

The Desert

Written for the "Record" by
The Rev. J. R. Blanchard

down, but he smiled at Reece.

"You don't mean to say you're this parson we've heard about?" asked Reece.

"Why not?" croaked Flynn.

"You're a sticker."

"We are like that."

"H'm," said Reece. "A parson is a rare bird out here, but you'll do. Come, and I'll put the billy on."

SO did this young Australian camel-pad it through the Inland, winning his way into the hearts of those who fought their grim fight there, dreaming his dreams and sticking to them though they all thought him "dippy"—to use their own word, though shorn of decorations—and sticking to them until he made them come true.

There were certain things which he saw in this Inland which made him dream his dreams, and which made him feel that God had put him into this world and into this particular bit of it, to make that dream materialise. Flynn had seen such things as these:

A blue-eyed youngster suddenly taken ill, with the nearest doctor 200 miles away! Flynn knew of the fearful drive through day and night to get that child to the doctor: the change of horses at the station, then day and night again; the overturning of the buggy down a black ravine; the cry of the mother as she groped for the child.

When the horses dropped, the parents walked.

It was a terrible journey over rock and sand with the smell of dead animals in the foetid water-holes that they passed. At last they saw the glint of roofs away down there in the tiny outback hamlet. Only one more hour to go—but the child was dying in the mother's arms.

"It was not fair," Flynn grumbled to himself as he dreamed. "The child should have lived; and would have lived if only the doctor had been near."

ONE day, again, he came to a bush home down among the hills. They were quiet folk, the brown-bearded husband and the wife with brave, grey eyes. The children were more quiet than shy, even though they only saw a visitor once in a year. After lunch, Flynn rose with a tired sigh.

"Oh, well," he said, "I won't stay any longer. You have no need of me."

"Yes, we have," said the man quietly.

And they took him down into the paddock where, under a pretty tree, was a wee mound with creepers already flowering upon it.

"There was no doctor," said the man. "We did not know what to do."

Flynn read the service; and passed on, dreaming and grumbling as he dreamed: "It was not fair. The child should have lived; and would have lived if only the doctor had been near."

SO he went through his parish, seeing the lonely graves of a continent; rain-flattened mounds under coolabah and gum; wind-scoured mounds under desert oak; graves by creeks that seldom held water; grass-covered resting-places of the plains, and graves by the billabongs; resting-places of children and mothers and bread-winners who had fallen by the wayside.

So many lives could have been saved, could now be saved, if organised help, quick in action, were stationed within a radius even of 300 miles. His dream was of how to save those lives by organised help. He was only a lone camel-man with nothing in his pocket. What could



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he do? He would rouse his Church to do something. But what could he suggest that his Church should do?

There for a time his mind came to a full stop, and he went on camel-padding it through the Inland, dreaming and dreaming of what could be done, drawing maps of the centre of Australia in the sand as he camped at midday or in the moonlight, locating on those maps where people lived, brooding over the long distances that separated them and the nature of the country that lay between, and of the spots of habitation that

would be most central in given areas.

GRADUALLY he evolved a plan. He would have a chain of nursing homes through the Inland, each establishment at a centre as reasonably accessible to everybody as possible. That would be something where, at present, there was nothing. And Flynn came in from the interior for a season to stir up his Church to that work.

The story of how he carried that through and of the splendid work those nursing homes have done, and are still doing, is too long a story to tell just now. But as Flynn went camel-padding in connection with the founding of these homes, and with the superintending of them, he saw that even they were quite inadequate. There was the problem of how to get the sick and the injured to those homes.

Camels and horses were terribly slow in that terrible country. Motor transport was swifter, certainly, but in a land of gibbers and sandhills most uncertain. The long, rough trip would kill the patient before he got to the nursing home! Some better means of transport must be devised.

ONE day, as he dreamed on this problem, from his lurching seat on the back of his camel under a blazing sun, he thought: "The wings of death are swifter than camels or horses, or even motors." "The wings of death!" The phrase stuck in his mind. "Wings." Aeroplanes!

That word crashed into his mind. Aeroplanes! Winged ambulances! Flying doctors! Flynn had his vision; that was enough. What did it matter that the Old World was still only experimenting in aviation at that time! They would succeed, Flynn said to himself. They will perfect flying and the Inland must have flying doctors.

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