

[[REPORT 1828]]

LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY
MISSION TO THE ABORIGINES
NEW SOUTH WALES

(Circular)

Numerous difficulties, misrepresentations, and severe trials have the Mission and myself had to encounter. Part are overcome, some are to be rebutted, and others for a season must be endured. The occasion and particulars of these circumstances are well understood in this Colony; but it is not the design of this circular to dwell upon that topic, but faithfully to display in simplicity and godly sincerity the present aspect of the Mission, and elucidation of the Character of those amongst whom, it is now presumed, the Mission is once more permanently established.

It may be said, with truth, respecting the **Aborigines** of this land, — treat them as savages, and they will act as savages; — treat them as Men and they will act as men. We view the conduct of **Charactacus**, heading the Aboriginal Britons and opposing the invading Romans with applause, and **Boadicca**, queen of an Aboriginal tribe, with her eighty thousand English Slaughtered by insulting conquerors with sympathy. But the Aborigines of Australia, who have no combined numbers, no political power, to render themselves respected, or rather feared, by the invaders of their country, are driven, indirectly, from their districts, as other wild beasts of the deserts, without Sympathy, when the civilized hand cultivates their soil!

Dispassionately speaking, it must be so. The Emigrant sinks his capital, pays his quit rent, and conforms to rules and regulations, under the firm persuasion of a quiet possession being granted [guaranteed] by that Government which has granted him the land. To encourage the Blacks about estates, would in most instances prove unprofitable, and, in many instances, completely ruinous to the industrious emigrant.

Whilst christian feeling, without entering into abstract speculations respecting antecedent possession, deploras the evil, it would suggest, if possible, a remedy. The existence, as a people, and means of existence, of the Aborigines of New South Wales, have become translated into the hands of His Majesty the King of Great Britain, who could in Parliament, prevent their speedy extinction, and induce them to become protectors to the Emigrants, by appropriating a moiety of the quit-rents and sales of their former hunting and fishing districts, from which they are dispossessed by the British Crown to the purpose of rationing the Tribes [97] within the line of Demarcation merely with a few slops and a portion of Indian Corn! Every enlargement of the Colony might then be hailed by the Aborigines with delight, and the deaths of Stockmen and cattle, and insults to European females, and abduction of infants, might possibly be prevented without the shedding of Blood. Perhaps it is not too presumptive to hope, that the

present feeling of this Colony would accord with the equity, and approve of the measure.

But their moral existence, their Conversion to Christianity, in the broadest sense of the term, is committed to other hands, and effected by other means. An act of Parliament, or, a Glass of rum, or a loaf of Bread, would most probably induce every individual to be Baptized, and thus nominated a Christian; But it is for the Minister[s] of Christ “To persuade them” to teach them “To think on these things,” “that they may be able to give a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness,”¹ and it is for private christians to meet the expence necessary to the accomplishment of this purpose, not grudgingly, but with cheerfulness, for “God loveth a cheerful giver,”² or they cannot become “Fellow workers with God.”³ When a squadron takes the post of observation in the day of Battle, the Commander watches, with breathless anxiety, the cool, long and steady fire of the enemy’s line and almost despairs of effecting a breach; but when the [least] trepidation of the standard, or the smallest unsteadiness, be discovered, he seizes the favourable opportunity with delight, he encourages the hopes of his men, gives the word, and gallops to the charge. Or, to advert to the more peaceful similitude of the sacred writer: “As I prophesied, there was a noise among the dry bones.”⁴ — Is it fondness to a beloved object and a most ardent desire for the accomplishment of our Christian purpose that draws the parallel in the following instances? May it though as the distant cloud, little as a Man’s hand, be the forerunner of the promised blessing.

Our mornings are generally employed in company with **M’gill** a black who speaks very good English, in writing the language &c &c. Our conversations vary, and arise from enquiries into their customs and habits. Easy sentences, passages from scripture, and information on Christian subjects are attempted. A few weeks have elapsed since **M’gill** one morning thus addressed me:

“Oh I forgot to tell you; I was speaking to the Blacks last night about what you tell me, you know, about Jehovah, and they would not believe, you know, what I tell ‘em; so they bid me *ax* you to let me bring down to them to see a *picture* of Jehovah, to shew it to them, tonight; I saw some pictures in your books!” —

To one who, in these lonesome woods, watches for the least sign of intellectual life, in the death-like stillness of their barbarous minds, it raised a hope, and became an encouragement to “Fight the good fight of faith.”⁵ The Apostle’s description of “The unknown God” was the only picture I could present and **M’gill**’s reply thus: “*Jehovah is a spirit*,” convinced me that he understood the representation. This subject elicited his coming in the flesh, and consequently, some of his acts, and the raising of the widow’s son (which is affixed as a specimen of the language) was translated to him, as an evidence of his power.

¹ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: [1 Pet. iii.15]

² Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. [2 Cor. ix.7]

³ For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. [1 Cor. iii.9]

⁴ So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. [Ezek. xxxvii.7]

⁵ Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. [1 Tim. vi.12]

The Blacks have much and speedy communication one with the other from different parts of the Colony even where their dialects are supposed to so much differ as to prevent conversation, and their messengers, always armed, painted red, and adorned often with down in their hair, communicate with speed to the different tribes.⁶

Some whales having lately been cast on the beach induced our tribe to visit them, a day's journey, and partake with others of the bountiful feast. Here they met a Black messenger from Sydney, to collect the Blacks to punish a Murderer; his tale was this:

"A Blackwoman, the messenger's own wife, was intoxicated, and close to the bathing house on the Government Domain Sydney; a Black, named **William Munnan**, cut her mouth with a knife from Ear to ear, split her head with a tomyhawk, and then with other Blacks jumped upon her body, until they supposed that she was dead! Her husband took her in the black's boat to Broken Bay, where she expired, and he buried her at Pit[-]Water."

Bungaree The Chief of the Sydney tribe, ordered him to collect all the Blacks he could, and come and punish the man. Her daughter a little girl urged revenge, and some of every tribe will at some favourable opportunity have blood for blood. —

Without vouching for the truth of this statement such are the occasions of their public fights. Hereafter, when knowledge increases, messengers may as quickly convey the conversations of midnight fire-sides, and excite distant tribes to seek Him "Whom to know is life Eternal." Whilst European Ministers may be as the several fountain heads, the Aborigines themselves may become the channels to convey "Living streams," into the remotest parts of this vast waste and howling wilderness, as is now the case in the Islands of the Southern Sea.⁷

Their messengers may be known by their being thoroughly equipped, and decorated with red and white paint and feathers on their persons; A bone thrust through the septum of the nostrils, and their long hair tied up into a pyramidal form, add to the natural dignity of the Ambassador, and the consciousness of security (for their persons are sacred), enables them to appear in the midst of even a hostile tribe with boldness.

The reception of them is not so courteous. I was amongst the tribe when two blacks were going as messengers, to meet another from a distant tribe: The Wives were painting their husband's persons, and when sufficiently adorned, trowsers and other encumbrances were cast away, and they prepared for their embassy. However they had scarcely proceeded a hundred yards when the expected Messenger appeared through the distant wood. They broke their spears, gave specimens of a sham fight, and as the exalted personage approached their camp, they squatted down at their fires, without noticing in the least the messenger among them. One person told him to sit down, at a respectful distance, by a log, where he applied the firebrand which they mostly carry with them, and gravely lit his pipe, but spake not [98] a word. The oldest man of the tribe rose,

took some ready roasted fish, went towards the visitor and threw the fish *at him*, which the other condescended to receive with the marks of a keen appetite.

Had this message been of importance, it would first have been communicated to an old woman, who would have whispered it from hut to hut until every fireside was furnished with the means of conversation on the subject of the embassy.

In the past year, death has under the form of influenza, made sad havoc amongst the Aboriginal tribes, nor have Europeans much better escaped; Our men, our children, my wife, and myself were all at one time severely laid up with this pestilence, and the cries of the surrounding Blacks in pain, and the howls of the living for the Dead, and the circumstances in which myself and mission were involved, harrowed up our feelings, and painted the surrounding scene with the Blackness of despair. But, "There is a friend who sticketh closer than a brother."⁸

When health and strength were in a measure restored, I had several opportunities of witnessing the Aborigines' mode towards their dead. At that time, I was in the habit of weekly visiting my only neighbour, some fourteen miles on the Lake, who has since removed, to preach on Sundays to his Men. On my return from one of these excursions, I was informed that the natives had burned [a woman who I knew was ill. On the following day, accompanied by the deceased's son and the man who burnt her], I went about two miles in the bush to ascertain the fact. The column of smoke ascending from the rem[n]ant of the pile guided us to the spot, where under two immense trees, amidst the smoking embers, the Skeleton of the woman presented a disgusting spectacle; her tobacco pipe, purified by the fire, claimed the victory over softer clay in the devouring element. The skull, the hip, the thigh, and arm bones were discernible, but so much destroyed by the fire as to fall to ashes on the gentle touch of a stick.

Cremating a dead woman

I asked *why did you burn her?*
*"The blacks ordered me, was the reply, to feed the Eagle hawks, which will come at midnight and feast on her roasted flesh."*⁹

I enquired, *why hawks should be regarded,* and the answer was, *that formerly they were black men, and the Blacks feared them."*

Was she alive when you burned her?

"No."

I then said *"Her flesh is consumed, her bones are there, but where is her spirit?"*

He pointed to the East, saying *"out yonder a long way off."*

Her own son, a young lad, laughed and said in English *"She go England."*

The conversation afforded an opportunity of introducing the subject of the resurrection and immortality.

Cannibalism rumour

On my return, I endeavoured to ascertain whether any part of the body had been eaten: they both observed that

⁶ Threlkeld, with his passion for communications, never failed to be impressed by the means used by the Aborigines and envisaged the Aboriginal courier as a potential evangelist spreading the 'good news'. For a comprehensive account of Aboriginal messengers see A.W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, London, 1904, 678-91.

⁷ Threlkeld was in the islands when the first Polynesian native teachers virtually overthrew the existing heathen practices in such island groups as the Australs, the Cooks, Tonga, and the Tuamotus. By 1838 native teachers were being prepared to pioneer missionary work in the Loyalty and New Hebrides groups.

⁸ A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. [Prov. xviii.24]

⁹ For the eaglehawk see note 19 to Introduction and notes 29 and 114 to *Reminiscences*.

it would make them sick. But the Blacks have informed me, that when a stout plump young fellow is killed in punishment, by one blow on the head, that it is a custom with the Tribe at Port Stevens to roast and eat the body; but of this I have no other evidence [see p. 48].

With respect to the woman, my suspicions were strong as to the manner of her death, from the following circumstance, which occurred but a few days previously to her death. One of her sons a young man, named in English, **Purcell**, was suffering under the prevalent disease: he submitted to be blistered and bled, but inflammation of the lungs destroyed him. A few hours after his decease, his wife came to me, under great alarm, for protection. She said that two blacks named **Black-boy** and **Bumble-foot**, were about to tie her to a tree, spear her to death, roast, and afterwards eat her, in revenge for the death of her husband. This was corroborated by the testimony of others, which determined me to adopt measures to prevent, if possible, the piece of horrid cruelty. I went to the camp and enquired; the blacks affirmed the same, saying they were expected very shortly. I threatened them, to write to the Governor to prevent their supply of Slops in future, and to cease employing them if they permitted the deed. A consultation was held; thrice they vociferated, "*Let her not be killed.*" and the Eldest man responded, "*Let it be so.*" The speaker then addressed me saying she should be spared: However, to make assurance doubly sure, we kept her under our own protection for a season. She died soon afterwards, apparently of the prevalent disorder.

On the following day, one of the blacks came, but being informed of my interference, he speedily decamped to his comrade **Bumble-foot**, in the woods. This black is so named from a natural deformity, and also **Devil-devil** on account of his habitual wickedness. He was in Gaol for a considerable period, in consequence of his attempting and almost carrying into effect the decapitation of a White man (**Jerry Buffy** mentioned in a preceeding part in the letter to **H. Moore** Esquire; 1838) in the Woods.¹⁰ When he the black was returned to this district, he attached himself to us, whilst at the same time the man whom he had grievously wounded was in my employ.

I therefore requested **Bumble-foot** to desist from working and return to his own land, about 40 miles distant. This gave offence, and he threatened to the Blacks, that he would kill me also, when he met me in the woods. **M'gill** the Black, from whom I principally obtain the Language, very coolly requested the loan of a gun, and he would go and shoot that fellow for saying so! Had I acceded to his request, he would have done it, for he is very faithful.

Some short time since, two of our convict servants went with the bullock team to Newcastle for provision. My son **Joseph**, 11 years old, accompanied them on horseback. One of the men became intoxicated in town, and on his return through the bush, threatened to beat **Joseph**; but **M'gill**, who happened to be with them stepped up, and with horrid imprecations, threatened to smash his brains, if the man moved one step towards his young master as he called him. That he would have levelled him to the ground, I have not

the smallest doubt had the man persisted, for the faithful black had been drinking too!

Thrice have we been visited by bushranging robbers; two we have captured, and but for the blacks one of those had escaped; they tracked and [99] recovered one after his escape from us. It unfortunately happens, often, that our greatest fears are excited when there is not a black about our station. At this moment, there is not a black within seven miles of us. One man died suddenly in the camp, the day before yesterday, and every one has fled for a short season, and yesterday we were apprised of several bushrangers having escaped from Newcastle, being now in the woods, against whom we are obliged to arm to preserve ourselves and property in case of attack.

It would be well if those who are enjoying the sweets of Society, the comforts of Police protection in cities and towns, the snug parlour and its concomitant luxuries, would but take these and many other considerations into their abstract speculations, and cold calculations on the expence of missions, when they safely indulge in the Stoical reverie; In that case injury and error might not be so often the result.

Burial of Purcell

The Blacks borrowed spades to bury the body of poor **Purcell**, I went to the ceremony. The body, having been previously painted red was wrapped in bark from head to foot.

Every spear was broken into short pieces tied up into a bundle, and placed by his side, his hatchets, and every other article also which he possessed.¹¹ Two old men took the body up placing it on the heads of two stout young men, who supported themselves steadily with long staves. One of the old men went to the head of the corpse and said in a whisper: "*Do you wish to see?*" then turning round to the Blacks with a smile said "*He does not.*" An Old woman came with a friend's hair, which he had just cut off; she thrust it into the bark to the head of the deceased. The two old men gathered a bunch of boughs, came to the corpse, made a feint desperate blow, then stepping up one repeated the question. Each time the blow was struck, the bearers of the body voluntarily sunk, as though compelled to give place by the violence of the Blow. They then turned round proceeded some yards stopped, turned round again, repeated the same ceremony for seven or eight times, until they reached the grave, into which they deposited the body, amidst the howl of the dogs, uniting with the most horrid yells of all the assembly. The women smeared themselves with pipeclay, burned their thighs with fire brands, and then limped away with pain, shedding abundance of tears.

The new arrangement of the Directors allowing 250£ pr annum to cover all expences of the Mission, including the support of myself, wife and six children, together with the kind assistance of four men on the stores, rendered by His Excellency the Governor (General **Darling**) has established the mission on a satisfactory basis, precludes the necessity of advertng to items of expenditure, and will it is anticipated produce general satisfaction.

May He, who alone can render the most prudent means effectual to their end, smile upon our united endeavours to promote his Glory, and crown our endeavours with abundant success."

Lake Macquarie Oct 8th 1828.

¹⁰ This is undoubtedly the same able-bodied Aboriginal with a cloven foot (referred to as 'Devil Devil'), who was charged before the magistrate on 30 October 1824 by Constable Richard Woodbury, with the 'murder of a servant of Dickson's, in the bush'. According to the historian of Brisbane Water the Aboriginal 'severed the head with a tomahawk while the victim was in the act of stooping to the ground' 'At his trial, the judge ruled that as "Devil Devil" could not understand English, he could not be charged with murder.' S. Swancott, *The Brisbane Water Story*, Part III, 135.

¹¹ Compare this burial with that of Dismal's sister (see p. 89), that of Baggarra (note 135 to *Reminiscences*) and that of the man witnessed by Ralph Mansfield (see p. 337). See also Howitt, op. cit., 426-508.

AN ATTEMPT to render Luke Chap 7th Verses 11 to 16 into the native Dialect, as a specimen of their language and Idiom. (Attached to the above report.)

Verse 11.

Tahri ta untah Purreung-ka uwah noah
Another it was it Day came he
Jesu Nain kolang, kowwol ngekoung katoah
Jesus Nain towards, great his with
uwah, kowwol ngiya kora.
came, great or many then men.

12.

Uwah noah papi gate-ah-ko kokere-kal
Came he close or nigh gate the to house-place
kobah tatte-borahng kurraah wahra
belonging to dead-man carried was outside
ta ko, Dunkahn kobah yenh! wahkora
to be for, Mother belonging to son one only
koba, mabongun bounnoah; kora yantebo uwah
of, widow she; man thereof came
bounnoun kahtoah kokere kahl.
her with house-place of.

13.

Nahkahlah noa Perrewol-lo bounnoun, minke-kahn
Saw he Lord-chief-the her, sorrow-being
noah hahkahlah bounnoun kai, weah
he was her on account of, said,
bounnoun ngurran bahn-korah.
commended her weep, or regret not.

14.

Uwah noah numah noah mung-ah; bahrur
Came he touched her covering the; they
kurretoahrah ngahrokaah korun. Weah bohn
carried-who stood still, quiet. Said to him
noah. Allah! Uhngngabrah-bahn weyahn
he. Vocative, ha! young-man speak
bahnuhng, boungkuleah.
I to thee, (Dual) arise.

15.

Newwoah tatte ba-berung yallahwah, butabiyah
He dead, was-from sat up, began
noah weahleahlah. Ngutuah-kahn noah bohn
he to speak and Gave he him
bounnoun dunkahn ngeko-amba.
her mother his.

16.

Kintah bahrur kahkahlah yahnteyn, petal-mahn
Fear they was, or were all, joy-made
bahrur bohn Jehovah-nung, weahleyn bahrur kowwol
they him. Jehovah-to, saying they great
ngurahke noah pibaah-kaan ngaurrin kin.
wise-one he appeared-has us among.
Uwah-kuan Jehovah-ko bahrin-kin nyekoung
Come-has Jehovah-the them among his
kata kora kah.
are that people are. [100]

This was written in the Orthography first adopted at the suggestion of the Deputation,¹² but it was found so ill adapted, and so much to encumber the language, with the letter H especially, that it was subsequently changed for reasons assigned in the introductory remarks of the Printed Grammar. The following is the same portion corrected according to the present Orthography. 1838.

Luoka Winta 7
Luke Part 7

11.

Ngatun yakita.purreung-ka yukita, uwá
And at that time Day was afterwards, came
noa kokeroa, ngiakai yitara Nain;
he into the house place, thus name it Nain;
ngatun kauwul uwá ngikoumba wirrobulli-kan
and great came, his followers, (Disciples,)
ngatun turai kan kore ngikoung-katoa.
and other beings men him with.

12.

Ngatun uwá noa ha papai pulungkulli-ngél-loa
And came he as nigh the entering-place to
kokere kolang, ngá, tetti kulwon kurrilliella
house, towards, behold, dead stiff carrying-was
kore warai kolang, wakól-bota yená!
Men outside towards One-only son
tunkan-koba, ngikoumba kore.
mother belonging to his people.

¹² Actually Threlkeld had made a number of corrections to the printed 1828 version when transcribing. For the change in orthography see notes 30 and 31 to Reminiscences.