

THE
ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
MISSION TO THE
ABORIGINES,
LAKE MACQUARIE INLET.
1840.

To the Honorable the Colonial Secretary,
E. DEAS THOMSON,
Esquire, &c., &c., &c.

Ebenezer, Lake Macquarie Inlet,
New South Wales,
December 31st, 1840.

SIR,

Early in the present year a person publicly boasted, "that prusaic acid had been administered to the aborigines at a station up the country, where they died about the place like rats:" and although, upon investigation, it was not substantiated, yet the vaunt of that individual who boasted of its occurrence as a capital way of getting rid of the blacks without troubling the Government, showed sufficiently what manner of spirit he was of, whilst his subsequent transportation to Van Diemen's Land for horse stealing, will prevent for a season the exercise of his diabolical machination on human beings of a better disposition than his own.

In March last a black from the interior was committed, charged with murder; and whilst detained in Newcastle gaol I visited him, accompanied with an aborigine who speaks his dialect, — a lad from the interior also, who resided with me a considerable time. But owing to the imperfect knowledge he had of

our language, we could only elicit that many blacks had been shot by the white people, amongst whom were shot the brothers of the prisoner; and that other blacks had killed the European for the murder of whom he was charged.

The lad **Billy** informed me that the blacks in the interior eat the white men when killed, and are particularly fond of the entrails! I have been also told by the aborigines here, that formerly some of our neighbouring tribes roasted and eat the young men whensoever they were killed with one blow, in their mode of punishment.

The aborigine, **Billy**, after commencing in writing and reading, returned to his tribes beyond the limits of the Colony. He lately sent me word that he will visit me again the first opportunity.

It is desirable that intercourse should be encouraged with the distant hostile tribes, as it may tend to operate favourably on them, although it is mortifying to lose hopeful youths the moment they appear to become a little conversant with our manners and customs; such, however, has always been the case, ever since the commencement of this Mission. Many a lad has promised well for a season, and then left us to live with some one else, or to serve for hire in such occupations as suited their dispositions and habits.

Not long since a young man, an aborigine, who is hired at a certain weekly rate of money and rations, was going to Newcastle with his wife, on business for his master, when he was assailed by a party of blacks, his fellow-countrymen, who robbed him of his wife, forced her away with them into the bush, and have detained her ever since. He complained, to me of the aggression, but I had no means of assisting him, aborigines being at present *British subjects*, but not allowed to give evidence in any court of justice, the royal assent not having arrived to a Bill passed the

Council, authorizing their evidence in criminal cases without an oath.

To the regret of the employer of the black, and myself, there was no European witness to appear in the case; all, therefore, that I could do was to threaten to write to the Governor to withhold the donation of blankets from the guilty party.

Subsequently to this affair, another appeal was made to me by the employer of a young aborigine, on his behalf; and on his stating the case it appeared to me my duty officially to interfere, as there was an European witness to the assault, a prisoner holding a ticket-of-leave. It was stated to me that a West-Indian, assisted by an assigned prisoner of the crown, had forcibly deprived the young aborigine of his wife, at a neighbouring farm on the Lake. On summoning the accused to the police-office, Newcastle, the ticket-of-leave-holder swore that he saw no assault; knew nothing of the matter, and only saw the black woman quietly walking after the two men! although he had previously informed his master of [1] the assault, and stated that he had received abuse for interference on behalf of the young aboriginal woman! Neither the black woman who was assaulted, nor the young aboriginal man with whom she was sleeping when she was violently forced from him, could be put into the witness-box as evidence, because of the present anomalous state of the British law, and thus the magistrates were compelled to dismiss the case!

I am made acquainted with murders at Newcastle amongst the tribes, and which will yet occasion more, but nothing can be done to prevent these acts of cruelty one with the other, in our present state of judicature, and yet they are all British Subjects, and the bench publicly and solemnly pronounces them under the protection of British law!

Since the transactions related took place, the royal disallowance of the "Act to allow the aborigines of New South Wales to be received as competent witnesses in criminal cases," has been gazetted, and thus leaves them without any hope of redress, exposed to the violence of any one, excepting proof can be obtained from white witnesses, which is most easily avoided in this Colony.

I had apprised them of the expected piece of justice to the aborigines; I am now perfectly at a loss to describe to them their position. Christian laws will hang the aborigines for violence done to Christians, but Christian laws will not protect them from the aggressions of nominal Christians, because aborigines must give evidence only upon oath; though the Sovereign Head of Christian nations commands to "SWEAR NOT AT ALL." Thus a strict adherence to an anti-Christian practice, derived from heathen authorities, involves us in difficulties respecting the aborigines, as precludes this helpless people from due protection; treats them not as men, but as the beasts that perish; permits them to bite and devour each other with impunity; and after all affords no stronger guarantee for eliciting truth than could be obtained by a solemn declaration in a court of justice, subject to all the pains and penalties of perjury: "for a good man will speak the truth without an oath, whilst the most solemn oath will not bind a wicked one;" conviction of, and punishment for perjury, being the only dread in the minds of those who regard not Him who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins.¹ An appeal to the every-day practice of our courts of justice will too abundantly prove the lamentable truth of the assertion, without the remotest fear of contradiction. Should it be assumed, that the minds of the aborigines are not susceptible to ensure veracity in their evidence, it is evidently erroneous, for though they are naturally without the knowledge of God our Saviour, yet

¹ I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. [Jer. xvii.19]

they have a secret fear of some unknown being; whose name they mention with awe. This sacred veneration keeps possession of them, even where some dawn of the light of our heavenly Saviour has shone in their darkened mind; for instance —

an aboriginal lad, now named William Burd, who has resided with me for some months, was asked if he knew who was the Saviour? to which he replied, " *Yes.*" The question was then put; "*What is his name,*" to which he answered, that "*he did not like to mention it, because it was sacred!*" and when farther pressed, he hesitated, until assured that it was not irreverent to mention it with solemnity. Nor is this a solitary instance; I have noticed a similar feeling in others. And yet this aborigine, whose mind is impressed with sacred awe at the name of Jesus, is excluded from all protection in our courts of law through a very questionable Christianized-heathen custom of legal appeals to the deity! Surely a Christian nation can never intend to preclude her sable subjects, whom she has compelled to be amenable to her laws, from the pale of her humanity, and leave theirs to certain destruction! But should it be replied, "Teach them to swear; instruct them to observe our oaths, if their minds be in the state described, and then they will have protection." Be it so; but then it would be also necessary to point out to them the authority from the new covenant dispensation, to instruct them from "the commandments of the Lord,"² to swear by his holy name, or by "Him who sitteth on the throne,"³ and instantly it would become our duty to teach the aborigines how to swear according to the most sacred obligation of the law of Christ, than which there can be no higher authority in the universe. But what must an aborigine think at present of the sincerity of our profession as a boasted Christian nation,

when not an individual can be legally believed, from the most exalted on the throne to the meanest that holds the staff of office in our Christian state, excepting that individual speaks under the sacredness of an oath? And yet we are a Christian people, subject to that divine law which says; "Let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil!"⁴

When the South Sea Islanders renounced heathenism, embraced Christianity, and desired of us a code of laws, no swearing, nor oaths of any description were introduced in their judicatory system; and to guard against false witnessing, the penalty attached thereto was, whatever punishment would have befallen the falsely accused person through deceitful testimony, would be inflicted on the guilty witness. Twenty years have now nearly elapsed, and no inconvenience has arisen from the exclusion of oaths, and why new countries like Australia should be encumbered with oaths, requires the grave consideration of the statesman and of the divine.

The cases already mentioned show the pitiable state in which the aborigines are abandoned [2] by the disallowance of their evidence; nor can the small remnant of the tribes long exist to call forth sympathy, even were they to enjoy every protection of British law, unless some fostering arm be stretched out, some special providence intervene to rescue them from ruin.

Two cases only have been mentioned, because they came immediate]y under my own cognizance; in which it may be clearly perceived that the aborigines need as much protection from the violence of each other, as they do from unprincipled Europeans, at least

² The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. [Psalms xix.8]

³ The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, [Rev. iv.10]

⁴ But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. [Matt. v.37]

within the limits of the Colony and without the limits it is hoped that the sanguine disposition which has hitherto disgraced so many in their brutal acts towards the aborigines, has become subdued; and whilst we would gladly erase them from remembrance any more on earth, we would fervently implore that they may be blotted out of the Book of Heaven.

The blacks have nearly forsaken this Lake, having found at Newcastle employment suitable to their habits; some being engaged in fishing, some as water carriers, messengers, servants, and some on board the numerous vessels, according as their services are required. Thus they seldom appear at this place, the employments already stated being more congenial to their taste than any of an agricultural nature, excepting such as are connected with stock requiring horsemanship. Many have learned to become good horsemen with us, and then have gone to other persons.

Two lads have been exceedingly serviceable, for several weeks past, in tracing out and pursuing, with the horse police, a gang of bushrangers who have plundered many persons in these districts in a most daring manner, and have ended their career in blood. One of the lads traced them for miles to the very place where the horse police found and captured their horses, though at the time the robbers escaped. My stated visits for preaching have been prevented for the last two months through these lawless men.

As a proof of the dispositions and capabilities of the aborigines, when employed in such occupations as suit their wishes, it may be stated, that at the station of George Imlay, Esq. at Twofold Bay, that gentleman mentions, "that he has two whale boats manned entirely by aborigines. One of the boats got five whales this season, the other three! These men live in huts with their families, and cook their own provisions the same as white people. They keep watch at night; some of their women are

good washerwomen, and two all three have made gowns for themselves." If it be inquired, how is it that they, do not employ themselves in some such manner on this Lake, it may be answered, that there are no similar means in existence here to employ them, and therefore, they finding their wants supplied at Newcastle, and loving society, they congregate there, and have done so for some time past. But it is to be deplored, that whilst they are, in many instances, usefully employed, spirits too often are the wages for their services in that town, and consequently drunkenness is a daily occurrence, although there is an Act of Council prohibiting the supply of spirits to the aborigines.

Many years have now elapsed in endeavouring to congregate the aborigines at this Lake without success; and as it appears that at Newcastle they not only assemble, but remain at that place, the distance of which prevents my frequent communication with them, it will be more advantageous to the residue of the tribes, who look up to me in every circumstance in which they feel themselves aggrieved, and convenient for myself to reside there, if our efforts for their becoming Christians are to be continued with any prospect of success, before the tribes become utterly extinct. It is therefore respectfully submitted, that something be done by the Government, in order to carry out the benevolent intentions of Her Majesty, abundantly expressed in a despatch to His Excellency the Governor from the Right Honorable the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in order to ameliorate the condition of the aborigines in these parts, resorting principally to Newcastle.

First — that a suitable building for instruction be erected, in which the aborigines can be assembled, and taught Christianity. There is an unappropriated sum in the Estimates for this purpose, which I declined receiving, because the property is private on

which the building would have been erected, and because the determination of the blacks to reside at Newcastle was becoming more and more apparent every day. If, therefore, a small building be erected on a Government reserve, no future loss can possibly be sustained in the event of the Blacks becoming extinct.

Secondly — that some provision be made for their habitation, as all Newcastle the birth-place of many of the aborigines, is being sold from under their feet, and only the sea-beach, one hundred feet from high-water mark, is the place on which they may rest of their heads beneath the burning sun or pitiless storm. A few huts, for the accommodation of about one hundred persons, would be amply sufficient, could be erected at a small expense; and should the effort to domicile the blacks prove unsuccessful, could be let hereafter, to the gain of the Government.

Thirdly — boats should be provided for the tribes who fish, but only in the first instance, to furnish them with the means of providing for their own, by vending the produce of their own industry; and in soliciting this on their behalf, I am only acting agreeably to frequent requests from the aborigines, but which I have hitherto refused, hoping to induce them to reside at the Lake, and establish a fishery there. Two boats with complete gear would be sufficient for them, together with the one large net. [3]

The expense of all these requisitions cannot be deemed unreasonable on behalf of the aborigines, when it is considered that they have never received *one farthing* from the British Government, save one blanket a year to such as apply for it either at Newcastle or this establishment; whilst hundreds of pounds are received for the sale of single allotments in the town from which the blacks must of necessity be expelled, to seek for shelter on an open beach.

By deed of trust a grant of ten thousand acres of land are reserved in trust for the

aborigines, near Reid's Mistake, lying waste, or at best but occupied gratuitously by those whose cattle graze thereon. If this portion of land be let by auction, the proceeds could be appropriated for the annual expenses of repairing the buildings, boats, &c. for the aborigines of these districts assembling at Newcastle, as already suggested, and no heavy annual expense to Government would be required.

Thus the aborigines would have the offer of being enabled to live in comfort, and might be prevented from lying about the ways and streets, or on the sea-beach, at all hours, in a state of intoxication and wretchedness, a disgrace to a Christian land.

Several of the younger branch might be most usefully employed as auxiliaries to the police, some having proved themselves very serviceable in tracking out bushrangers, if suitable encouragement be held out to them for such services, which are always engaged in at the peril of their lives. The robbers already mentioned, whilst plundering a neighbour some seven miles off, avowed their intention of shooting every black, lest they should track them out! providentially they are now taken and safely lodged in gaol.

A mere trifle from His Excellency the Governor would induce the aborigines to a much greater activity in such services than a large donation from a private individual.

A natural curiosity was brought under my notice in the person of an aborigine, a young lad, who accompanied the horse police in search of the robbers. He has six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot; but from one of the hands, and from one of the feet the blacks have amputated the extra member; in every other respect he appears only a sturdy young fellow. He comes from the interior.

In residing at Newcastle, if a residence can be obtained, daily opportunities will be

afforded of attending to the aborigines, as well as acceding to the wishes of several persons, both bond and free, who have expressed a desire for my services amongst them, and in thus devoting my time and abilities, according as God has given to me, for the spiritual benefit of the aborigines and my own countrymen, the few remaining years of my life will be occupied, I trust, as a faithful minister of Jesus Christ, whose I am, and whom I wish to serve; and although in this wilderness sixteen years have rolled on under the hope of congregating the aborigines of this Lake, and for which purpose I chose my present residence, but without effect, yet I trust that those years have not have been spent in vain in the Lord.

Hoping that His Excellency will feel authorized to sanction the pecuniary assistance necessary to carry out the measures contemplated, and now proposed, for the amelioration of the condition of the aborigines in this vicinity, on whom no government subsidy has ever been expended, save to each black the annual donation of one blanket; and that the measures submitted in this report may prove to be in perfect accordance with the avowed benevolent intentions of His Excellency the Governor, to do that which is just and right to a hitherto disregarded people, and for whom the Christian sympathies of the United Kingdom loudly plead,

I have the honour to remain,
Sir,

Your most obedient and faithful servant,
LANCELOT EDWARD THRELKELD.

[Processed by Jeremy Steele, 10 November 2020]