

ANOTHER STEP FORWARD

By Norah J. C. Foster, Kincumber, N.S.W., (ex-Matron and Teacher Walgett Aboriginal Station)

So, it has come about at last—I mean the promise that aborigines will sometime next year be able to go into a hotel and have a drink. It is a step I have advocated previously in this magazine, and I am very glad that it will be law.

Much of the humiliation suffered by the temperate aborigine drinker will have been removed—he has previously had to suffer because of the intemperate ones of his race.

There will always be the problem of the excessive drinker, both white and coloured, and it is now the job of the medical profession to find out what can be done for such persons.

As far as the law goes, we can say that there is equality for coloured people, but is every Australian man and woman prepared to treat coloured people as equals?

The coloured races are in no way inferior in intelligence to the white people. I have taught in European schools, Maori schools in New Zealand, and I have also taught aborigines, and I can say truthfully that there is no difference in the intelligence of the children.

Now how are we to bring white and coloured together, and teach them to respect one another?

That is for every individual. The Church can do much to help.

From my observations, we hold out the hand of friendship to coloured visitors from other countries, while despising our own very likable people, the aborigines.

It is for each individual to ask himself in what way he is superior to the aborigines. His white skin gives him no superiority. He could just as easily have been born brown or black. It is purely fortuitous that he is white.

The superiority he feels is due to a little undeveloped mind, for no human being is better than another.

If some of our ways of living are better than those of coloured people, it is not for us to look down on them, and keep them away from us, but to help them learn such ways.

The Australian aborigine has much to teach us, believe me, in the manner in which he looks after his old and sick relatives. There is loving kindness such as many of us do not possess.

A quick way to break down the colour bar is for employers to take into their employ aborigines, and for people everywhere to invite them to their homes and to social occasions. The important thing of course is that there should be no hint of patronage. We are all human beings walking the road of life and it is a sad state of affairs if we cannot join hands and help one another over the rough patches, but each individual must search his own conscience, and do what he considers right to his coloured brother.

Getting back to the matter of aborigines being allowed by law to go into hotels, we must not despair if at first, in their newly won freedom, they drink to excess. Things will soon simmer down. It is human for people of whatever colour, to want forbidden fruit, and if the aborigine knows he can get a drink whenever he wants one, the urge will not be so strong.

The average aborigine can be depended on to show that he can drink in moderation and cause no trouble to anyone. No doubt people who are against aborigines having the right to drink will show us horrible examples of the comparatively small percentage who are alcoholics, but they can find even more white alcoholics if they look around.

There need be no doubts that it is the right step in allowing aborigines to go into hotels. I have seen many, many cases where, not having the money with which to pay the suppliers of adulterated wine, they have resorted to methylated spirits, with dire results.

With legal equality comes responsibility for the aborigine to play his part in being a good citizen, by paying what he owes, and meeting all obligations.

The Aborigines Board is to be congratulated for its broad view and now it is up to every individual to help and encourage our aborigines as friends and neighbours, for we can ask reasonably no more from the State. It has done its part well.

Robust young river boatmen Sid Cubby, Clem Dodds and Ken Dennis (at end), of Walgett, smile for Dawn's camera

