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[781] ABORIGINES

Report of the Mission to the Aborigines at Lake Macquarie, New South Wales.

TO THE HONORABLE,
THE COLONIAL
SECRETARY,
&c.&c.&c.

EBENEZER,
LAKE MACQUARIE,
NEW SOUTH WALES,

December 30, 1837

SIR,

The period having arrived in which I am directed by the Right Honourable the Secretary of State for the Colonial Department annually to report progress, it would afford me greater pleasure could a more favourable statement be presented, consistently with truth, respecting the Aborigines, than the one now submitted for the year 1837.

The disappearance of so many of the Blacks, in this District, induced me to address a letter to His Excellency the Governor, stating the circumstance, and requesting the loan of the Official Returns of the Black Natives throughout the Colony, for the years 1835, 1836 and 1837, in order to ascertain whether the decrease was merely local, or general, and then to consider if better measures could be devised, than those at present adopted, to make more effective my employment among the Aborigines.

Two modes of proceeding presented themselves, namely; to remove to a more populous part of the Colony, as respects the Blacks, or, to alter my original plan of

proceedings, on which I have hitherto acted, to suit the exigencies of the Mission. His Excellency was pleased to favour me with the Official Documents, from which a tolerably correct general Return of the Aborigines, within the four divisions of the Colony, has been compiled, and is attached to this Report.

It appears clearly from the Returns, that the decrease of the Black population is not local and temporary, but general and annual. The returns shew that the greatest portion of the Aborigines is found in this North and North-west District of the Colony, the majority being within my sphere of action, whilst their language differs not materially from the dialect in which I have made some progress. Such being the case, it seemed preferable not to remove, but rather to **suspend the translating for the present**, and endeavour to render available to the Natives the works which are finished, and have been mentioned in last year's *Report*.

It would be very gratifying to possess printed copies of the four **Gospels**, and the **Acts**, as originally contemplated; previous to any attempt at oral instruction being extensively made; but the unexpected great decrease of the Blacks, and the conviction that a further advance in the knowledge of their tongue will improve the translation, reconcile to the postponement of an application to "The British and Foreign Bible Society" for aid to print, until some future period, when it may be found necessary to furnish the objects of our attention with the inspired Epistles, which are "The Commandments of the Lord," and the sole rule of life for our conduct.

Having therefore deliberately considered the peculiar state of affairs, the only course that appears suitable to the pressing occasion is, for me "To do the work of an Evangelist,"¹ in visiting the neighbouring Districts during the ensuing year, and endeavour to meet, at stated periods, or as occasion serves, the various Tribes at Port Stephen and its vicinities, the Returns of which contain about 500 Blacks; Hunter's River and its dependencies having about 300; and other contiguous Tribes, consisting of about 200 more, with whose dialect I am acquainted, and

¹ But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. [2 Tim. iv.5]

orally teach them “The first Principles of the Oracles of God.”² The dialect of the Tribes to the southward being different to those of the northward, the Southern District is not contemplated in the present itinerant arrangement.

A circumstance occurred recently which induces me to hope that the attempt may not prove in vain in their behalf. At all events, no possible loss of time or labour can arise, should disappointments ensue on the part of the Aborigines, but good may result, situated as we are among so many of our own countrymen, who do not refuse to have dispensed unto them and their dependants “The Words of Life.”³

An unforeseen event occasioned my visiting Maitland last month, and being requested to preach at Morpeth, I subsequently met at Hinton, the junction of the River Hunter and Paterson, a small Tribe of Blacks, who exhibited much surprise at being addressed in their own tongue. After a number of conjectures, they concluded that the speaker must be the person whom M’Gill, the Aborigine, had spoken, and they appeared to be apprised of the nature of my pursuits. After some conversation they were requested to attend again at the same place on the next full moon, to hear of “The Chief of Chiefs,” whose dwelling is in Heaven. Whether the refusal to accede to their solicitations for money to drink may prevent the fulfilment of their promise to assemble, the event must determine.

I trust also to be enabled to visit Port Stephen, and surrounding Districts, early in the next year, to make, if possible, similar arrangements with other Tribes. Could my Aborigine assistant be induced to act with propriety, and accompany me in such efforts, the result might be more pleasing, but, like Brainard’s in America, my most useful Aborigine is the most intemperate in drink.

Years of painfully close application have been sacrificed to the injury of my sight and health, in endeavouring to acquire a knowledge of the Native language, with a view, ultimately,

of pursuing the same course, which at this juncture it becomes necessary immediately to adopt, to save, if possible, the feeble remains of the Native Tribes. The numerous disappointments, and pecuniary losses to my family, arising from the peculiar nature of my employment, during the period necessary to be spent in qualifying for such engagements, have also severely exercised my mind. Even now, we can only endeavour “in patience to possess our souls,”⁴ and hope almost against hope that “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”⁵

The present decreasing state of the [782]Aborigines, whilst it urges promptness in our measures, presents a far from pleasing prospect for Missionary enterprise, their speedy annihilation being certain, unless it pleases God quickly to accompany with the influence of the Holy Spirit, the means used of his own appointment to save them. But how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?⁶

During this year one case only has arisen for Trial in the Supreme Court, the which I attended as Interpreter, “**Wombarty**,” an Aborigine, belonging to the Interior, near Port Macquarie, was charged with being concerned in the murder of four Europeans. The Court humanely appointed Counsel for the prisoner, and I visited the culprit in gaol to ascertain his defence. The dialect spoken by him being different, I could only elicit through the means of my assistant Black, **M’Gill**, and he communicated partly through another Black belonging to Port Macquarie, who was under confinement at that time.

It appeared from his disclosure that the murder was committed by a strange tribe which he named, he looking on, in revenge for two Blacks who were confined in a Lock-up house, charged with spearing and slaughtering cattle; that the Tribes were collecting for the purpose of further retaliation on the Whites, but, that he, only took part of the spoil.

² For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. [Heb. v.12]

³ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. [Philipp. ii.16]

⁴ In your patience possess ye your souls. [Luke xxi.19]

⁵ And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. [Gal. vi.9]

⁶ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? [Rom. x.14]

His Excellency the Governor was immediately apprised of the movements likely to take place in that District, that means might be adopted to secure the lives of the unprotected.

We thus ascertained the committal of a dreadful murder by parties named; elicited the occasion of such a murder, and discovered designs for further atrocities; but, when the means of interpreting were tendered in open Court, the Black could not be sworn in with myself as assistant interpreter, and ultimately the prisoner was discharged.

Thus that just and equitable principle which declares that "The Aborigines are subject to and under the Protection of British Law," becomes a mere Legal Fiction, in consequence of means not being duly provided to meet the case, and afford Legal protection to its subjects in its own Courts; and thus the strictness of the administration of the Law becomes the height of Injustice to all.

It cannot be denied that our circumstances, as a Civilized People in connection with these Aboriginal Barbarians were never contemplated by the British Constitution, but it remains to be ascertained, whether this Age of Intellect will provide a suitable remedy in some specific enactment, or suffer year after year, the Aborigines to be frittered away from the Land by private vengeance for injuries publicly sustained; which injuries the Executive at present cannot punish but by the horrors of Martial Law! Surely it is a matter worthy the prompt attention of Legislators belonging to a professed Christian Nation, lest there be found "Those who shed innocent blood,"⁷ and our "Heavens become brass, and our Earth iron, and the rain of our land be made powder and dust,"⁸ through the voice of a Brother's blood crying aloud for vengeance unto God.

The very weakness of the Blacks, forms to noble minds, the strongest appeal to Justice, nor should Equity forget the price of the Land of their Birth which fills the coffers of our Exchequer with Gold, exalts Britain among the Nations, and establishes her Colonies in the destruction of the Native Inhabitants thereof, and thus presents a powerful claim to the tender sympathies of our Christian Charities; whilst the

certainty of legal punishment to the guilty, would save the innocent, "Be a terror to evil doers," and ultimately prevent the increase of crime. Under present circumstances the guilty escape, and human justice can only announce the Law as it exists, which bars the door of Equity against the Blacks, and leaves them to public vengeance, or, to the private revenge of injured Europeans, which steady to its purpose, will surely, secretly, and speedily annihilate the Aborigines from the face of this land.

Generally speaking, however, there is a kindly feeling, a friendly disposition, manifested towards the Blacks by the Colonists, and many of the out-stations prove places of refuge in cases of danger, whilst other stations are dreaded on account of the alleged barbarity and violence inflicted on the Aborigines.

A Black refused to conduct a European to one of such suspected stations, stating that he might be shot, as many of his countrymen had been, without any provocation on their parts. But aggressions of the most irritating nature have been committed by the Blacks in the Interior, in destroying cattle, and in the destruction of Human Life, and a severe retribution has been made. But, the mode of surrounding a herd of cattle, the slaughtering of the beasts, the preserving of the flesh by smoke, and the plaiting of whips from the hides, were the lessons of a convict stockman; and under such tutors, so numerous scattered amongst the Tribes in the Interior, it is not marvellous that they become adept pupils in such arts. Upwards of eighty were shot in retaliation for this.

In accounting for the very great decrease in the Black Population, it unhappily occurs that the very means used by many to express their kindly feeling towards the Aborigines, tends to their destruction, namely — supplying their wants with ardent spirits, as the wages most acceptable for any little services which they are often required to perform. Thus a thirst is created for more; they are then urged on to maddening intoxication, the besetting sin of this Colony, too often to the loss of Human Life.

⁷ My right hand will not spare the sinners, and my sword will not cease from those who shed innocent blood on earth. [2 Esdras 15:22]

⁸ And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. [Deut. xxviii.23]

A determination, from the formation of this Mission, not to adopt the prevalent practice, may be assigned as a potent reason why the Missionary Establishment is least likely to become the favourite resort of the misguided Aborigines in their Pagan state — Divine authority forbidding to “Do evil, that good may come.”⁹

The mortifying circumstance of the frequent desertion of the few Aborigines left alive, from this station, must be borne with patience in the exercise of just and conscientious principles. We are responsible for the means we employ — we are not for success.

Another cause of decrease amongst the Tribes, may be traced to the swelling tide of emigration which has universally swallowed up the petty streams of Barbarism, and the Aborigines have generally either been driven back to the Forests by the force of arms, or, have become amalgamated with the overpowering people who thus “Multiply, Replenish, and Subdue the Earth.”¹⁰ In this Colony, local circumstances have occasioned the total destruction of the Blacks within its limits to be less rapid, but not more ultimately certain than when martial force has been employed.

The un-matrimonial state of the thousands of male prisoners scattered throughout the country amidst females, though of another colour, leads them by force, fraud, or bribery, to withdraw the Aboriginal women from their own proper mates, and disease and death are the usual consequence of such proceedings. The official return from one district gives only two women to twenty-eight men, two boys, but no girls.

The continued ill treatment and frequent slaughter of the Black woman can only be deplored, perhaps without remedy. One Black of the number sentenced to work in irons at Goat Island, had previously shot several females and chopped to pieces others with his tomahawk. On his return from confinement he joined his Tribe, sat with them around a fire in [783] the Bush, seized a woman, was about to despatch her,

when a Black started up and cleft his skull with a hatchet, whilst another was buried in his heart.

Frequently have I noticed in the retributions which have taken place amongst the Aborigines, the fulfilment of that Divine decree, which declares — “Your blood of your lives will I require, at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man.”¹¹

Of the surviving culprits it is pleasing, and not irrelative, to state, that no depredations have been committed by them on Europeans since their release from irons in Goat Island for which release they are indebted to the humane consideration of His Excellency the Governor Sir Richard Bourke. The severity of their punishment, which necessity required, was such to them, that several died whilst under confinement on the island.

The last, but not the least, cause to mention, as occasioning the rapid diminution of the Aborigines of this Territory, is far above the control of mortal man, and not confined to the limits of the Colony. He who “increaseth the nation,”¹² or “destroys that there shall be no inhabitant,”¹³ has visited the Land; and the Measles, the Hopping-cough, and the Influenza, have stretched the Black victims in hundreds on the earth, until, in some places, scarcely a Tribe can be found.

Of one large Tribe in the interior, four years since, there were one hundred and sixty-four persons, there are now only three individuals alive! Many suffered from the ire of human vengeance, for alleged acts of aggression, but the most died by act of God.

At our former residence on the Lake, upwards of sixty Blacks lie mouldering into dust, of whom many were destroyed, by the effects of licentiousness, but more by the epidemic of the time. The Providence of God having hitherto sustained us amidst many discouragements, through evil report and good report, in humble, but, firm dependence on his opening a door of usefulness, and a small

⁹ And not *rather*, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just. [Rom. iii.8]

¹⁰ And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. [Gen. i.28]

¹¹ And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. [Gen. ix.5]

¹² He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them *again*. [Job xii.23]

¹³ Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant. [Zeph. ii.5]

remnant of the Aborigines being yet preserved to whom the glad tidings of good things may be reported, we can only Hope “That a little one shall become a thousand and a small one a strong nation,” and that “the Lord will hasten it in due season.¹⁴

Having thus endeavoured faithfully to report the affairs of the Mission to the Aborigines, and stated the plan of operations for the ensuing year, which the present exigencies require in order to carry into effect the benevolent intentions of the British Government towards the Blacks; it is, with the highest assurance of respect, hoped that the abject state of the decreasing Aborigines of the Colonies may not be forgotten in the considerations and gracious sympathies of Her Majesty the Queen, whose reign may Almighty God prolong, bless, protect, and govern to the happiness of the nation, and her own Royal Person, to the Glory of God, and to the peace and good will of all.

I have the honour to subscribe myself,
Your most Obedient Humble Servant,
LANCELOT EDWARD THRELKELD.

An ABSTRACT from the Official General Returns of the Black Natives, taken at the Annual Distribution of the Government Donation of Blankets, to each Tribe, within the four divisions of the Colony, for the Years 1835, 1836, 1837.

Men, Women, and children

| | | |
|---|---|------|
| 1 | South and South-western District, from Sydney to Twofold Bay, inclusive, 5 returns | 422 |
| 2 | Western District, Bathurst, Wellington Valley, 1 return | 127 |
| 3 | North and North-western District, from Sydney to Port Macquarie, inclusive 10 returns | 1220 |
| 4 | Home District, Sydney and Windsor inclusive, 8 returns | 825 |
| | Sum-total of 24 returns in 1835 ... Individuals | 2094 |

| | | Men | Women | Boys | Girls | Total |
|------|---|-----|-------|------|-------|-------|
| 1835 | Description of Persons, from 24 returns | 904 | 681 | 291 | 217 | 2094 |
| 1836 | Description of Persons, from 15 returns | 727 | 461 | 225 | 169 | 1522 |
| 1837 | Description of Persons, from 16 returns | 735 | 454 | 195 | 147 | 1531 |

PROPORTION OF SEXES, INCLUDING CHILDREN.

| | | | |
|------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1835 | OF 2094 Persons, | there were 75 Females | to 100 Males. |
| 1836 | OF 1582 Persons, | there were 66 Females | to 100 Males. |
| 1837 | OF 1531 Persons, | there were 64 Females | to 100 Males. |

| | Men | Women | Boys | Girls | Total |
|---|-----|-------|------|-------|-------|
| From 11 returns of the most popular Districts, there were, in 1835 | 535 | 405 | 196 | 136 | 1272 |
| From the same 11 Districts, in 1837 | 538 | 343 | 154 | 120 | 1152 |
| *The Returns not being complete sets, only eleven were found to correspond for the years 1835 and 1837. | | | | | |
| Decrease in two years | | 62 | 42 | 16 | 117 |

NUMBER OF ADULT MALES, OF THE SUPPOSED AGES (THE WOMEN'S ARE NOT RETURNED)

| Years | | 10 to 20 | 20 to 30 | 30 to 40 | 40 to 50 | 50 to 60 | 60 to 70 | 70 to 80 |
|---|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1835 | of 850 Adult males, from 24 Returns, there were | 99 | 318 | 249 | 100 | 63 | 21 | ... |
| 1836 | of 633 ditto, 15 Returns, ditto | 74 | 261 | 211 | 86 | 39 | 11 | ... |
| 1837 | of 702 ditto, 16 Returns, ditto | 129 | 253 | 193 | 65 | 49 | 10 | 3 |
| The returns note being complete sets, only 11 were found to correspond for the years 1835 and 1837. | | | | | | | | |

December 30, 1837
L.E. THRELKELD

¹⁴ A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time. [Isaiah lx.22

In the Colonial Newspaper, of the 1st September, 1838, the wellknown public organ of the Reverend Doctor **Lang**, the following article is published as a comment on my Report of the Mission to the Aborigines, for the year 1837: —

“In our fourth page will be found the Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines at Lake Macquarie, and we are truly sorry to find any document of this kind presenting so entire a vacuity as it certainly exhibits. Mr. Threlkeld speaks of his hardships, and sacrifices his family have experienced, through his connection with the Mission to the Aborigines.

This is rather new to us we confess. Is it a hardship, or sacrifice, for Mr. Threlkeld and his family to be living at a comfortable homestead, enjoying a comfortable salary, and doing even on their own showing, very little, or no work, while their sheep and cattle are grazing under the care of some third person, along with the Rev. Mr. M’Garvie’s, far up the Hunter?

These Reverend Cattleholders we abominate, one and all of them; at the same time, we are happy to be able to speak in very different terms of the Mission at Wellington Valley. It is evident, from the report of it which we shall publish in our next, that there is something doing there by somebody or other. We had been induced, some time since, to speak rather slightly of that Mission, from the report of persons in the neighbourhood, in whose testimony we placed reliance. We shall be [784] most happy to make the amende honorable, and to bid the Missionaries God speed. Their report is a very interesting one.”

The praises or the censures of the Reverend writer in the *Colonist* are now of little consequence, because truth is never adhered to whenever that writer is personally concerned. The very assertion, that “Their cattle and sheep are grazing under the care of some third person, along with the Rev. Mr. M’Garvie’s, far up the Hunter,” is a perfect falsehood; nor am I in any way connected with that Gentleman. I have not a full flock to supply us with mutton; I have but the produce of twenty-six head of cattle devised to my wife some fourteen years ago, which does not yet supply us with beef! together with a few,

the gift of my esteemed colleague John Williams, Missionary, to my children, some sixteen or eighteen years since; these formed the nucleus of all my stock, which is managed by my son, for the benefit of my numerous family of nine children, and I have yet to learn that Missionaries have not Divine authority “to eat and to drink,” and “to lead about a sister, a wife,” as well as the Apostles and the brethren of the Lord and the Apostle Peter (Cephas)?

Nay, without this assistance^[1] which God has given me, I could not have continued the Mission to the present time. It is astonishing, that a Protestant writer should so far allow his passions to blind his reason, as to advance in effect the Franciscan doctrine, that the followers of Christ “Have no right to common or personal property, nor a power of selling, or alienating any part of it!” — but, are to be held up to the world as heretical characters to be abominated!

What saith the Law of Christ in opposition to the papistical doctrine; or, to a professed religious newspaper, that as a busybody in other men’s matters, revels in scandal, revilings, misrepresentations, and falsehoods, — Thus saith the Lord: — “If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an Infidel.”¹⁵

Acknowledging therefore, as I do, no other canon as the rule for members of Christ, than “The Commandments of the Lord,” contained in his Divinely Inspired Epistles, I laugh to scorn the miserable dogmas that are opposed thereto.

LANCELOT EDWARD THRELKELD.
September 13, 1838.

¹⁵ But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. [1 Tim. v.8]