

DR. ALLAN VICKERS AND THE ABORIGINES

By Michael J. Richards

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Four years ago Dr. Charles Duguid threw down a challenge to historians of the Australian Inland Mission and the Royal Flying Doctor Service in a brief paragraph that must be quoted in full:—

“... I had thought that the A.I.M. was caring for Aborigines as well as Whites. Instead, it was accentuating the division, and when I returned to Adelaide I called on the Director of the A.I.M. to discuss it with him. He was utterly frank. ‘The A.I.M. is only for white people’, he told me. ‘You are wasting your time among so many damned dirty niggers’.”(1)

Duguid’s comments arose from his first trip to Alice Springs in July 1934, and from an unfortunate clash with the A.I.M. Padre at the Alice at the time. The significance of his remarks stems not so much from his assertions per se as from the credentials of Duguid himself — credentials which can not be dismissed lightly. He became widely known soon after that trip as an articulate and experienced campaigner for Aboriginal rights, and as a keen analyst of Aboriginal disabilities, particularly in the health field. He was for many years President of the Aborigines Protection League in South Australia, and from 1951 to 1961 President of the Aborigines Advancement League of South Australia. He served on the Aborigines Protection Board of South Australia in the 1940’s — and in 1935 was Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Australia. He founded the Ernabella Mission to the Pitjantjatjara, and did so in terms of the re-assertion of Aboriginal rights to Smith of Dunesk monies, supposedly usurped in 1933 by the Australian Inland Mission (2). In other words, Duguid’s voice is one that must be listened to if a balanced view of the relationship between the A.I.M., R.F.D.S., John Flynn, Allan Vickers and the Aboriginal peoples of Australia is to be reached.

Obviously, Duguid and his arguments provoked public dissension both within and without the Presbyterian Church and the Inland

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Mission in the 1930's. So, too, did his repetition of these claims in the 1970's. An attack on John Flynn was seen as an affront to one of the great idealists of this century in Australia, to his ideals of service, and to the life's work of the men and women who served with and after him in both the A.I.M. and the R.F.D.S. I intend in this paper to show whether or not Duguid's claims can be related to the latter body in the 1930's, and, in particular, how an assessment of the character and life of Dr. Allan Vickers should be affected by the Duguid argument and the social and racial environment that the former lived and worked in in the 1930's.

It should not be necessary to spend too much time in sketching Dr. Vickers' life before this audience. He graduated as a doctor in 1926, after studies bedevilled by illness and poverty. In 1931 he took over the embryo A.M.S. base at Cloncurry in North Queensland, and over the next three years played a major role in the extension of this new service — and did so in times of extreme economic stress for the Service, Australia and most of the world. That role could be described as having been nearly as important as that of John Flynn himself, for Vickers on his rare trips out of the sparsely populated North bore an extraordinary public relations burden, addressing public meetings, service clubs and organizations, and even the members of Federal Parliament, as well as backing up Flynn's message in scores of private interviews.

He left Cloncurry in February 1934, taking with him the former Liliias Whitman as his wife, and after a period with the A.I.M. organization in Victoria went to Broome as Government Medical Officer, and, after ten months, to Port Hedland to establish the first flying doctor base in Western Australia. His range of official functions at the latter place included that of resident magistrate, and, as such, cases involving Aborigines occasionally entered into his public and private life. The decade of the 1930's is particularly rich in entries in his diary, and I am greatly indebted to Mrs. Liliias Vickers for access to these and to the thoughts and opinions behind much of her husband's life. He spent the early years of World War II running one of the largest military hospitals in Australia, once again starting almost from scratch. He was invalidated out of the Army in 1943, and went to Charleville to establish another new F.D.S. base. He finished his career as medical superintendent of the Queensland section of the R.F.D.S., retiring in 1966.

I believe that I can see a change in Allan Vickers' attitude to the Aborigines he met in the 1930's that is important not only in assessing Dr. Duguid's claims but also in undertaking what happened at that time to race relations in Australia generally.

It is very easy to find comments attributed to Vickers in the press of the time which served both the general White Australia

policy and the specific theme therein of populating the north. The Brisbane *Telegraph* quoted him in 1933 (March 15) as appealing for aid for the great-hearted people of the outback “who are trying to further the cause of a ‘White Australia’.” The Melbourne *Sun* in 1934 (August 9) reported his telling the English Speaking Union that “if we want to hold the sparsely-populated north of Australia, we must settle it officially and with white people”. The *Argus* of the same city on June 15, 1934, stressed his claim that white women were essential to outpost Australia to stop the “deterioration” of its male pioneers. He followed this claim later by asking for a tolerant attitude towards those white males who, because of the lack of white women and the “willingness” of the black alternatives, inevitably came to “see them (Aborigines) as women”. (3)

Yet *The Pinion*, a Rotary Club magazine, reported him telling the Albury Rotary Club that his organization barred no patient on ground of colour, class or creed (4). This, of course, presents no contradiction. It is not just that one can be apparently humanitarian and supremacist at the same time, and this paternalism is of course a strong part of white Australia’s reaction to its predecessors — it is also part of the outlook of many doctors. It seems to me that it is very easy to see patients as primarily that — people who are ill and whose illnesses categorize them — and at the same time to divide society in a different way when one looks at it from the perspective of an idea or a goal.

Moreover, Vickers did not have to be a convinced “white Australian” himself to see that, at a time when his audiences were either feeling the cramps of Depression or were aware of the possibility of a personal impact, an appeal to a hallowed ideal and goal was the best way to extract money from purses that were not exactly overflowing with philanthropic zeal. And that money had to come if the Service which he did believe in so greatly was to survive and be extended.

I am not being cynical in saying this. It is a very natural thing to emphasise part of your beliefs in public if so doing is more acceptable than the rest of your value system. The diaries from Port Hedland show that Dr. Vickers had a far from simple outlook which did not always parallel the Australian consensus.

SITTING AS MAGISTRATE

One striking instance emerged in July 1938, when he was especially commissioned to sit as a magistrate in Marble Bar to hear the case of an Aborigine who had allegedly killed his wife’s lover. I quote from his entry for July 6, 1938; and I must give the full entry if the situation and his reaction to it is to be understood.

“The native law in these parts seems to be as follows:

. . . one man takes another man’s woman — the husband sets off *in the morning*, accompanied by two or three men of the tribe — tracks and overtakes the couple — goes up to the woman and drags her away by the arm and leaves her in custody of the other man — then takes a *small* spear — the other man holds out his leg and the husband drives the spear through the fleshy part above the knee — he must attempt not to wound in such a way as to endanger life:— if the wife runs off with the man a second time the same procedure is followed except that the husband this time uses a bigger spear to inflict the wound (in some tribes the woman is also speared in the leg on this occasion) but it should be done

1. in the presence of male witnesses of the tribe, and
 2. in a good light so that no undue damage may be done.
- On this occasion Smiler’s wife Lucy had been “making sweethearts” with Conjie for some months, ever since Smiler had brought home a new wife — Smiler had already speared Conjie once and had “belted” Lucy with a woccaburra (sic) several times — then *one night* when they were together, Smiler came up *alone*, and speared Conjie through the leg. Conjie speared him back — they started to fight with woccaburras — a woman tried to stop them — while Conjie was stooping down to pick up a stick, Smiler hit him with a woccaburra intending to hit him on the shoulders but hit him on the neck instead — fracture dislocation of upper cervical vertebrae — death. (Native law allows hitting on the shoulders in these fights but not on the chest or head).

We decided that

1. the killing was accidental — Smiler did not intend to hit him on the neck
2. under white law he would still be guilty of “manslaughter”
3. he had broken native law by going *alone* and by starting the fight at night so that
 - a. Conjie was entitled to fight back and
 - b. Smiler could hardly make the excuse that he could not see properly as he should not have started the fight at night.

The verdict was therefore “guilty of unlawful killing” — and the penalty “banishment from his own country and detainment at Noola Bulla Native Station during the Governor’s pleasure”.

He continued:

“Prison is not a deterrent to these people — it only means little work — plenty food — and sleeping “white feller fashion”, i.e. in a house — banishment to the Kimberleys is much more effective in that these boys are afraid of the Kimberley tribes and more satisfactory in that he would be able to be put to some useful work in Noola Bulla”. (5)

This new emphasis on Aboriginal law was not entirely a personal matter. Vickers and Mr. J. Bisley, superintendent of the Port Hedland Native Hospital, had been commissioned as “the Pilbara Court of Native Affairs” under section 31 of the Western Australian Aborigines Amendment Act of 1936 which C. D. Rowley speculates may have followed the debate over the infamous Tuckiar case as an attempt at “cross-cultural justice” — although Rowley also points out that the rest of the new Act tended “to maintain, in some respects to extend, the already rigid system of administrative controls; and in the exercise of which there was no provision for any concern with Aboriginal custom”. (6)

The “Tuckiar case” followed the killings of five Japanese seamen and a Constable McColl in Arnhem Land in 1933. Initial plans for the usual punitive expedition met such an unusually large outcry in the south that the Commonwealth accepted a Robinson-like offer from the Church Missionary Society to persuade McColl’s alleged killer to come to Darwin for trial. This man, known as Tuckiar, was sentenced to death by Mr. Justice Wells: a conviction invalidated by the High Court of Australia in November 1934 following another series of protests involving “academic, mission and humanitarian circles” in a ruling which roundly condemned the original trial procedure. Tuckiar disappeared forever soon thereafter. (7)

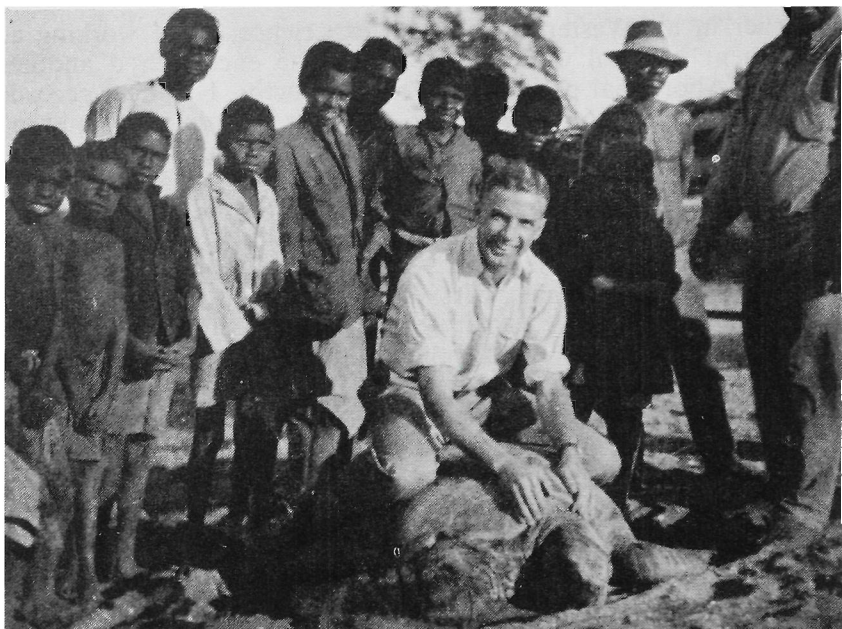
In other words, Vickers’ and Bisley’s decision has to be seen against a background of rising unhappiness about the legal and general social position of Aborigines, particularly on the remaining frontiers of white settlement. The significant thing about Smiler’s case is that Allan Vickers seems not to have condemned the humanitarians in the cities as interfering busybodies. He continually stressed the role of the Flying Doctor as being a frontier one serving men and women who were keeping alive frontier virtues: but in this respect at least, he did not accept the still-strong attitude to Aboriginal crime and punishment common to Australians in closer contact with people who were in many ways still recent and not quite defeated enemies. It might have been different if Smiler had killed a white adulterer (which, incidentally, was one of the accusations initially levelled at Constable McColl), but I suspect that Vickers would have brought the same principles of justice into

the court room. This is, of course, purely hypothetical — after all, Vickers would not have been likely to have heard such a case, except in the first stages of judgment before matters were transferred to the Supreme Court.

Earlier in his Western Australian experience, while working as government Medical Officer in Broome, he encountered another aspect of Aboriginal policy in his role as doctor. His diary records the following entry for February 16, 1935. It is again worth quoting the whole entry to give the flavour of a common practice that, I suspect, would still be accepted by many Australians dedicated to the proposition that all are either not equal or not the same.

“Today Constable Burke brought in two quadroon children (girls) about eight years old from La Grange. They both were very little darker than white children — I had to examine them to certify they were healthy previous to sending them down to a home in Perth — Burke told me he had a great party getting them away from the tribe — he travelled down at night (travelling all night) so that they would not have news of his coming and arrived at 4.00 a.m. — one of the children hid in a thick scrub and was very hard to find — the gins kicked up a great row and the tribe looked as if they might “start something” — eventually he got away by taking the two gins who mothered the children (they must have been half castes really if they were the children’s mothers) along with the children for about a mile and then left the gins on the road. He said it was a rotten business and he would rather go out to arrest a dangerous buck any day — one of the children (who had quite fair hair and skin) was already promised to an old buck of over forty, dirty and sore-eyed. In a couple of years she would have had to live with him. It seems a rotten thing to have to tear them away from their mothers, but certainly better than allowing them to go on living with the blacks’.

Vickers in agreeing with the proposition that these little girls were not black after being brought up by their families as such for all of their eight years may strike a modern audience as being out of touch with reality, but he mirrored the attitude of most Australians at the time. Now, I of course can see that his treatment of Smiler detailed earlier could be seen in the same light, as part of the “separate but equal” attitude to full-blood blacks. But my feeling is that these two accounts, only three years apart, are contrasting rather than continuous. I base this on perhaps equivocal evidence, but the feel of comment changes subtly in those years. Above all, I think that Vickers became more conscious of what



Allan Vickers on his first visit to Mornington Island.

were to him good things about Aboriginal society and its members, instead of seeing them to a certain extent as misfits. The latter view is not surprising — he was after all brought up in a society which predominantly saw them as such — and it must have been strengthened in the early Broome period by his frequent contact with the black prisoners in the local gaol, all sentenced for murder. He commented on this experience that:

“They are a happy lot when well. They never have to work hard, are well fed, play cards and quoits amongst themselves when they wish, and are kindly treated by the gaolers”. — perhaps the source of his later comments on the Smiler case.

Yet there are no tones of disgust in his record, and his brief report of one Lurubia (?) who was “in for life for killing a white man who ran away with his gin” as being “the greatest humorist of them all” is hardly that of a man overwhelmed with horror. (9)

There was only admiration in the record of an Aborigine who, after being kicked by a horse while alone and suffered a Pott’s fracture:

“crawled to a trough that night and waited for a horse to come to water — one came at daylight — he coaxed it . . . and eventually caught it — managed to get on lying across the horse on his stomach and had just started on his way in when his mother found him, having tracked him 10 miles as soon as there was light enough to see . . . the native had put up a good show”. (10)

No comments about the unnatural, animal-like resistance to pain of the Aboriginal people so easily found at the time.

There is nothing but good humour in his telling of a trip to an Aboriginal woman 100 miles south of Marble Bar who had been in labour for 48 hours and whose Aboriginal midwife reminded the potential white competition that she had never lost a baby. (11)

His impatience with the Perth bureaucracy’s attempts to impose controls and white regulations on the people they were supposed to be protecting came to the fore when the Chief Protector demanded a marriage certificate to legalise the union of two full-blood non-christians married according to tribal law in 1936. Vickers organised a special licence and thoroughly confused the local Registrar of Marriages, commenting afterwards that the whole thing was:

“Just about the most stupid exhibition I have yet had from the Aborigines’ Department — and that’s saying something”. (12)

To summarize to this point: I am suggesting that Allan Vickers’ attitudes to the Aborigines he came into contact with changed in the 1930’s. That change was more a matter of emphasizing certain themes already evident than of the adoption of a new outlook. I will attempt to further explain that change later, and will leave him with two interesting snippets from his later Queensland career.

One is the draft of a letter written probably in 1955 to the Hon. Garfield Todd, then Prime Minister of the two-year-old Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland which, after introducing the topic of the R.F.D.S., went on to say:

“In particular I have been impressed by your efforts to build a multi-racial society in the Federation and it seems to me that an air-borne Medical Service could possibly be a factor worthy of your consideration in the development of such a society, apart from its value in other fields — hence this intrusion”. (13)

The other is a letter he wrote to the Minister for External Affairs, R. G. Casey, in 1959. He said:

“Knowing of your interest in the Royal Flying Doctor Service and realising that Australia’s treatment of its Aboriginal people is sometimes a matter for discussion at international conferences, I venture to forward several copies of a cutting from the *Courier-Mail* of 14th October.

I trust that the cutting will be of interest to you and even that it may provide a little useful ammunition on some appropriate occasion”. (14)

The cutting quoted “the leaders of an Anglo-Swiss expedition”, Mr. H. M. Berney and Mr. V. B. Cranley, as saying that “Australian Aborigines are treated better than primitive peoples anywhere else in the world”, and attributing this to the Assimilation policy backed by the extensive education of Aboriginal children and the availability of free medical aid through the R.F.D.S.

ABORIGINAL WELFARE

In other words, Vickers by now had added Aboriginal welfare to one of the important public aims of the R.F.D.S. I intend now to return to John Flynn and the A.I.M. and to a time when this was most emphatically not a public aim.

Frontier News, the journal of the A.I.M. and successor to *The Inlander*, will do as a starting point. Recipients of the July-August issue for 1934 would not have been able to avoid a 2” x 1” block on the centre of page 2 which boldly proclaimed “The A.I.M. Primarily is a Service to WHITE PEOPLE”, a not uncommon entry in those years and even in the next decade. (15)

However, a news item from July 1935 displays a new tone in reporting especially the flying doctor work of the A.I.M. and its Aboriginal patients. It concerned an Aborigine with a compound fracture of the right ankle.

“Consultations took place and Dr. Thompson stressed the fact that an abo with only one foot was not much good in the bush, but if he had a foot and a half he would be able to manage. It was decided to try and save half the foot and we are pleased to report that the operation was entirely successful. A very human story, with deep concern for the welfare of this abo.

“During the three months Dr. Thompson flew over 1900 miles to attend Aborigines”. (16)

This story marks the introduction of a note of defensiveness in the stressing of statistics in discussing medical aid to Aborigines (17). Is the date just a coincidence? It was in 1935, of course, that Duguid had begun to agitate amongst Presbyterians in South Aus-

tralia and elsewhere, and even to challenge the church's work in public.

Now, I am not suggesting that the A.I.M. and John Flynn had ignored Aborigines prior to 1935. They did the reverse, and A.I.M. sisters often recorded medical and other aid. The July 1935 issue also reported on the Oodnadatta Sunday School, run by the A.I.M., whose enrolment of 27 children appears to have been integrated. But this I do say: the A.I.M. emphasis on service to a gallant white few for both Christian and nationalistic reasons without an expressed awareness of the important role it was developing in the realm of Aboriginal welfare left it very open to the attacks of people like Duguid who could not help seeing that Aborigines needed massive aid far more than the majority of the white settlers whose depressed living standards Flynn and his allies stressed. Moreover, the lack of this awareness makes it easy to see how the A.I.M. could recruit the occasional padre whose perspective on matters of race was less than desirable whilst being good practical Christians in the other aspects of their role in their huge parishes.

In 1936 Dr. George Simpson wrote:

“There were missionaries to the blacks for forty years before the Church thought of its own people in the Inland, but in 1912 the Presbyterian Church of Australia first tackled the problem”. (18)

This, I suggest, is at the heart of the problem. Duguid's message is one of protest at his church's apparent blindness in the Outback. The specific allegations of prejudice and hostility he makes have to be seen against this background. We will never know whether John Flynn said the things Duguid says he said, and a search for more documentary evidence strikes me as futile. Certainly those of Flynn's letters that I have seen so far could be construed in a similar light — but they could also be interpreted to say the direct opposite. For example, are his plans for separate Aboriginal wards at A.I.M. hostels proof of apartheid, of a surrender to white reluctance to share the same roof with their inferiors, or of an awareness that Aboriginal health problems were different from those of whites, that different care was needed, or that Aborigines themselves would be reluctant to share with whites? Part of the answer I can state definitely — money was tight in the A.I.M. from the beginning, and *capital* development especially occurred only when donors gave money for specific purposes. If hostels were not to be integrated fully then the building of black wings which seems to have begun in the 1940's had to wait for donors who would accept such use of their money.

I may seem to be side-stepping the issue that I myself have raised, but I don't think I am. I am not going to say that Flynn was a

man of his time and that specific accusations of racism should be levelled at the time rather than the man. That is true enough to appear as the answer, which it isn't. Flynn was a man of his times also in that he shared the excitement of the early twentieth century in beginning to realise some of his hopes for a better world as technology allowed Clifford Peel's vision to come alive. His vision took note of the Aboriginal presence — but it was a presence within a white world whose needs appeared to be at least as large as those of the displaced tribes, if not larger. It was this *weltanschauung*, apparently dominant in Australia, that was discredited in the 1930's. That the new goal which emerged at first was assimilation into white society is unimportant in this context, for its premise was an Aboriginal specificity which inevitably led to the acceptance of and demand for policies geared to a unique Aboriginal identity.

Flynn, I repeat, shared the view of Aborigines as part of a broader set of problems. Vickers and the A.I.M. moved increasingly towards an analysis of the unique problems of these people. Whether he led the way for the A.I.M. and the R.F.D.S. is something I can not yet say with any certainty. I am more interested in explaining his attitudinal changes than in looking at the effect of those changes, mainly because my work is that of biographer rather than social historian. Yet I believe that Allan Vickers is a fit study for an historian concerned also with Australian society, for he lived out some of its most important and, if I may speak as an individual for a moment, most attractive and hopeful changes in direction — especially in the decade under discussion.

But before I leave John Flynn I must make one last point. I believe that the true measure of his greatness lies not so much in the two organisations he created in his lifetime per se as in the way he created them as flexible, humanitarian instruments given the freedom, the solid organizational base, and the reservoir of support throughout Australia to tackle the tasks seen as most pressing by each subsequent generation, whatever they might be. I do not think it would serve his memory's interest to build him into a mythical, superhuman figure, nor do I think he would have wanted that. We are much more likely to emulate his ideals of service if we can see him warts and all, as another great practical Christian once requested he be seen.

I would like now to return to Allan Vickers and to the task of explaining his attitudes and their social and individual background. He was thirty when he went to Cloncurry in 1931, and had been practising as a doctor for only four years. In many ways he was a young man albeit a thoughtful and considerate one. The continuous struggle to overcome his severe asthma can be seen

as a sobering and maturing influence — an oft-made remark but a good one nonetheless. Contact with Aboriginal people and problems in this town was limited compared to his later experience, and confined largely to his role as a doctor without much official contact in any other regard with the town. But I would make two points regarding Cloncurry.

The local tribe had been that known as the Kalkadoons. They had established a fierce reputation as doughty warriors who had severely hampered white settlement in the previous century. That this legend, for such it was by the 1930's, was accurate only in that it underrated the realities of black resistance elsewhere in North Queensland did not weaken its import in creating attitudes. By the time any real threat had passed, memories of the Kalkadoons were strongly characterised by respect and an awareness that the white pioneers who had beaten them had resorted to a violence also not usually remembered elsewhere in Australia at the time.



Two Aborigines waiting for transport after initial medical aid. Dr. Vickers may have intended to use this photograph for the dust-jacket of the autobiography he planned to write in his retirement which is in itself significant.

The other striking note from Cloncurry was his trip to Mornington Island in July 1931, after a call for help in fighting an epidemic from the re-established Presbyterian Mission on that island. This trip of some 300 miles, including nine over the sea, and with an unknown make-do landing strip at the end, was at first forbidden by Hudson Fysh of Qantas unless a £1,000 guarantee to cover

“possible mishap and delay” was provided. Vickers persisted and the flight was authorised after further urging by George Simpson the next day. It was completed without accident, and became an important part of the Flying Doctor story. The important thing for my purposes is that Vickers did not see it as an adventure or an intriguing lark. The tenor of his diary for those days is of great concern for the sick and a lively interest in the way of life of the healthy. Moreover, he was prepared to spend two days away from Cloncurry when emergencies involving whites might arise, and even longer if flight permission was denied and he had to go by sea from Burketown. There were people up there suffering an epidemic he could not identify, and they were important to him. Typically, he took a passenger as far as Burketown to stay there until he returned the next day and to organise an A.M.S. Committee! (19). Incidentally, the painter Dick Roughsey was amongst the children who greeted him as he landed on the first aeroplane they had ever seen.

CHANGE IN ATTITUDE

This I believe reinforces my contention that his change in attitude was a complex one. It was not a transition from racism to anti-racism, nor was it a movement from paternalism to the advocacy of black rights. He was always coloured by a humanitarian perspective, but his answers to the problems that this perspective suggested changed, and his perception of the causes of these problems deepened and matured. The explanation of this process must include his entry into the new roles I have described at Port Hedland, and probably his contact with an extraordinarily multi-racial and somewhat tolerant community at Broome. But behind the personal experience of this one man stand major changes in Australian race relations throughout the decade that involved broad masses of people in a new way. This I have already mentioned in discussing the Tuckiar case. That most of these people lived in the southern cities lessened only the degree of qualitative change eventually experienced through much of the country — and he spent much of 1934, one of the key transitional years, in and around the southern metropolises.

The year 1925 had seen the establishment of a Chair of Anthropology at Sydney University. That achievement, whilst at times threatened by considerable financial troubles, had proved to be a turning-point. After this, anthropological knowledge of the Australian Aborigines was not dependent upon the reports and reminiscences of untrained missionaries, squatters and government officials, with the occasional visitor from abroad adding to the confusion. The material gathered by such people still came, and was still vital, but it had to compete with and complement the research and theories of a growing new group of people.

Most of the decade of the 1930's was dominated for such people by the need to do as much field-work as possible, both in areas where contact had been limited and with groups that they simply had no information about, but 1930 also saw the foundation of a specialised journal in Sydney, *Oceania*.

One of these new anthropologists, W. E. H. Stanner, looked back over three decades later and described both his own interests and the way he had still tended to fit those interests into an acceptance of a static Aboriginal society within a white world that differed in its depression only in degree.

"I have some letters and reports which I wrote at the time . . . The letters are filled with sympathy for the plight of the natives, with respect for their quality of mind and social personality, and with real affection for several who had become personal friends. But they show very much the same attitude towards the bushmen I had met, many of whom had also befriended me. It is clear that I gave a lot of weight in the scales of judgment to the hardship, loneliness and privation of their lives, and to their unyielding struggle to keep going. The reports are rather different. Somehow, in them, I seem to have managed to draw a screen over at least the worst things of that frontier. There is no obvious sign of trying to put a good face on things; no indication of saving the eyes or ears of those to whom I was reporting; no palpable effort to write, as it were, for history; but on the other hand a very interesting absence of declamation. The tone of my comments is rather reminiscent of the flat, emotionless remark that Spencer and Gillen had made thirty years earlier when they said that ' . . . taking all things into account, the black fellow has not perhaps any particular reason to be grateful to the white man'. Apparently what lay before my eyes seemed to me a natural and inevitable part of the Australian scene, one that could possibly be palliated, but not ever changed in any fundamental way". (20)

Stanner's comments are remarkable in their mirroring of the early A.I.M. perception of inland and frontier problems. But it is not the anthropologists themselves who are really important — it is a rising concern with what was happening *to Aborigines* that fired the anthropologists both directly and indirectly.

It was in the 1930's that people began to realise that the Aboriginal population had stopped its rapid decline. This posed a challenge not only to those who hoped for a rapid extinction but also to the "dying pillow" consensus. The decade was for many a time of reassessment, with the Great War and the Great Depression

forcing many a re-examination of the bases of the Western tradition. In other words, many social and political compasses were swinging wildly, and much of the real world in and around Australia no longer fitted the explanations that had made it understandable earlier.

Another nation's answer to this disorientation also impinged on the consciousness of many Australians: the rise of Nazism. Vickers' diary becomes increasingly dominated from 1935 with fears of war. He wrote after the bombing of Adowa: "the whole shape of the future during my life-time will be set for peaceful settlement or armament races and wars . . . (in) the next few days" (21). His attention shifted to Spain and Germany from 1936 onwards. The link between this and a rethinking of race relations is not necessary, but it is certainly possible — even probable.

I have deliberately avoided launching into a definition or description of racism, because I believe it is unnecessary for my purposes. I did not set out to prove anything so crass as whether or not John Flynn and Allan Vickers were racists. Rather, I have tried to describe some of their attitudes and, in the case of Vickers, some of the experiences tied up with those attitudes. Nor have I tried to contrast one with the other. That they were different men, with different backgrounds and lives, is obvious. Explanation which depends on contrast is shallow unless a creative dialectic can be shown to have existed, which I can not do in this case. The dialectic is between each man and his social world, and it was that process that most interests me within the part of Allan Vickers' private world that I can reach. It was a creative dialectic, because it caused what I believe to be basic changes in his perception of Aboriginality.

That perception was not a racist one, in Duguid's terms or anyone else's. The R.F.D.S. and its predecessors similarly can not be seen as having been discriminatory and anti-Aboriginal. Racism is one of those themes that can be seen in any human institution if one looks hard enough, for it is an inextricable part of our world. But, I repeat, the Service and Allan Vickers were both geared to ideals and methods that tended to make them, if not specifically oriented to black rights, certainly supportive thereto. John Flynn must also be seen in this way.

Charles Duguid did not extend his specific accusations against a few members of the A.I.M. to the whole Presbyterian welfare movement in the Inland. It is important for it to be made very clear that such an extension is not, I believe, at all possible in the areas I have discussed tonight. Dr. Duguid travelled a different road to different conclusions. They were honourable ones that hold

important lessons for our country. So too were the results of the flight of Allan Vickers.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Doctor and the Aborigines*, Adelaide, 1972, p. 100.
2. *ibid*, p. 122-4.
3. News clipping in *A.R.V. Cuttings Book*. Vol. 2, p. 60, no date, no source.
4. Undated — 1933? *Cuttings*, Vol. 1, p. 24.
5. *Diary*, VII, pp. 31-5.
6. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Sydney, 1972, p. 312.
7. *ibid*, pp. 290-7.
George Augustus Robinson mounted the famous "mission of conciliation" in Tasmania in 1830 and 1831. His efforts to find a sanctuary for a people whom he saw as likeable misfits who could not be expected to survive white invasion stand in contrast to the extraordinary concept of the "Black Line" of 1830, but led to an essentially similar result — the deaths of the people he tried to save. See Plomley, N. J. B. (Ed.) *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian journals and papers of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834*, Hobart, 1966.
8. *Diary*, Vol. V, 16 February, 1935.
9. *Diary*, Vol. V, 14 December, 1934.
10. *Diary*, Vol. VI, p. 91, 13 August, 1937.
11. *Diary*, Vol. VI, p. 13, 28 November, 1935.
12. *Diary*, Vol. VII, pp. 22-3, 12 March, 1936.
13. *ARV papers*.
14. ARV to Casey, 19 October, 1959.
15. See also December, 1943, Vol. 28.
16. See also Vol. XIII, July, 1935.
17. See May 1937, Vol. 18; December 1943, Vol. 28; June 1944, Vol. 29; April 1946, Vol. 32.
18. *Walkabout*, 1 April, 1936: Vol. 2, No. 6.
19. *Diary*, Vol. 1, July 10-14, 1931.
20. *After the Dreaming*, Sydney, 1968, pp. 13-14.
21. *Diary*, Vol. VI, 1, 4 October, 1935.