

Excerpt from a letter by the Rev. F. Huttfield,
a Wesleyan missionary in Bunting, Geelong,
Port Philip.

March 17, 1842

I will now continue to inform you about our mission. We have a land reserve with a radius of five miles for the use of the natives, in this reserve no settlers are allowed to dig. I reached this reserve (which is about 40 miles west of the town of Geelong) on June 18, 1839, with a wagon, tent, etc., to begin the construction of temporary buildings. Since that time, we have built houses for our convenience, improved agriculture, and grown a lot of wheat, potatoes, etc. for the natives. Additionally, about £600 per year was spent on the natives' sole provision of food, clothing, etc., regardless of the missionaries' salaries.

Our plan was to provide the natives with food that would be useful for the station and to supply all children attending school with food and clothing. But after all we can do, and not being able to resist the provision of food and clothing that was granted to them, we have the greatest difficulty in keeping them at the station for longer. Sometimes they leave us all for a few weeks and lose everything they have acquired when they return to us.

Our station is a hub for approximately four tribes, or rather remnants of tribes, which total about 260 people. We initially hoped to concentrate these scattered tribes, but currently we have no prospect of doing so. Because whenever they come together, they seem to have a fatal aversion to settling down, along with other temporary events that lead to frequent bloodshed and murder.

The tribe, which is more closely associated with our mission, is almost extinct. And as a result of the rapid decline in their numbers due to sexual intercourse with Europeans, aggressions among themselves, and natural causes, the prospects for our current mission are of a very discouraging nature.

I am now in the process of visiting new tribes in the interior of the country to see if I can find a more promising location for use. The evils you are complaining about are felt here up to the same starting point, especially those resulting from sexual intercourse with Europeans.

Respecting the language of the Aborigines and introducing them to spiritual teachings are topics that have deeply moved me; and my only hopes depend on the blessing of the almighty God. All mere civilisation systems have so far failed, and if the

Aborigines of Australia are ever to benefit, I am quite convinced that it must be done by the Gospel exerting its full and legitimate influence on them. However, like you yourself, I have noticed that this will be a very difficult task, as I had no predecessor in the work, and was largely obliged to try to do it alone, amidst all the difficulties and procedures that necessarily arise from dealing with uncivilised barbarians.

Judging by your grammar, I think I haven't done as much in the language as you have. However, I can freely converse on all topics. But due to the lack of abstract concepts and terms, particularly those related to the tenets of the Christian religion, these ideas were unknown to them before we introduced them; and it's extremely difficult to instill spiritual teachings into their minds.

Excerpt

The final report of the mission to the Aborigines.

Lake Macquarie, New South Wales 1841

To the Honorable, the Colonial Secretary E. Deas Tomson Esqu. etc. etc. etc.

Ebenezer, Lake Macquarie, New South Wales, December 30, 1841.

Dear Sir, I have the honor to confirm the receipt of your communication of May 18th, in which His Excellency expresses the Governor's pleasure regarding the mission:

Office of the Colonial Secretary, Sydney, May 17, 1841

Dear Reverend, I have been instructed by Mr. George Gipps to inform you that the annual reports you have prepared in recent years, and particularly the report for the year 1840, have been taken into consideration.

His Excellency seems to wish that no further benefits should accrue to the Aborigines from their continued residence at Lake Macquarie, and that the Governor should not respond to the proposal you have made that you relocate to New Castle and continue to receive a salary from the government. His Excellency is reluctantly compelled to inform you that the commitment made with you by the government administration in 1831 will be terminated at the end of the current year.

I have the honor, Your Reverence,
to be your obedient servant,
E. Deas Thomson.

When conveying this decision, it's impossible not to feel considerable disappointment about the expectations that were once held regarding the missionary work among some people, at least among the Aborigines in this part of the colony, and not to express concern that so many years of constant attention seem to have been futilely expended. However, it's perfectly clear that the termination of the mission is solely due to the Aborigines who have become extinct in these districts, and the few who remain * are so scattered that it's impossible to gather them for instruction, and when they are seen in the cities, they are generally not suitable for productive conversations. The thousands of Aborigines, if they ever existed in these parts, have dwindled to hundreds; the hundreds have reduced to tens, and the tens will split into individuals before too many years have passed.

There is a circumstance that expresses the deepest regret, namely: -

If the unfavorable termination of this mission were to tend in any way to shake the other mission efforts in favor of the Aborigines, or to prompt government or private individuals to withhold this present support, without which no mission can be effectively carried out. The administrative costs for this facility amounted to £250 per year for my salary, along with £36 as an allowance for the rations of four boarding school servants. But all other costs, including the support and clothing of natives to keep them around me, both for teaching and for acquiring knowledge of their language, to put the natural grammar of their dialect into a written form, were paid from my own funds. This year, there were no natives provided with food. Their complete independence from Europeans for their natural desires, their habits of wandering, completely prevent any interaction with them.

During my seventeen-year presence(?) among these tribes, the atrocities were not so numerous or extensive that they warranted serious consideration in relation to the decline of the Blacks or to changing the belief that the reduction of people, or of entire nations, is due to the wrath of God, manifested from heaven against all the cruelty and incomprehensibility of mankind.

The mortality rate among the inhabitants of the South Sea islands puts them in a similar melancholic position to the Aborigines of this country, and after a few years, they too will either have become extinct or have intermingled with immigrants from European countries. And so on, and so forth.

Mr. Threlkeld's opinions, compared to other mission stations in New South Wales, which he privately explained in a letter to Mr. Moorhouse, are that in a few years, there will be no missionaries left in New South Wales.