

Lest all be Forgot - by J. B. Piggott CBE LLB

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by J B PIGGOTT CBE LLB

FOREWORD

The Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG

Bruce Piggott is a truly remarkable institution of the Australian law. The length and depth of the experiences of his life are recorded in this book. But no book could ever fully capture his remarkable personality. He is a paradox. A man of personal gentleness and apparent diffidence. But with a steely determination to do bold things. A man of operatic arias and poetical quotations. But a hard-nosed lawyer who established a leading firm of solicitors with a commercial and conveyancing practice. A doyen of the legal profession, surrounded by conservative colleagues whom he charmed and led. But a man brimming over with ideas for the reform of the law and for the righting of wrongs. A child of an age long before "women's liberation". But a champion of the rights of women, a contributor to the reform of family law, rape law and much else beside, to remove legal disadvantages to women. A child of Hobart in the early years of the century: with turnip fields and milking cows near the centre of town. But an Australian citizen who saw before most others the lesson to be derived from our geography and the vital need for us to relate to Asia, the Pacific and the broader world. A Hobart solicitor. Commander of the Order of the British Empire. But also a founder of Lawasia, President of the Law Council of Australia, champion of World Peace through Law, early supporter of the United Nations and, in his seventy-fourth year, when virtually all other Judges of Australia had retired, accepting appointment to the position of a Judge in the Marshall Islands in mid-Pacific to defend the Fund administered by the Nuclear Claims Tribunal established to award damages to the victims of the United States' nuclear testing programme at Bikini and Enewetak Atolls.

Bruce Piggott's life spans the history of this century. As I read this book I could hear his gentle, whimsical voice, speaking through its pages. He recreates Australia in the early days of the century. He paints, with a deft hand, the judicial, legal and other characters whom he has come across. As a child of that time, he finds it natural to lapse, like John Mortimer's Rumpole of the Bailey, into Shakespeare, Coleridge and Gray's Elegy. These were poems of the treasure-house of the intellectual capital upon which Australians were brought up in Bruce Piggott's time. But he never stopped learning. In his chapter on his experience in the Marshall Islands, he recalls the marvellous poem by Kath Walker (Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal), *Song of Hope*. Bruce Piggott was never a little islander with a narrow vision. He was an example to following generations of Australians, in all parts of this continental

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country. He looked about him and saw wrongs to be righted. He looked beyond his own environs and saw humanity to which we must relate. He looked to the future and saw the need for national and international co-operation, the need for an effective United Nations and a permanent International Penal Court.

The beauty of this book is that it describes, with vivid phrases, some of the important and memorable characters who contributed to the law, to Tasmania, to Australia and to the global community, during Bruce Piggott's long life of adventure and experience.

I got to know Bruce Piggott first when we were respectively Chairman of the Australian and Tasmanian Law Reform Commissions. BP (ie Before Piggott), the Law Reform in Tasmania was described as a "lost cause". At least that is the way Stefan Petrow has characterised it in his recent essay in *The University of Tasmania Law Review* (vol 13 no 2, 369). The main obstacles were said to be "an indifferent legislature, an apathetic public opinion and a conservative (and even hostile) legal profession". Nothing daunted, Bruce Piggott entered the fray. He was always willing to respond to a new challenge in life. Truly, he was a child of the age of nation-builders.

I suppose this book will mainly be of interest to lawyers. It describes the strange way in which intense rivalries and stressful battles of legal life throw people into challenging relationships which tend to endure, and even to blossom into friendship.

But beyond the law, Bruce Piggott's tale is one of personal fulfilment. As a small boy growing up in Hobart during the Great War he expanded his horizons to become the leader of the legal profession of Australia. He saw more clearly than almost any other lawyer of the future, the future of Australia in its region, and the law as an international, and not just a local, discipline.

The intriguing question which is posed by this book is how this happened. How did the wider vision of the forward looking outlook enter the thinking of this man to propel him into doing something about what he saw? If we could identify the answer to this riddle, we would have the definition of the leadership of foresight. Never before has our country, and the planet, needed people of such vision. In this sense, this book is well timed. It tells the story of a man at the close of one millennium who caught a glimpse of the millennium that is to come.

Michael Kirby

Sydney

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