

# A RELIGIOUS CONVENTION

## *A Promise Kept*

by

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Some years ago I had promised Mr. Frank Roberts Snr., of Cubawee that I would come to a Convention. At last, I was able to keep my promise in a month or so ago.

Flying to Evans Head, I was met by the Area Welfare Officer, Mr. Morgan, who took me first on a brief visit to the folk at Coraki Reserve, and then to Cubawee where I met several of those concerned with the running of the Convention, especially Mr. Frank Roberts. The organization was indeed a credit to him and to all who worked with him. This applied to the provision of meals and camping facilities (for those visitors needing the latter), and to the actual conduct of the meetings.

I attended the meetings (and services) on Saturday night (October 30) and on Sunday morning and night (October 31). Actually there were three meetings a day, at 6 a.m., 11 a.m. and 7 p.m., and on Sunday, a big afternoon for the children. One leader conducted the preliminary congregational singing and appeals for witness. The singing, to the accompaniment of a small orchestra, went with a fine lilt in good revivalist style. In addition, local and visiting choirs (with their Aboriginal conductors) rendered hymns.

At some stage Frank Roberts took charge and made the announcements, as well as emphasizing the spiritual purpose of the Convention. However, he kept the atmosphere natural, and was not humorless. He also welcomed the visitors from the various centres, including on the Saturday night, myself, as Vice-Chairman of the Board, Mr. Morgan (Welfare Officer) and Mr. Malcolm Calley (a member of my staff). I was very pleased to accept the invitation to respond, and to be able to commend the Convention and the religious and moral purposes expressed by it. Mr. Morgan also replied. Another who spoke was Mr. Soper, a missionary from Cundalee in Western Australia, where he works amongst a tribe of full-blood Aborigines whom I knew in 1930.

### SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER

A special guest speaker was then asked to address each meeting. On two occasions this was a Nauruan, who has been trained in the Strathfield Bible College for missionary work. Many Nauruans come to Australia

for higher education. One was trained in Sydney to assist in scientific research into the upper air currents. This preacher's sermons were well constructed, and appealed to the reason, while not neglecting the emotions. They were thoughtful and well delivered.

On the Sunday morning one Aboriginal "brother" preached in a Lismore Church, and in the afternoon the Pastor and a group from that Church visited the Convention. Some Lismore people contributed towards the expenses.

In addition to those who stayed at Cubawee with friends or in the tents, a bus-load came from Tabulam on the Saturday and on the Sunday bus-loads from Tweed Heads, Woodenbong and Cabbage Tree Island, as well as a car load from Coraki. Indeed on the latter day there were 370 adults at Cubawee and very many children.

Such Conventions must do much good. The moral and spiritual principles inherent in the Bible reading, preaching, praying and singing do not fall altogether on thorny or stoney ground, even though some regard themselves as pagans, and others will not listen, and some may not be sincere. Moreover, the meeting together of so many from different places expresses and emphasizes the unity of background and purpose, and strengthens the feeling of "belonging together". This is very useful and significant in the process of assimilation. And perhaps most important: the religious movement and the Conventions are being organized and conducted more and more by the Aboriginal people themselves. This reveals real power of social service, a feeling for order, and an aspiration towards moral idealism and spiritual discipline.

I have come from the Convention with strengthened conviction that the Aboriginal people can, and will, work out their assimilation for themselves. The rest of us will help where we can, especially by removing obstacles. Above all, we will give them the respect which is due to human personalities and Australian citizens.

Thus encouraged, I went on my round of visits to Woodenbong, Tabulam and Cabbage Tree Island.