intercollegian*, 1 May 1940, p. 46.

<sup>57</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines', *The Australian Intercollegian*, 1 May 1940, p. 46.

<sup>58</sup> C. Duguid, 'An Advocate for the Aborigines in England', p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Joe McGinness, *Son of Alyandabu. My fight for Aboriginal rights*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1991, pp. 54-56.



fastening a piece of down to its body and following the sluggish creature to its hive.<sup>60</sup> To Phyllis this was proof that Aborigines had 'learned to read and understand nature as no other people [had] ever done', while to Charles the story illustrated the 'resourcefulness of the native child'.<sup>61</sup> In his version of the story, Charles had the child take the honey back to his family, for in Aboriginal society, unlike in white society, '[o]bedience to the laws of the tribe is learned very early in life, and selfishness is unknown'.<sup>62</sup> For Charles and Phyllis Duguid then, raising the status of the Aborigines and bringing 'the white population of Australia to recognise their worth' often meant portraying Aborigines in their own environment as more than equal, or superior, to whites.<sup>63</sup> To balance the scales of (in)justice, the Duguids tended to tip them in favour of the Aborigines; a conscious political act made 'real' by their deep admiration of Aboriginal people, their culture and society.

According to Charles Duguid, the Aborigines of Australia were 'a people ... full of intelligence', and this was especially evident when the 'native [was] judged in his own field of knowledge'; meaning in his or her own culture and environment.<sup>64</sup> 'To witness day by day their routine in the bush—all ordered and arranged—[was] to stand aside and marvel', Charles exclaimed: 'Their powers of observation', their 'ability to learn a foreign language' and their 'aptitude for drawing, writing and painting' was not only 'amazing', it was also 'far greater than the Anglo-Saxon's'.<sup>65</sup> Phyllis Duguid, while expressing similar sentiments, went further than her husband, suggesting that white society 'might do well to emulate' certain of the Aborigines 'gifts and graces'.<sup>66</sup>

For instance, can we claim as a race to have achieved the high degree of endurance and self-discipline which are so important a feature in the training of the young Aborigine? Have we anything like the same grace of subordinating the wishes of the individual to well-being of the community? As linguists and students of nature they leave us far behind, while their powers of telepathy or thought transference is to us baffling.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>60</sup> According to Bennett, this story was told to her by her father. See Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as Human Being*, p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Educational Needs of Our Aborigines', typescript of radio broadcast, [1940s], Phyllis Duguid Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide (hereafter Phyllis Duguid Papers); C. Duguid, 'The Tribal Natives and Their Customs', pp. 5-6.

<sup>62</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Tribal Natives and Their Customs', p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> C. Duguid to Hasluck, August 1951, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>64</sup> C. Duguid, 'An advocate for the Aborigines in England', p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines', *The Australian Intercollegian*, 1 May 1940, p. 47.

<sup>66</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—(III): A Woman's View', *The Australian Intercollegian*, 2 September 1940, p. 125. Like Charles, Phyllis argued that to observe the Aborigines in their 'untouched state' was to 'realise their real intelligence and the way in which they [had] successfully brought it to bear on their environment'. P. Duguid, 'The Educational Needs of Our Aborigines'.

<sup>67</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—(III): A Woman's View', p. 125.



Far 'from being the lowest of human races', Phyllis insisted that the Aborigines' 'innate intelligence [was] in no way less than our[s]'. Instead, 'their minds [had] been trained differently from infancy'.<sup>68</sup> Unlike white children, the Aboriginal child's 'education [was] intimately related to his tribe's struggle for existence', a point Charles delighted in explaining.<sup>69</sup>

From the age of twelve onwards the boys are associated with the men of the tribe [and] are taught to recognise the footprints of animals and birds, and are shown how to track down their quarry ... In a year or so the boys go through their first initiation. From then on to full membership of the tribe the lads go through a series of tests of endurance that few, if any, white youths could suffer. The young people of both sexes are taught to endure loneliness, hunger and pain, and are trained in self-control far beyond anything we expect of our children.<sup>70</sup>

These cultural differences aside, Phyllis had 'no doubt whatever about the ability of the average Aborigine or half-caste to assimilate education and training'.<sup>71</sup> Nor did Charles: 'The truth is, there is nothing the Australian native cannot learn if given time, provided he is handled with some degree of sympathy and understanding'.<sup>72</sup> Thus, rather than continue to condemn Aborigines as unintelligent—or worse 'inherently inferior'—what was needed, Phyllis maintained, was more 'research into Aboriginal ways of thought'.<sup>73</sup>

The Duguids' desire to have the Aborigines' 'innate intelligence' recognised and appreciated by white Australians was just the beginning. Their greater goal was to transform the Australian nation by encouraging Aborigines to 'bring their gifts to the common pool of Australia's enrichment'.<sup>74</sup> The advocates of biological assimilation, or absorption, also sought to transform the Australian nation. However, whereas the Duguids imagined a hybrid culture blended of Aboriginal and European traditions, the advocates of absorption imagined a hybrid people bleached white through the process of miscegenation. The idea that Aborigines and whites hailed from the 'same root-stock', or proto-Caucasian theory, informed both of these imaginings to a greater and lesser extent. As Warwick Anderson has shown, this idea became widely accepted in scientific circles

<sup>68</sup> P. Duguid, untitled transcript of radio broadcast, 2 April 1939, Phyllis Duguid Papers.

<sup>69</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Educational Needs of Our Aborigines'.

<sup>70</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Tribal Natives and Their Customs', p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Responsibility of Nation Building', *The White Ribbon Signal*, 15 May 1941, p. 72.

<sup>72</sup> C. Duguid, 'Our Natives and Their Future', p. 173.

<sup>73</sup> P. Duguid, 'Broadcast (Aborigines) for Labour Womens Forum', typescript, March 1945, Phyllis Duguid Papers.

<sup>74</sup> C. Duguid, handwritten notes on 'Assimilation', [1961], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 6. Likewise, Phyllis Duguid argued that it was 'chiefly due to our very limited knowledge of the [Aborigines] gifts and graces ... that we have almost lost the opportunity to weave their life into the stuff of our nation and thus greatly enrich ourselves'. See P. Duguid, 'Neglected Opportunity', transcript of radio broadcast, 29 January 1945, Phyllis Duguid Papers.



during the 1920s and 1930s. Blood tests, intelligence tests, physical and physiological tests 'demonstrated that the 'uncontaminated' nomads were fine physical specimens, Caucasian in type and not degenerate'.<sup>75</sup> Supported by anecdotal evidence that atavism—or 'throw-backs' to the Aboriginal colour—did not occur in the descendants of unions between Aborigines and whites, the theory of racial relatedness was used by A.O. Neville and C.E. Cook, the Chief Protectors of Aborigines in Western Australia and the Northern Territory respectively, to justify their policy of 'breeding out the colour' of the Aboriginal race. But it was not just scientists and administrators who made use of this theory. As Russell McGregor has observed, 'the propaganda value of a scientifically-validated racial kinship was not lost on contemporary humanitarian lobbyists', many of whom 'used the notion of blood-kinship as a means of fostering public interest in the plight of the Aborigines, and of justifying their right to a fuller participation in the social, economic and political life of the nation'.<sup>76</sup> Charles Duguid was one of these. Phyllis Duguid was not. Neither was Australia's leading anthropologist and committed lobbyist on the Aborigines' behalf, Professor A.P. Elkin.

Charles Duguid used the theory of racial relatedness to infer Aborigines' potential to advance to the same level of civilisation enjoyed by white Australians, not to become white Australians. In 1936, in an article published in *The Aborigines Protector*, he described the Aborigines as 'the earliest living examples, as we are the latest, of the same root stock'.<sup>77</sup> The following year, in an article published in *The Ladder*, Duguid stated that '[t]he Aborigines are far more akin to the Caucasian group to which we ourselves belong'.<sup>78</sup> In 1938, he informed readers of *The Link* that '[t]he native of Australia is a stone-age man, akin to our own stock in the dawn of time but unrelated to the Negro or Mongol'.<sup>79</sup> In 1940, in an article written for *Venture*, Duguid lamented the fact that '[v]ery few white people in Australia have any idea that the natives are far closer in blood to ourselves than to either the Mongol or the Negro race'.<sup>80</sup> Clearly, this lack of understanding was not through want of effort on his part. His wife, on the other hand, made no such effort. With one or two equivocal exceptions, Phyllis Duguid completely avoided the issue of Aborigines' and whites' racial relatedness.<sup>81</sup> While it may simply have been a matter of not repeating each others arguments, the obvious importance Charles

<sup>75</sup> Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2002, p. 197

<sup>76</sup> Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1997, p. 157.

<sup>77</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines', *Aborigines Protector*, p. 12.

<sup>78</sup> C. Duguid, 'Natives of the Interior', p. 14.

<sup>79</sup> C. Duguid, 'Our Natives and Their Future', p. 172.

<sup>80</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Aborigines of Australia', typescript article for *Venture*, February 1940, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 4.

<sup>81</sup> In 1941, Phyllis mentioned that 'blood tests ... [had] shown the real kinship of the two races'. In 1954, she stated that there was 'little doubt' that Aborigines and whites belonged 'to the same branch of the human family'. See P. Duguid, 'The Responsibility of Nation Building', p. 73; P. Duguid, 'Brown and White Down Under', unpublished address, [1954], Phyllis Duguid Papers.



placed on spreading the word of Aborigines' and whites' exclusive blood relationship suggests otherwise. Phyllis' silence, as well as her equivocation, spoke volumes. Rather than disagree with Charles, or suggest an alternative theory, Phyllis encouraged her readers to consult Professor Elkin's book *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*.

First published in 1938, Elkin's monograph made 'ignorance ... inexcusable', according to Phyllis. In her view, 'the whole book [was] an expression of deep human understanding'.<sup>82</sup> Yet Elkin totally rejected the idea that Aborigines and whites shared a common racial ancestry. According to Elkin, the argument for viewing Aborigines as primitive Caucasians was, for the most part, 'negative in character'. Since there were assumed to be three main divisions of human beings, and since the Aborigines were not Mongoloid or Negroid, the only other option was Caucasian. Not so, according to Elkin, who argued that the Australian Aborigines belonged in a fourth division, 'a special group' he called 'Australoid'. Other members of the Australoid group could be found 'in the lands from Australia to southern India', Elkin explained:

Evidence suggests that there have been some Australoid folk in New Guinea and the Celebes, and archaeology points to their former presence in Java. The Sakai of the Malay Peninsula, the Veddas of Ceylon and the aboriginal hill-tribes of southern India belong to this division.<sup>83</sup>

Although Wood Jones and others, including Charles Duguid, named these same peoples as evidence of the Australian Aborigines' Caucasian ancestry, Elkin was adamant that they were 'rightly classed ... in a special human division'.<sup>84</sup> McGregor has suggested that Elkin's insistence on this point 'perhaps ... stemmed from his antipathy towards schemes of 'breeding out the colour', which drew their scientific sustenance from the Caucasian theory'.<sup>85</sup> However, it could also have stemmed from Elkin's antipathy towards physical anthropology and physical anthropologists like Wood Jones who advocated the absolute segregation of 'uncontaminated' Aborigines on large inviolable reserves.

Either way, Elkin's Australoid category left Phyllis Duguid in an awkward position. 'Professor Elkin's authority [was] unchallengeable', according to her, and yet to use his argument would be to contradict, and thus undermine, her husband's.<sup>86</sup> Phyllis circumvented this dilemma by emphasising the Aborigines' essential humanity rather than their racial classification. 'The Aborigine', she argued, 'has his share of what is in all of us—the desire for development, and the ability to develop'; a human characteristic rather

<sup>82</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—(III): A Woman's View', p. 125.

<sup>83</sup> A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, (second edition) Halstead Press, Sydney, 1943, pp. 2-4.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4. See also Wood Jones, *Australia's Vanishing Race*, p. 11; Duguid, 'Natives of the Interior', p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 200.

<sup>86</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—(III): A Woman's View', p. 125.



than a purely Caucasian one.<sup>87</sup> Charles did not disagree with this, however, in stressing the point that the Aborigines were 'without Mongol or Negro blood' he effectively, if unintentionally, privileged the Caucasian group.<sup>88</sup> Sometimes he was more explicit. According to Charles, the 'word nigger as applied to the natives of Australia [was] a complete misnomer and should be dropped', not (just) because of its derogatory connotation, but because the Aborigines had 'no link with the Negro division ... of peoples'.<sup>89</sup> Did this mean that the word 'nigger' was applicable to people of African descent, long oppressed, enslaved and treated as less than human? Probably not, however Charles was adamant that the Aborigines of Australia were 'not black fellows'. Instead, they ranged in colour from 'dark chocolate' to 'very fair' and their 'babies at first [were] pinkish, not unlike our own babies'.<sup>90</sup> Tjaruru, the Aboriginal boy mentioned above, was 'one of the light coloured full-bloods of whom there [were] many among our Aborigines', according to Charles: he was also 'one of the most mentally alert boys [Charles had] ever met'.<sup>91</sup> By contrast, Tjaruru's friend, Warungulla, 'was very dark': he was also 'slower', 'quieter' and 'shyer than Tjaruru'.<sup>92</sup> Was there a link between skin colour and mental ability? Did Tjaruru's lighter colour suggest a higher stage of evolution? What about Aborigines of mixed-descent? Did their 'white blood' make them more intelligent than Aborigines of full-descent?

Charles Duguid, the defender of Aborigines as human beings, did not ask of himself, or his readers, questions such as these. Charles Duguid, the man bombarded by competing racial theories, lived experiences, hopes, fears and fantasies, could not help but wonder whether lightness (sometimes) equalled brightness. If there was a hierarchy of races—and Duguid would never have admitted to subscribing to such a view—the implication of his observations suggest Caucasian superiority, and since the Aborigines were 'akin to the Caucasian group', this likely placed them ahead of other non-white peoples in Duguid's mind. When it came to differentiating between different 'types' of Aborigines, Duguid employed a reverse hierarchy: he placed 'full-blood tribal' Aborigines at the top. There were three main types of Aborigines, according to Duguid: '(a) Those as yet hardly touched by us; (b) Those around cattle stations and mining camps; (c) Those in our own civilisation'.<sup>93</sup> When speaking or writing about Aborigines, Duguid insisted upon the importance of differentiating between these 'aspects of Aboriginal life', shortened for ease of explanation to 'full-blood [tribal], detribalised [and] half-caste'.<sup>94</sup> Reflecting his

<sup>87</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Educational Needs of Our Aborigines'.

<sup>88</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines', *The Australian Intercollegian*, 1 May 1940, p. 46.

<sup>89</sup> C. Duguid, 'Natives of the Interior', p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*; C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', p. 30.

<sup>91</sup> C. Duguid, 'Bush Natives at Home', p. 19.

<sup>92</sup> C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', p. 30.

<sup>93</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—(II)', *The Australian Intercollegian*, 1 July 1940, p. 88.

<sup>94</sup> C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Sunday' (1945), in C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia: Broadcasts and an Address*, p. 46.



belief that 'way of life' was the greatest difference between Aborigines and whites, Duguid distinguished between Aborigines on the basis of location and degree of interaction with white society, not blood—although blood played a role—and he measured them against an ideal of pre-contact Aboriginal life.

The Aborigines in the first category—'those as yet hardly touched by us', or 'full-blood tribal' Aborigines—were the people Duguid most admired for they most resembled his imagined ideal of Aboriginal life in Australia prior to the arrival of white civilisation. They were 'natural natives—people of amazing initiative and ability and fineness of character'.<sup>95</sup> The Aborigines in the second category—'those around cattle stations' or detribalised Aborigines—Duguid described as 'ill-clad, ill-fed [and] subservient'.<sup>96</sup> Having lost the land on which their 'tribal' life revolved, Duguid viewed detribalised Aborigines as people without culture—dispossessed, degraded and deprived of reason to live:

These are the relics of the tribe or moiety who for centuries occupied the country now carrying the white man's bullocks. These natives are dressed in cast-off clothing, are almost invariably under-nourished, and for the most part are broken in spirit.<sup>97</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, Phyllis Duguid viewed Aborigines of mixed-descent in much the same way. In fact, she believed that 'mixed-bloods' often fared worse than detribalised Aborigines, for while they had 'lost the moral standards and strict of their Aboriginal forefathers they [had] never been properly trained and educated in the best traditions of their white ancestors'.<sup>98</sup> Charles disagreed. In his view, 'half-castes' were so far removed from 'full-blood tribal' Aborigines, both culturally and physically, as to be virtually indistinct from white people.<sup>99</sup>

In keeping with his location-based typology, however, Charles Duguid included under the heading 'half-caste' Aborigines of full-descent who lived in white society, declaring in 1940 that '[w]ith the half-caste we can consider the full-blood in our civilisation'.<sup>100</sup> Behind this curiously worded statement was another chance meeting borne of Duguid's trip to Central Australia in 1936. Before leaving Alice Springs for Haast's Bluff, Duguid met a young Aboriginal man who, like Tjaruru, left a lasting impression.

<sup>95</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—(II)', p. 88.

<sup>96</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Natives on the Edge of Our Civilisation', in C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia: Broadcasts and an Address*, p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines—(II)', p. 88.

<sup>98</sup> P. Duguid, 'The Atlantic Charter for all Australians', typescript of radio broadcast, 30 October 1944, Phyllis Duguid Papers.

<sup>99</sup> In Charles Duguid's view, most Aborigines of mixed-descent 'differ[ed] from white people only in tint of skin'. C. Duguid, 'Voices from overseas', transcript of radio broadcast, May 1954, Charles Duguid Papers, Private Collection, since deposited with the National Library of Australia (hereafter Duguid Papers: 3).

<sup>100</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Australian Aborigines —(II)', p. 89.



The man was Duguid's 'friend', Micky Dow Dow's grandson. In his travel diary, Duguid wrote:

The young [man] is 24, tall and well built, but he had a very sad expression. He, although a full-blood, was dressed like any work-man, but no work is available. The law, however, provides rations only for the sick, aged and the infirm. This young man, although most anxious for work, cannot get either work or rations because he is neither white, sick, aged or infirm.<sup>101</sup>

According to Duguid, Micky Dow Dow's grandson had to keep his 'body and soul together with scraps from his grandfather'.<sup>102</sup> This intolerable situation prompted Duguid to argue that *all* Aborigines who lived in white society, be they 'half-caste' or 'full-blood', should have access to the same benefits of civilisation as white Australians. However, Duguid's inclusion of a few 'full-bloods' in the same category as 'half-castes' did not necessarily mean that he believed such Aborigines belonged in white society. In my view, it was merely a reflection of reality; it meant that such Aborigines were living in white society. In line with his views on detribalisation, Duguid sought to stop Aborigines of full-descent from 'drifting' towards white society, insisting that those who congregated around railway lines and small townships 'should be led back to their own country ... for their own sakes'.<sup>103</sup> This was not a matter of intelligence, for Duguid was adamant that 'the intelligence of the full-blood Aborigines [was] in no sense inferior to that of the half-castes'.<sup>104</sup> Rather, it was a matter of place. Only in their own place—meaning in their own culture and environment—were Aborigines of full-descent capable of real advancement.

Where did this leave Sydney James Cook, a displaced child of 'tribal full-blood' parents? By Duguid's definition, Cook was the same as a 'half-caste'; that is, hardly Aboriginal at all. However, belonging in the same category as the 'half-caste' did not mean that Cook belonged in white society. It just meant that he was domiciled there. For how long and to what end remained to be seen.

### III. Just like a white boy?

Sydney James Cook lived as a full and ostensibly equal member of the Duguid family for six years, from 1944 to 1950.<sup>105</sup> During that time he was shown the same love and affection as the Duguids' own children and, although not legally adopted, assumed the

<sup>101</sup> C. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, pp. 3-4.

<sup>102</sup> C. Duguid, 'Bush Natives at Home', p. 16.

<sup>103</sup> C. Duguid, 'The Aborigines of Australia', typescript for *Venture*, 1940.

<sup>104</sup> C. Duguid, 'This Week's Good Cause—Our Aborigines', in C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia: Broadcasts and an Address*, p. 40.

<sup>105</sup> An account of Cook's life with the Duguids can be found in Nancy Barnes, *Munyi's daughter: A spirited Brumby*, Seaview press, Henley Beach, SA, 2000, pp. 68-71.



Duguid name.<sup>106</sup> Sydney Duguid was a 'lad'; occasionally wilful and often disruptive, a prankster who loved the limelight, a young boy desirous of attention. According to Charles, 'Sydney [was] little different, if at all, from a stirring white boy of his own years', and yet, in 1950, the Duguids sent him to live with Aborigines at Roper River, a remote Christian mission in the Northern Territory.<sup>107</sup> Why? What precipitated this undeniably drastic move? What, if anything, had changed?

In contrast to the expansive files kept by the Northern Territory administration following Cook's relocation to Roper River, few records of Cook's time with the Duguids remain. Of those that Charles Duguid chose to keep, their type as well as their content are revealing of Duguid's frustrated efforts to understand his young charge, and to help Cook cope with the prejudices of white society: psychological reports, school reports and correspondence pertaining to Cook's expulsion from Kings College in 1948.<sup>108</sup> Added to this, two short entries in two published works—'Aboriginal children I have met' and *Ernabella Revisited*—comprise the full-extent of Duguid's personal and public records regarding Cook's life in Adelaide. Although further insights can be gleaned from the records of the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board, the fact that Duguid, an activist who built his reputation on 'knowing' Aborigines, chose not to make Cook, or his relationship with Cook, a topic for wider public consumption requires explanation.

The general public were definitely interested in Cook's story.<sup>109</sup> In October 1946, in the midst of the rocket range controversy, Duguid presented himself at the Adelaide office of *Smith's Weekly*, a large bundle of maps under his arm. Duguid wanted the magazine to publicise his protest against the rocket range, and they did, but *Smith's* editors were also interested in Duguid himself—a man who had 'spent a small private fortune in pushing the black man's cause', had helped to establish Ernabella mission and had even 'adopted a full-blood boy'. Anticipating their reader's interest, *Smith's* explained:

The lad is now nine years old, goes to King's College (Adelaide) and is equal of his fellow students. He has been reared with [the] white man's pride of his own race and is unashamed of his colour.<sup>110</sup>

The question of Cook's racial pride and/or colour consciousness will be examined below. Such comments aside, it is clear that Duguid's association with Cook enhanced his public reputation as an activist. In 1951, less than a year after Cook's relocation to Roper River,

<sup>106</sup> During his years with the Duguids, Cook was known as Sydney Duguid. See Sydney Duguid's school reports 1944-48, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>107</sup> C. Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>108</sup> See Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>109</sup> Mary Bennett (nee Baird), a former craft teacher at Ernabella mission, grew up in the house next-door to the Duguids. According to her, 'Sydney ... was talked about all over the town and many predicted "it would never work" but it DID because of the attitude, love and understanding of problems which Dr Duguid showed'. Mary Bennett (nee Baird), 'My memories of Dr Duguid', typescript, June 1972, Nancy Barnes Private Collection, Adelaide (original emphasis).

<sup>110</sup> 'Aborigines and Rockets', *Smiths Weekly*, 12 October 1946.



*People* magazine devoted four pages to Duguid's work on behalf of Aborigines, beginning with an exaggerated account of his efforts to help Aboriginal children:

[Duguid's] first step was to take several Aboriginal children—tribal full-bloods—into his home. Most of them stayed weeks and months at a time. One, a boy of six, stayed for many years. They came timid, suspicious creatures wondering what to expect in the white man's house. But their fears were soon allayed. They became part of the home. They ate at the family table with the Duguids' own children, had their own rooms, were sent to school.<sup>111</sup>

This 'experiment astonished Adelaide', according to *People*, 'but it proved Duguid's point. Given equal opportunities, the Aboriginal children were well-mannered, intelligent and in every way the equal of white children'.<sup>112</sup> And it was not just Adelaide society that found Duguid's so called 'experiment' so astonishing. In 1954, Duguid's 'daily experiment'—his willingness 'to go the limit and bring the Aborigine into [his] home'—saw him praised in the Church of Scotland's newsletter *Life and Work*.<sup>113</sup> Ten years later, in 1964, the *Newcastle Morning Herald* described Duguid's determination to prove the Aborigines' equal intelligence by bringing 'full-blooded children into his home' as a 'magnificently successful ... experiment':

The full-bloods grew up with Dr Duguid's own two children, knowing them as brother and sister, living a normal suburban life, attending school and college. They became responsible adults, took responsible positions in life. Dr and Mrs Duguid were very proud of them.<sup>114</sup>

Apart from Nganyintja who spent less than three-weeks with the Duguids, the only other Aboriginal child of full-descent the Duguids brought into their home was Cook, and the Duguids sent him to live with Aborigines.

As mentioned earlier, Charles Duguid was adamant that Cook was not an experiment. Clearly, the general public thought otherwise. So did the Adelaide anthropologist and medical scientist, J.B. Cleland. In 1964, Cleland wrote to Charles and Phyllis Duguid requesting 'a full record of Sydney Cook's ... behaviour as a child'.<sup>115</sup> Since Cook's 'nurture was strictly European till late childhood', Cleland wanted to know 'whether he behaved exactly as a white child would or differed significantly or slightly in

<sup>111</sup> 'Dr Duguid - champion of the dark skinned underdog', *People*, 14 February 1951, p. 43.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> 'Champion of a Primitive People', *Life and Work* (the Record of the Church of Scotland), September 1954, p. 239.

<sup>114</sup> W.H. Fenwick, 'A Scalpel That Cut to Size', *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 30 June 1962.

<sup>115</sup> J.B. Cleland to C. Duguid, 7 January 1964, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.



any way'.<sup>116</sup> Demonstrating the pervasiveness of racially or biologically deterministic ideas, what Cleland really wanted to know was whether Cook had 'inherit[ed] any trait not likely to be shown by a white child'.<sup>117</sup> Despite Cleland's insistence that such a record would be 'most valuable', Charles Duguid did not acquiesce. Nor did Phyllis. Perhaps inspired by Cleland's interest, however, Phyllis penned a long poem entitled 'To an Aboriginal boy' in the months following Cleland's request.<sup>118</sup> Reproduced in full at the end of this chapter, Phyllis' poem—sixty lines of lament—was not what Cleland had in mind. It was (and is) an expression of deep regret over white society's failure to understand, let alone appreciate, Aboriginal people and their culture. As the final few lines attest, it was also a message of hope and a call for forgiveness:

Ignore the judgement and forget the lie.  
 They said your race was doomed—its heritage  
 Feeble and useless in the march of time.  
 And, if you can, forgive the bitter wrong  
 Your fathers suffered at our fathers' hands.  
 Share with our sons your ancient disciplines  
 And what remains to you of native lore,  
 While they redeem the past and share with you  
 The endless riches of our common land.<sup>119</sup>

If, as seems likely, Phyllis' poem was written for Cook, then her message was clear: as an Aboriginal man conscious of his own and his people's self-worth, Cook had much to contribute to the Australian nation. But what of Cook, the Aboriginal child who was just like a white boy? How did he get to be that man?

According to Rosemary Douglas, the Duguids' daughter, life was hard for Cook in Adelaide. There were very few 'full-bloods' in the city, she recalled, and so Cook 'stood out'.<sup>120</sup> It did not matter that Cook had only ever known the company of white people, his skin colour and physical appearance marked him as Aboriginal, and therefore out of place in white society. Even those aware of Cook's circumstances found it difficult to look beyond his colour. Cook's psychologist, for example, reported that Cook, aged eight, found it difficult to 'adjust to complicated civilised standards' because he '[did] not understand their necessity', and that Cook, aged ten, found school work 'boring' because it

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*; Cleland to C. Duguid, 11 February 1964, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>117</sup> Cleland to C. Duguid, 11 February 1964.

<sup>118</sup> Phyllis Duguid applied for the copyright of her poem 'To an Aboriginal Boy' in March 1966. This was granted in June 1966. In her application Phyllis stated that the poem was written in January 1964. See P. Duguid, 'To an Aboriginal boy', NAA: A1336/1, 67922.

<sup>119</sup> P. Duguid, 'To an Aboriginal boy'. A copy of Phyllis' poem can also be found in Barnes, *Munyi's daughter*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>120</sup> Personal communication with Rosemary Douglas, 24 August 1999.



was 'against his natural bent'.<sup>121</sup> The fact that 'civilised standards' were all that Cook had ever known was apparently irrelevant in the face of his 'natural bent'—meaning his Aboriginal inheritance. Cook's teachers were similarly predisposed to judge him according to his colour, consistently drawing attention to his carelessness, lack of concentration, unreliability and roughness in play.<sup>122</sup> In terms of his academic ability, Cook's grades in standard subjects such as reading, writing and arithmetic decreased each year that he was at Kings College, while his marks in subjects such as art, sport and music increased.<sup>123</sup> Although Cook may simply have been better at certain things than others, it is no coincidence that the areas in which he did well—art, sport and music—were also the areas in which Aborigines were commonly thought to excel.

Most people's reactions to Cook, as well as their expectations of him, were determined by his skin colour. In 'Aboriginal children I have met', Charles Duguid sought to minimise the visibility of Cook's difference by highlighting the numerous ways in which Cook was the same as a white boy his age, a tactic which had the opposite effect of reinforcing the dual nature of Cook's difference. First broadcast as an address to Adelaide schools in 1946, the article featured three 'full-blood' Aboriginal children, Tjaruru, Nganyintja and Cook—two 'tribal' Aborigines and one from the 'white world'. Unlike Tjaruru and Nganyintja, Cook was not named in the article. Nor was the nature of his relationship to Duguid specified. Instead, Cook was referred to as 'the third child', 'the baby from the sack', 'that child' and 'he'; an abandoned Aboriginal infant who 'had to be kept in white society' and was 'now living in an Adelaide home'.<sup>124</sup> A photograph of Cook in a tailored suit—white shirt and tie, double-breasted jacket and short pants with knee-high white socks completing the ensemble—accompanied the article. Instructively, if somewhat unimaginatively captioned 'Full-blood, Aged 7, Adelaide', it showed the very model of an assimilated Aborigine (see Plate 10). But there was a catch. To his readers, should they ever meet this boy, or others like him, Duguid instructed:

Don't draw attention to his brown skin, don't laugh at him, but just as important don't spoil him. Don't single him out with lollies and toys. Treat him exactly as you would your own white friend or brother.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Lois Allen, Confidential Report on Sydney Duguid, Aged 8 years, 0 months, November 1945, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1; Lois Allen, Psychological Report on Sydney Duguid, Aged 10 years, 4 months, February 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>122</sup> According to his teachers, Cook lacked 'self-confidence' and was 'easily led to excitable and negative behaviour'; he was 'lip lazy' and sat 'badly'; he was 'rather erratic' and needed 'constant supervision'. See Sydney Duguid's school reports 1944-48, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>123</sup> Cook's teachers reported that he was 'often clumsy indoors' but he was very 'good at games outdoors'; he was 'quick to understand' music and had a 'particular interest' in drawing; he was also good at telling stories and loved 'to hold audience'. See Sydney Duguid's school reports 1944-48, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>124</sup> C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', pp. 33-34.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.



By withholding Cook's name and asking others to ignore his colour, Duguid showed how tenuous Cook's hold on sameness really was. Unlike white children, Cook was black. Unlike Tjaruru and Nganyintja, Cook had no special skills or 'tribal' qualities for Duguid to admire. Having been raised in white society, the best that Cook could be, it seems, was the same as a white boy his age. Thus, Duguid reported that Cook could 'swim and dive, play games with vigour ... [and] throw a ball much further than any of his school mates'. He was 'a wizard on a scooter, [could] ride a bicycle with abandon' and he had even 'joined the Cubs', an important rite-of-passage for white boys his age.<sup>126</sup> However, since there was nothing especially significant about a young boy joining the Cubs or riding a bicycle, what made Cook's achievements noteworthy was that he was a 'full-blood' Aboriginal. This simple truth lay at the heart of Duguid's unease about Cook.

In May 1946, the entire Duguid family, Cook included, holidayed at Ernabella mission (see Plate 11). On their return to Adelaide, the question 'How did Sydney react to the natives' was asked so often that Duguid took the opportunity of answering it in *Ernabella Revisited*, a booklet issued by the Presbyterian Board of Missions. According to Duguid, the trip had a profound effect on Cook's behaviour. He returned to Adelaide 'less aggressive than he was and much more helpful in the home'. Duguid attributed this change to Cook's new-found awareness that he was 'not ... the only brown boy' in the world; 'he knows there are hundreds more at Ernabella, on the stations ... and at Alice Springs'.<sup>127</sup> The trip also had a profound effect on Duguid's understanding of Cook. In *Ernabella Revisited*, Duguid related an incident that occurred while he and Cook were visiting the sheep camps with one of the mission's workers, Walter MacDougall:

At one of the sheep camps two Aboriginal women were in charge—a woman at least in the late forties, and a younger woman in perhaps the early twenties. The older woman asked Mr MacDougall in her own language who Sydney's father and mother were and where they were. "He hasn't any father or mother," Mr MacDougall replied in Pitjantjatjara. "Dr and Mrs Duguid look after him." "No father or mother!" cried the old woman and she burst into tears. The younger woman almost reproved her. Pointing to Sydney, running happily with the native children she said in her language, "Look, he's alright, Dr and Mrs are father and mother to him. They look after him." It may only have been the mother heart that brought the tears but I think the older woman was probably conscious of the fact that Sydney was missing much knowledge and learning that no white parents could give him.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> C. Duguid, *Ernabella Revisited: The Diary of a Pilgrimage*, Presbyterian Board of Missions, Melbourne, 1946, pp. 15-16.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.



Thus reminded of what Cook was missing, Duguid found it increasingly difficult to convince himself, let alone others, that Cook could survive in white society, and be happy there.

Duguid wanted Cook to take 'the usual place in the [white] community of a boy his age—just that—no more, no less', and so he said that Cook did, but saying it did not make it so.<sup>129</sup> The new headmaster at Kings College, C.C. Shinkfield, required Cook to be 'one of the rest', and Cook's school reports paint a picture of a child desperate to be just that; a child so desperate for 'affection, attention and appreciation' that conflict often ensued.<sup>130</sup> According to his grade two teacher, Cook had 'a keen wish to please' and was 'always quick to do small things to help other children or adults'. He was also very 'fond of younger children' and a 'protector of the timid'. In his role as protector, however, Cook was often 'very aggressive' towards other boys, and was sometimes 'very rough'.<sup>131</sup> Cook's grade three teacher described him as having a 'poor perception of the rights of others', while his grade four teacher reported that Cook was 'inclined to be aggressive when he [could] not get his own way by other means'.<sup>132</sup> At the beginning of Cook's fifth year at Kings College, 1947, Shinkfield sounded the following warning:

I am very concerned with this youth. Constant care and discipline are necessary. Disobedience is still in evidence and I am viewing the future with some concern, for Sydney is not inclined to adjust himself to the general pattern and is a law unto himself.<sup>133</sup>

Cook's school report for term one the following year—his final term at Kings—showed a marked improvement in both general behaviour and academic attainments, but Shinkfield insisted that 'much more improvement ... [was] necessary before [Cook could] be esteemed as "according to pattern"'.<sup>134</sup>

In May 1948, on the first day back from term break, Shinkfield asked Duguid to 'make other arrangements' for Cook's education. According to Shinkfield, the school risked losing four students on Cook's account. None 'of the parents concerned were ... against [Cook's] colour', Shinkfield assured Duguid, but they were all 'against the boy himself for his influence [was] by no means wholesome'.<sup>135</sup> Of particular concern was the 'undesirableness' of Cook's 'conduct in the lavatories': 'The lad will interfere with smaller boys, and will not let them alone, to the extent that, in one instance, one small boy is having

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Kings College report on Sydney Duguid, Term 1, 1946, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1; Kings College report on Sydney Cook, Term 1, 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

<sup>131</sup> Kings College report on Sydney Duguid, Term 1, 1945, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>132</sup> Kings College report on Sydney Duguid, Term 3, 1946 and Term 1, 1947, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>133</sup> Kings College report on Sydney Duguid, Term 1, 1947, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>134</sup> Kings College report on Sydney Duguid, Term 1, 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>135</sup> C.C. Shinkfield, headmaster Kings College to C. Duguid, 24 May 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.



nightmares over [him]', Shinkfield explained. In Shinkfield's view, the school had 'done its best' for Cook and was not to blame for this 'disappointing' result: 'The boy in himself [was] the obstacle'.<sup>136</sup> Duguid was outraged. According to him, Cook admitted his involvement in the lavatory incident—an unfortunate affair, but one that occurred 'frequently in boys schools'—and he named the other boys involved, including the ring-leader, but 'they [were] white' and Cook was not: only Cook was expelled. There was no doubt in Duguid's mind that 'colour [was] at the bottom of all this trouble'.<sup>137</sup> More than colour, however, it was the meanings that Shinkfield and the parents involved attached to Cook's colour in light of his actions that was the problem. Colour plus sexuality—or instinct at its most untameable—invoked irrational fears of unrestrained sexual licentiousness, and since Cook was 'nearly two years older' than most of his classmates, Shinkfield feared that his 'inherently unwholesome' influence 'bid fair to widen'.<sup>138</sup>

The Northern Territory administration proffered a similar explanation. Nearly a decade later, a draft dossier of Cook's life prepared by the Director of Welfare, H.C. Giese, cited such instances of negative behaviour on Cook's part as evidence of his 'reverting to Aboriginal tendencies'.<sup>139</sup> Although, as far as Duguid was concerned, Cook's indiscretion was typical of boys his age, not typical of Aboriginality, it was clear that Cook could not remain at Kings College.<sup>140</sup> It will be recalled that Cook's 'distinctly favourable' association with Kings College had been one of Charles and Phyllis Duguid's main considerations in accepting Cook into their home. With this association broken, the Aborigines Protection Board felt that Cook's 'best interests' would be served 'if he were transferred to the St Francis Home for Native Boys at Semaphore'.<sup>141</sup> This suggestion was not acted on and Cook remained with the Duguids. Towards the end of 1948, however, the situation became unmanageable, and Duguid wrote to W.R. Penhall, secretary of the APB, requesting that 'permanent' alternative arrangements be made. According to Duguid, Cook had 'had every chance that could be given him, but he [was] becoming more difficult every month' and was 'upsetting the home through defiance'. 'For his own good', Duguid suggested that Cook 'ought, if at all possible, to be with older boys of his own colour who [could] control him'. Duguid was aware that Harry Green, the superintendent at Ooldea mission, believed that he had located Cook's parents and, if this were true, Duguid reasoned that Cook 'should be allowed to return to them'.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Shinkfield to C. Duguid, 1 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>137</sup> C. Duguid to Shinkfield, 11 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1; C. Duguid, notes on 'Objections to Sydney', [June 1948], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1; P. Duguid, notes on conversation with Cook, [June 1948], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>138</sup> Shinkfield to C. Duguid, 1 June 1948

<sup>139</sup> 'History and Background of Sydney James Cook', draft report, 29 May 1957, NAA: F1, 1955/820/90-89.

<sup>140</sup> C. Duguid to Shinkfield, 2 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>141</sup> Penhall to C. Duguid, 2 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>142</sup> C. Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948.



Penhall 'agree[d] entirely that [Cook] should be returned to live amongst his own people'.<sup>143</sup> However, rather than 'thrust [the] boy back into the primitive conditions existing at Ooldea', Penhall felt that Cook would do better under A.J. Pearce's control at the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) at Finniss Springs.<sup>144</sup> Pearce, however, was reluctant to be lumbered with such a difficult child. He had heard that Cook was 'inclined to be dishonest', and since there was no dormitory at Finniss Springs, Pearce was unwilling to take Cook into his own home.<sup>145</sup> Undeterred and determined to avoid 'thrusting the boy back into the primitive life', Penhall approached Noel Wiley of the UAM mission at Oodnadatta.<sup>146</sup> Unlike Finniss Springs, Oodnadatta had a dormitory and access to a school, and although word of Cook's poor behaviour had spread, Wiley agreed to the move.<sup>147</sup> The secretary of the UAM, Pastor Samuels, strongly objected: 'If Dr D. wants to get rid of Sydney, let him send him to Ernabella', he declared.<sup>148</sup> Another approach by Penhall, again with emphasis on the undesirability of returning Cook to a primitive life, elicited the desired result. Samuels agreed to the move provided that Cook was subject to the same conditions as applied to other children at the Oodnadatta home: there was to be no special treatment, no interference by Duguid and Cook was to 'remain in the institution unless removed by the APB'.<sup>149</sup> Although Duguid had asked for 'permanent' arrangements to be made, no-one in his family was 'willing to part with the boy on the understanding that he [would] not be allowed to return'.<sup>150</sup> Phyllis, in particular, was 'terribly upset at the thought of [Cook] going to Oodnadatta for good'.<sup>151</sup> Against Penhall's advice—and much to Penhall's chagrin—Duguid withdrew his request to have Cook relocated.

Despite the 'exceedingly favourable environment' provided by the Duguids, Penhall doubted whether Cook 'would ever be successful or happy living in a white community'. In his view, the longer Cook remained 'away from his true environment', the harder the inevitable transition would be.<sup>152</sup> In an era commonly associated with the first stirrings of change towards a national policy of assimilation, Penhall's determination to see Cook 'absorbed in his true environment amongst the native people' seems oddly discordant, especially in light of Penhall's own views on assimilation.<sup>153</sup> In February 1948, at a Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Welfare Authorities, Penhall affirmed that the object of Aboriginal policy was 'to facilitate and hasten the assimilation of [the

<sup>143</sup> Penhall to C. Duguid, 17 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>144</sup> Penhall to A.J. Pearce, 21 October 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86; Penhall to Samuels, 17 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>145</sup> Pearce to Penhall, 1 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>146</sup> Penhall to N.B. Wiley, 25 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>147</sup> Wiley to Penhall, 6 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>148</sup> Note to Penhall of phone call from Samuels, 8 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>149</sup> Penhall to Samuels, 17 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86; Penhall to C. Duguid, 21 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>150</sup> C. Duguid to Penhall, 29 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>151</sup> C. Duguid to Penhall, 19 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>152</sup> Penhall to C. Duguid, 17 November 1948; Penhall to Pearce, 21 October 1948.

<sup>153</sup> Penhall to Samuels, 17 December 1948.



Aborigines] into the general life of the community'.<sup>154</sup> Yet, less than ten months later, Penhall was advocating Cook's immediate return to Aboriginal society, albeit one more advanced (less primitive) than Ooldea. What did this say about assimilation? If Cook, an Aboriginal child who was raised in white society by white people could not be happy there—if he did 'not fit into the environment of our white civilisation' as Penhall claimed—what hope did other Aborigines have?<sup>155</sup> Rather than question the efficacy of assimilation, Penhall blamed Cook's inability to live in white society on 'the handicap resulting from his early years' with the Bush Church Aid Society; a condition entirely unique to Cook, and not, therefore, the failure of assimilation.<sup>156</sup>

Duguid held a different view. While he agreed that the BCA's 'utter spoiling' had left Cook damaged in terms of assimilation by depriving him of the 'normal disciplines that a child learns in its earliest years', Duguid characterised Cook's greater 'tragedy' as 'what happened at his birth'.<sup>157</sup> 'In judging [Cook]—and by implication assimilation—we must remember that he has never known his real parents and never mingled with his own race', Duguid told Penhall.<sup>158</sup> This meant that Cook had been denied the opportunity to develop certain qualities that Duguid regarded as essential to his survival in white society. These were 'courage', 'self-control', 'self-reliance' and 'self-respect'—the very qualities that Duguid admired in 'tribal' Aborigines. In Duguid's view, the 'strongest argument against [Cook] or any Aboriginal child remaining in the white community [was] the undue attention they receive[d] from both adults and children': 'whether it [was] unkind contempt or undue appreciation, very few white people seem[ed] to be capable of treating the Aborigines as ordinary individuals', Duguid complained.<sup>159</sup> In order to cope with this 'extra attention', Duguid believed that Aborigines in white society needed to be as conscious of their own self-worth as 'tribal' Aborigines were, secure in their own environment and living their own way of life. In his view, they needed to be like Nganyintja.

Following Nganyintja's three-week stay in Adelaide, Duguid claimed that '[n]o more adaptable, no more lovable or co-operative child [had] ever been in [his] home'.<sup>160</sup> Of all Nganyintja's qualities, it was her 'naturalness' that Duguid most admired: Nganyintja 'met people naturally' and by her 'naturalness' showed 'what possibilities [lay] in ... native children'. Duguid attributed Nganyintja's ability to be her 'natural self' around whites to her having 'no sense of racial inferiority', which he attributed in turn to the respect paid

<sup>154</sup> 'Notes of Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Welfare Authorities', held at Parliament House, Canberra, February 1948, NAA: A52/3, 572/994. See also Charles Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia*, Penguin Books, Sydney, 1972, pp. 389-91.

<sup>155</sup> Penhall to Wiley, 25 November 1948.

<sup>156</sup> Penhall to C. Duguid, 17 November 1948.

<sup>157</sup> C. Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948; P. Duguid to Giese, 21 May 1960.

<sup>158</sup> C. Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948.

<sup>159</sup> C. Duguid to Penhall, 17 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>160</sup> C. Duguid, 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', pp. 32-33.



Aboriginal culture at Ernabella mission.<sup>161</sup> 'Naturalness' was a compliment Duguid reserved for describing Aborigines' reaction to others. Aside from describing Cook's reaction to the Aborigines at Ernabella as 'natural', it was not a term he applied to Cook. In *Ernabella Revisited*, Duguid noted that Cook 'took his place naturally among the boys and girls' at the mission 'and they received him as naturally. They taught him to play their games, to throw the boy's spear, to ride horses, and to make damper'.<sup>162</sup> But Cook's 'naturalness' was contingent, a quality of his response to Aboriginal company only, for unlike Nganyintja who slept 'naked ... between the fires at night', Cook 'was a member of the white community' at Ernabella and so 'had meals with us and of course slept with us'.<sup>163</sup> Outside Aboriginal society Cook had no recourse to 'naturalness', no reservoir of self-respect or system of self-honour to draw upon, other than that which whites had given him. As a consequence of his mishandling by the BCA, that was not enough.

To survive in white society, Duguid believed that Aborigines, and especially Aborigines of full-descent, needed to feel as proud of their own race and be as unashamed of their colour as *Smiths Weekly* had, presumably on Duguid's advice, described Cook in the article mentioned above. Like Duguid's statement regarding Cook's place in the white community, Duguid's advice to *Smiths Weekly* reflected his ambition for Cook; an ambition that Duguid came to see as unrealisable so long as Cook remained in white society. Cook's problem was not Aboriginality, in Duguid's view, but the lack of Aboriginality. It was not race, but the lack of pride in his race. It was not colour, but the lack of a dignifying context for his colour. And these were things 'that no white parents could give him'.<sup>164</sup>

In May 1950, two years after Cook's expulsion from Kings College, Charles and Phyllis Duguid sent Cook, aged twelve, to live with Aborigines. Having effectively burnt their bridges among the small community of appropriate missions in South Australia—Ernabella, being a mission for 'tribal' Aborigines, was not considered appropriate—the Duguids sent Cook to the Church of England mission at Roper River in the Northern Territory.<sup>165</sup> The intervening years had seen Cook enrolled in a school that was 'particularly gifted in the handling of difficult boys', according to Phyllis, 'but he continued to play truant and please himself, eventually becoming quite out of school control'. At Roper River it was planned that Cook would 'live with [an Aboriginal] family, continue with correspondence lessons, and above all learn something of cattle work under sympathetic direction'.<sup>166</sup> Sending Cook from the relative luxury of a comfortable suburban home to an Aboriginal camp was not an easy decision to make—as late as

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*; C. Duguid, 'Let's Learn About Schools', in C. Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia: Broadcasts and an Address*, p. 15.

<sup>162</sup> C. Duguid, *Ernabella Revisited*, p. 16.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*; C. Duguid, 'Let's Learn About Schools', p. 15.

<sup>164</sup> C. Duguid, *Ernabella Revisited*, p. 16.

<sup>165</sup> Penhall to C. Duguid, 14 April 1950, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1950/3.

<sup>166</sup> P. Duguid to Giese, 21 May 1960.



October 1949, Cook's psychologist reported that 'he did not want to leave home' and that 'he seemed rather agitated at the suggestion'—but the Duguids were convinced that Cook needed 'the companionship of his own people ... [in] his adolescent years'.<sup>167</sup>

It was Charles and Phyllis Duguid's particular understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginality—or what it meant to 'be Aboriginal'—that drove them to seek racial companionship for Cook. Other white parents might have acted differently, and, according to the Northern Territory administration, could hardly have acted less appropriately. Cook's relocation to Roper River was viewed by the Welfare Branch as backward in terms of assimilation and cruel.<sup>168</sup> However, whether it was a retrograde step depends entirely on how assimilation is understood. Charles and Phyllis Duguid's support for assimilation was different from Paul Hasluck's, Minister for the Territories (1951-1963) and architect of the assimilation policy. Nowhere was this more apparent than in their decision to send Cook to live with Aborigines. As far as Charles and Phyllis were concerned, Cook's advancement in white society had stalled. To become an Aboriginal man conscious of his own self-worth, they believed that Cook needed to learn how to 'be Aboriginal'; to go through the rigours of tribal initiation and hopefully acquire a meaningful and dignifying context for his colour. Unlike Penhall who anticipated Cook's remaining in Aboriginal society, Charles and Phyllis saw the move as temporary. 'After a few years' with his own people, they believed that Cook would re-enter white society and 'become a very useful and happy citizen'.<sup>169</sup> Although, as will become apparent in the chapter five, Cook's life at Roper River was far more difficult than the Duguids imagined, it is clear that in sending Cook to live with Aborigines, they thought that they were aiding Cook's assimilation by giving him a chance to assimilate Aboriginal culture as well.

<sup>167</sup> L.S. Piddington, psychologist to P. Duguid, 2 October 1949, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1; C. Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948. It will be recalled that Charles and Phyllis held strong views on the crucial role that adolescence played in the lives of 'tribal' Aborigines. See C. Duguid, 'Tribal natives and their customs', p. 5; P. Duguid, 'The Educational Needs of Our Aborigines'.

<sup>168</sup> J.R. Ryan, District Welfare Officer to Giese, 23 March 1957, NAA: F1, 1955/820/79; J. C. Archer, Administrator to Hasluck, 5 June 1957, NAA: F1, 1955/820/96-95.

<sup>169</sup> C. Duguid to Penhall, 17 November 1948; See also, C. Duguid to Hasluck, 21 October 1953.



League for the Protection and Advancement of  
Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women

# **PUBLIC MEETING**

**Thursday, November 23rd**  
at 8 p.m.

at the

**Institute, North Terrace**

Lady Muriel Barclay-Harvey has graciously consented  
to be present

## **An Illustrated Lecture**

will be given by

**PROFESSOR HARVEY JOHNSTON**

**"The Aboriginal Woman of Australia"**

**VOCAL ITEMS BY ABORIGINAL GIRLS**

Chair to be taken by Mrs. Chas. Duguid, B.A.

**COLLECTION**

**The Future of the Aboriginal Women Concerns Every  
Australian Citizen**

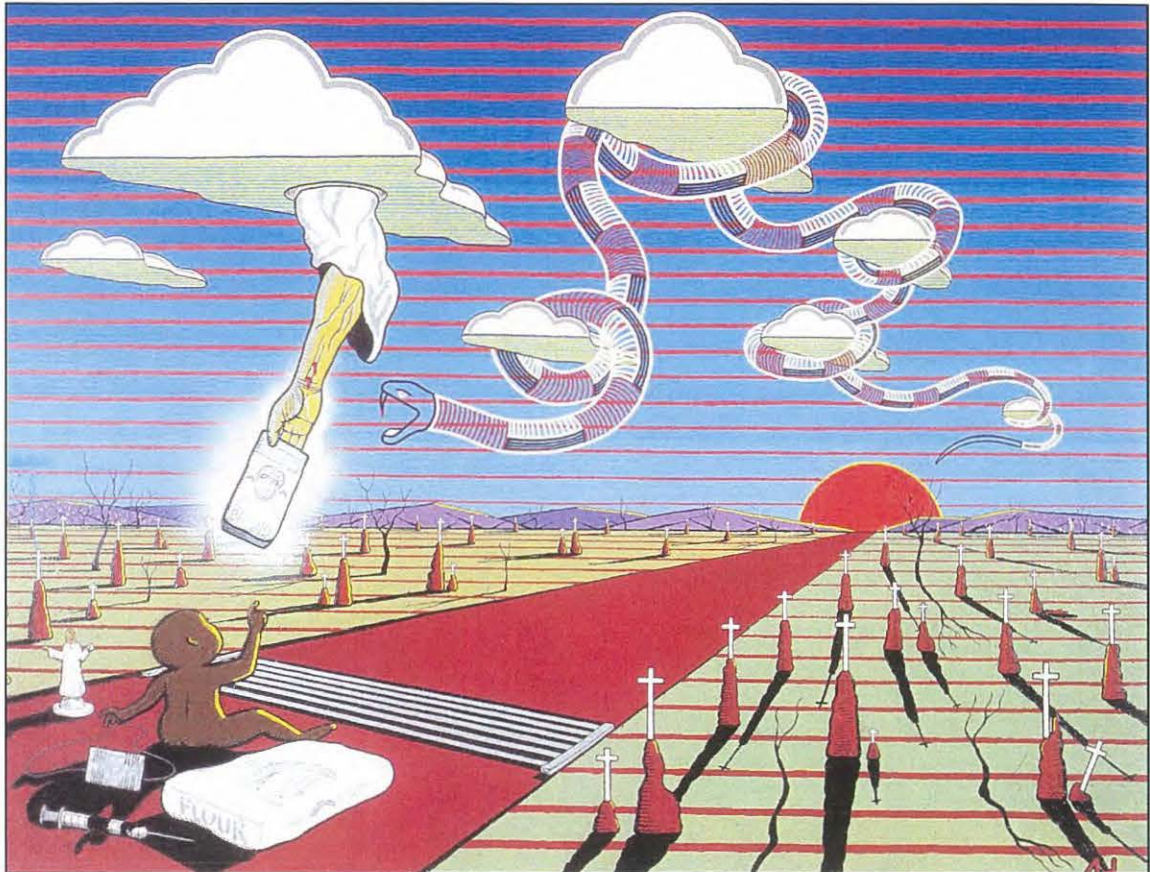
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**Murkin, Ellis & King, Ltd., Printers, Pirie Street, Adelaide.**

PLATE 6. Notice of Public Meeting, League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-caste Women, 1939.

Source: Alison Holland, "'Saving the Aborigines': The White Woman's Crusade. A Study of Gender, Race and the Australian Frontier, 1920s-1960s", PhD Thesis, School of History, University of New South Wales, 1998, p. 184.





**PLATE 7. 'Hand, Christian and Her Son'.** This picture shows the hand of God 'passing introduced toxins (flour, sugar, western medicines etc) to the unsuspecting and somewhat gullible little indigenous fella'.

**Artist:** Adam Hill

**Source:** *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award: Celebrating 20 Years*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2004, pp. 68-69.




*The Real Australian*  
"Australia for Christ"

Organ of the Bush Church Aid Society for Australia and Tasmania.

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No. 74. MARCH 1, 1940. 1/6 per annum (post free).

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"Sydney James Cook is now two and a half years old. Pray earnestly for him as he climbs life's ladder."

PLATE 8. Sydney James Cook, 1940.

Source: Duguid Papers, National Library of Australia, MS 5068, Series 3.




*The Real Australian*  
"Australia for Christ"  
Organ of the Bush Church Aid Society for Australia and Tasmania.

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No. 80. MARCH 4, 1942. 1/6 per annum (post free).

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**OUR BABY**



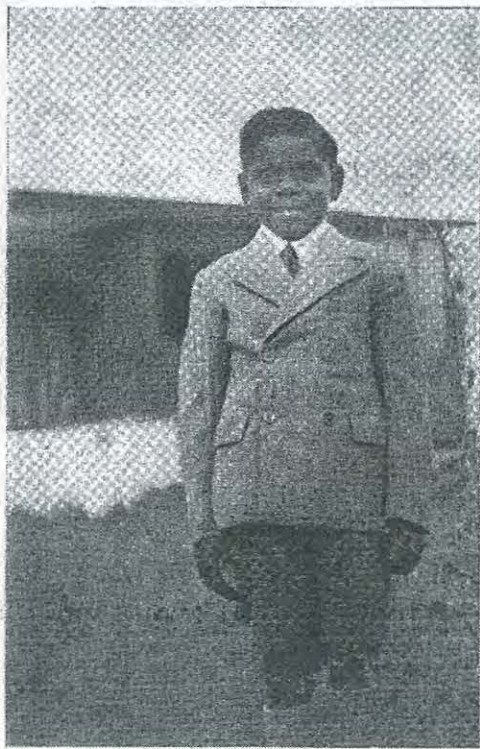
SYDNEY JAMES COOK, aged 4½ years.

Copies available at sixpence each.

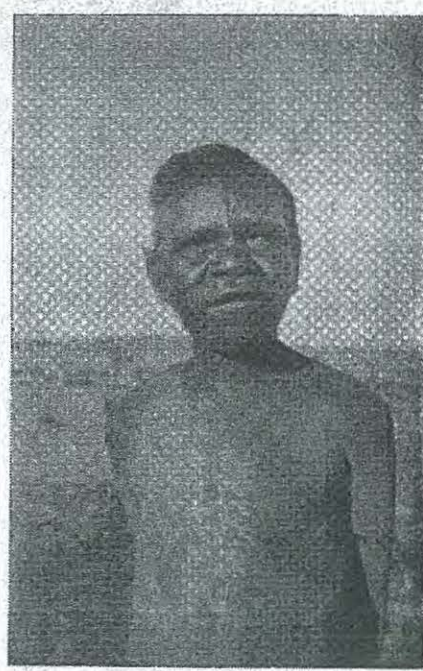
PLATE 9. Sydney James Cook, 1944.

Source: Duguid Papers, National Library of Australia, MS 5068, Series 3.





FULL-BLOOD, AGED 7, ADELAIDE.



TJARURU, A VERY ABLE BOY.



NGANYINTJANYA, a Tribal Native of the Musgrave Ranges, in the Author's Home.  
A Former Pupil of the Ernabella School, and now an Assistant-Teacher there.

PLATE 10. Sydney James Cook, Tjaruru and Nganyintja.

Source: Charles Duguid, *The Aborigines of Australia: Broadcasts and an Address*, Reliance Printing Company, Adelaide, 1946, pp. 2, 23, 31.



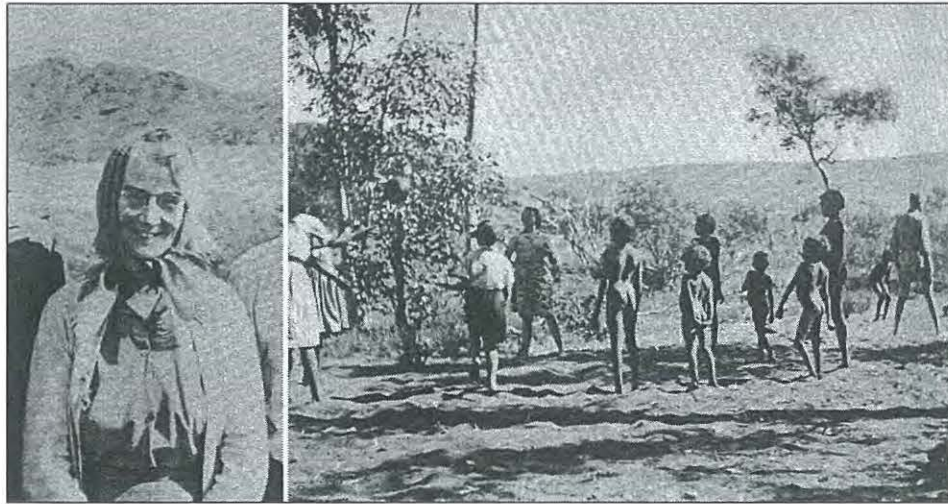


PLATE 11. (a) Phyllis Duguid at Ernabella mission, 1964. (b) Ernabella mission, 1946. The young boy in the white shirt facing away from the camera is probably Sydney James Cook, aged seven. The girl facing him is Rosemary Duguid, aged twelve. The boy at the far right of the photograph is Andrew Duguid, aged fifteen.

Source: Charles Duguid, *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1972, p. 175.

### To An Aboriginal Boy

They told me yours was but a dying race,  
 Brutish and all inept for gentler ways,  
 Sinking with meagre skills back to earth  
 From which their toil had wrested nothing else  
 Than food and water. Slow of mind - they said -  
 These people cannot live with abler men,  
 Theirs was the past, with us the future lies.  
 How strange, how ignorant the lie they told!  
 I found your people rich in human gifts,  
 Strong with the mastery of a hostile land  
 That yields its store of water grudgingly.  
 I saw their hunting skill when, spear in hand,  
 Sitting behind a ghost gum one would stand  
 Deep-browed against the fiercely setting sun  
 To wait until some curious emu ran  
 Lightly to drink from that still water hole.  
 I saw their tenderness as, by the fire,  
 A father told his children merry tales  
 Or legends sacred to their tribal life  
 And if at night a baby waked from sleep  
 Beneath the deep and studded central sky  
 Crying in fear of some imagined loss,  
 I heard its mother croon it back to rest.  
 I know their faithfulness - for oft, unskilled  
 And daring not to walk in that vast land  
 I followed trustingly, my life secure  
 In those brown hands. These things I found.  
 Then, through the dark and intervening years  
 When pale intruders rode into your lands  
 Driving their herds of thundering cattle down  
 To drink in muddy tumult at the pools  
 From which the native game had fled in fear,  
 I saw your race develop other skills.

For they were dispossessed of sacred haunts  
 By mountain caves or reedy water holes.  
 Their hunting lands were over-run by beasts  
 That made the intruders rich beyond their need  
 For food - yet must not serve the family group  
 Sitting in silence round the tribal fire,  
 Hungry because the day-long hunt had failed.  
 These things I saw with grief; but watched your race  
 Stand up and leave their ancient tribal ways,  
 Laying aside the spear and woomera,  
 The piti and the woman's digging stick.  
 They took the gun, the hammer and the knife,  
 Changing the heavy stone for tempered steel.  
 The throbbing engine soon became their tool,  
 And minds that formed the winging boomerang  
 Could meet the mystery of the aeroplane,  
 Adaptability unrecognised,  
 And unsurpassed in man's long history.  
 Ignore the judgement and forget the lie.  
 They said your race was doomed - its heritage  
 Feeble and useless in the march of time.  
 And, if you can, forgive the bitter wrong  
 Your fathers suffered at our fathers' hands.  
 Share with our sons your ancient disciplines  
 And what remains to you of native lore,  
 While they redeem the past and share with you  
 The endless riches of our common land.

Phyllis Duguid, January 1964