

THE
ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
MISSION TO THE ABORIGINES
LAKE MACQUARIE
FOR MDCCCXXXVI [1]

Ebenezer, Lake Macquarie ,
December 31st , 1836.

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND WILLIAM
GRANT BROUGHTON, D.D.,
LORD BISHOP OF AUSTRALIA ,
&c., &c., &c.

My Lord,

Your return to this Colony allows me again the honor of presenting to you, my usual report of progress in the Aboriginal Mission during the present year.

In March last, I was subpoenaed to attend the Criminal Court, in the case of alleged murder of a black by one of his own countrymen; and the question was raised for the consideration of the Court, in his defence, whether he could be put on his trial in a British Court, whereas, should he be acquitted, he must again stand trial amongst his own people? This was overruled, and it was laid down by the Court, that the Aborigines are subject to, and under the protection of the British Law: — But, it remains yet to be determined whether the Aborigines [sic] can be admitted as witnesses in our Courts, they having no form of solemn adjuration, or any description of oath amongst themselves. A black may be falsely accused of murder, by the very murderer himself; the accused might be able to prove an alibi by his whole tribe, with whom, perhaps, he was hunting at a distance from the scene of crime, at the very moment in which the barbarity was perpetrated? yet such is the present state of the law, a black witness having been rejected by the Court that not one of his people could enter the witness-box to speak in evidence, being incompetent in consequence of our forms of justice in the administration of paths, although they are now proclaimed to be subject to, and under the protection of our

Courts of Law! This anomaly requires the consideration of those competent to provide a remedy, lest impartial justice should hereafter be impeded when some case of considerable excitement may possibly arise betwixt the Aborigines and Colonists. I respectfully call the attention of the Judges of our Courts, of the Legislative Council, of the British Parliament, to the peculiarity and injustice of their case.

No act of outrage against Europeans, bringing the blacks to trial before the Criminal Court has arisen this year. The deplored murder of Mr. **Cunningham**, during the expedition in the interior, or the melancholy catastrophe in the destruction of the shipwrecked Captain with part of his companions, and forcible detention of his widow, by the blacks far northward in the territory, while they call forth the tenderest sympathies towards the unfortunate sufferers, occurred not within the limits of the Colony.

At the request of the Attorney-General, during my stay in Sydney, I visited and questioned the black who was in custody at Goat Island, on the charge of being concerned in the murder of Mr. Cunningham. With the assistance of the Aborigines, who were under sentence of transportation at that place, I was enabled to understand, though a different dialect was spoken by the prisoner. The subject of our enquiry was, that: — “His own name was **Pu-ri-mul**, he resided at a place called **Put-ta**, that two blacks named **Pu-rui-to**, and **Wong-kai-tu-rai-to** killed Mr. Cunningham, that he did not kill him, nor did he see him killed, — he knew it not, — but was told it. — That it was men belonging to a distant part killed him. — That he was at **Put-ta** when he was killed, — heard that it was about an opossum he was killed. — That his brother named **Mu-i-yum-bai-to** told him to go and bury the remains of Mr. C., two other blacks assisted him to inter the body.” The question was put, “who ate part of him?” the reply was, “I did not see them, I did not see the [291] killing of him.” No further information could be obtained. We communicated pretty freely by means of the blacks, with whose dialect he appeared to have become acquainted during his confinement. The readiness with which this black guided to the spot, where the remains were found, led,

naturally to the conclusion that he must be a party concerned. The difficulty of understanding his broken English, added not a little to such suspicion: there being no evidence against him, he was not put on his trial, but remained in custody at Goat Island.

The blacks on the island, who for depredations and outrages committed some two years since, had experienced that there is “a minister for God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil,¹ — sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well,”² were about now to receive the effects of clemency. His Excellency the Governor having mercifully viewed their wretched ignorance, appointed an instructor, and commuted their sentences, which having now expired with most of them, they were all liberated and escorted by their preceptor Mr. Langhorne to this place, with instructions from His Excellency to endeavour to establish them at, or near my residence.

With much gratification I received them, heard them repeat their lessons, conversed with them, proposed that they should live in a large hut, being then erected for the use of the blacks, that they should have a seine to fish, should send their produce salted to Sydney for their own benefit, that I would build a small vessel for themselves to navigate, instruct them daily, and this should be considered their home, to all this they appeared cordially to agree; however, on the following day the desire to return to their own district, Brisbane Water, became so violent, that in the evening they left their clothes in the hut, and when called, on the morrow, to their early lessons, every individual had disappeared!

I have since ascertained that they have returned to their district, one taking a wife with him on his way, and are still in dread of a recapture. Thus the benevolent attempt of His Excellency to fix them here could not at this period be accomplished, and our hopes, as is very often the case in missionary exertions, are,

for a season, disappointed. But, “The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receive the former and the latter rain,”³ so, likewise, must we endure, “Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on High.”⁴

The peculiar habits of the Natives are serious drawbacks to Missionary enterprise, and to their own civil and spiritual advancement; for, however much they may, and do, become useful to Europeans in trifling employments, in our various Settlements, they remain uninstructed in Christian principles, and become by such intercourse more initiated in vice: the men receiving the wages of prostitution from those they procure, who are yearly becoming victims to disease.

When the Government donation of blankets was distributed to the blacks in the vicinity, there was only the proportion of twenty-nine females to fifty-five males, and of those who profess to be man and wife, not above two or three had families of children. It often occurs, that for weeks together not a single Aborigine appears, and seldom excepting in Towns, could ten be found in one place, for by scattering, they are more easily supplied with food, and if they wish to assemble together, it is only to despatch a messenger, who sets fire to the grass on his route, by which means the tribes know, when, and where to congregate. Thus, from their natural habits they require no settled place to form a Village, for when danger is reported, they flee to our Settlements for safety, where immoral contagion thins their ranks, or concubinage so amalgamates them with the whites, through the overwhelming numbers of the prison population. Such are some of the difficulties in a mission to these barbarians, which call for the daily exercise of faith, patience, and perseverance.

Under such circumstances, my employments vary. At one period of the year, during an absence of the blacks, I arrange the English

¹ For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. [Rom. xiii.4]

² Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. [1 Pet. ii.14]

³ Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. [James v.7]

⁴ Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. [Isiah xxxii.15]

words from Johnson's Dictionary, rejecting useless technicalities, &c., to form an **English and Australian Lexicon**, the Australian to be attached as opportunities occur in the progress of translation.

At other periods two youths, named **Billy Blue** and **Little McGill** are taught to read and write in their own tongue, but their disposition to wander, although well fed and clothed at my expense, manifests itself very frequently to my sad annoyance. The latter has been now two months away, and the former must needs leave yesterday because my son went up the Country, and no doubt will be absent until it is reported to him of his return, which not being expected before six or seven weeks, the lads will lose much of what they have already attained. Their unfinished first attempt in copy books, I attach, as specimens just as they left them; the books are made narrow to prevent soiling with their hands.

The elder McGill, from whom the lads has, according to their usual custom, received his name, seldom visits me, he displays his knowledge at Newcastle Town, where drink has attractions far more strong than my study possesses at the Lake.

Selection from the Old Testament, namely :

- "The Creation of the World"
 - "The Creation of Man and Woman"
 - "Institution of Marriage"
 - "The Fall of Man"
 - "Of the Deluge"
 - "The Confusion of Tongues at Babel"
 - "Abraham interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah"
 - "The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah",
- have been translated also to form reading lessons, which, to the youths already mentioned, afford means of instruction in divine truth.

Billy Blue, when riding out with my son one day in the bush, was asked what he thought of the account which was read to him? he replied, that he thought it was all gammon that master had told him about the Creation, for who was there who saw God create man!

The **Australian Spelling Book**, two copies of which I also attach, has been completed and [292] put to press this year, at an expense of

£5 16s 0d. for the printing thereof, but the difficulty at present lies in procuring scholars, besides the two already mentioned. **Little McGill**, whilst reading one of the lessons in the **Spelling Book**, in which I was explaining to him, and enforcing the truth, that "He who made all things is God," observed, that old McGill knew it, for he had seen Jehovah. Enquiring further into this extraordinary assertion from a black, he said he would bring McGill to inform me all about the circumstances.

McGill came, and related to me as follows :
— "The night before last, when coming hither, I slept on the other side of the Lake, I dreamed that I and my party of blacks were up in the Heavens; that we stood on a cloud; I looked round about in the Heavens; I said to the men that were with me, there He is? There is He who is called Jehovah; here he comes flying like fire with a great shining — this is He about whom the witness speak. He appeared to me like a man with clothing of fire, red like a flame. His arms were stretched out like the wings of a bird in the act of flying. He did not speak to us, but only looked earnestly at us as he was flying past. I said to the blacks with me, let us go down, lest he takes us away; we descended on the top of a very high mountain like this pestle; (showing me one that was in the study) we came to the bottom, and just reached the level ground, I awoke. We often dream of this mountain, many blacks fancy themselves on the top when asleep".

My present employment is translating the **Gospel of Mark**, after which, I propose **Matthew** and **John**, which with **Luke** already accomplished, will complete the Evangelists, when they must be compared and diligently revised, in which my **eldest son** will be able, if it please God, to afford much assistance, from the superior knowledge he has acquired of the aboriginal language.

He is again attempting to bring with him on his return, a youth or two from the interior some three hundred miles distance, whither he is now travelling, and which could not be accomplished heretofore. Should it please God to influence the minds of one or two of the Aborigines, causing them to become well instructed in the Gospel of Christ, they would then be valuable instruments

to promulgate the truth as it is in Jesus, from tribe to tribe, amongst their own countrymen.

Thus, My Lord, I have stated to you for the information of His Excellency the Governor and His Majesty's Government at Home, the occurrences and employments in the Aboriginal Mission for the last twelve months. Placed by the special Providence of God in this wilderness, amongst white and black bones, but all exceedingly dry, our only hope is, that the spirit will breathe in them the breath of life, then shall "Peace be within our walls, and prosperity within our dwellings,"⁵ this "wilderness and solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose"⁶— for "righteousness exalteth a nation,"⁷ and "happy is that people whose God is the Lord."⁸

I have the honor to subscribe myself,
Your Lordship's obedient Servant
L. E. THRELKELD.

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Judge Burton

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Note

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⁵ Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. [Psalms cxxii.7]

⁶ The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. [Isaiah xxxv.1]

⁷ Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. [Prov. xiv.34]

⁸ Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD. [Psalms cxliv.15]