

Nro. 2

Mr. Moorhouse Esqu.
Protector of the Natives.

Port Lincoln, May 18, 1842

Dear Sir, I regret that my absence from the city at the time when "Governor Gawler" sailed to Port Adelaide prevented me from writing to you last month.

The details of the gruesome murder of Mr. Biddle and two of his men by the natives are, I assume, already so well-known that it would be superfluous to say anything more about it. Therefore, I will immediately make a few general remarks about the indigenous people of Port Lincoln, so that the events, which I consider it my painful duty to report, can be better and more easily understood by you.

The natives of Port Lincoln are divided into two main tribes, who refer to themselves in their own language as "Nauro" and "Parnkalla". The former of these is often found on the coast south and west of the settlement and primarily subsists on fish; generally, they are a strong race of people and often gather in comparatively large groups, similar to the natives of Encounter Bay. They differ significantly in dialect and customs from the other tribe, and the men have a distinctive mark in the form of a small ring or circle carved on each shoulder.

The Parkalla tribe is spread across a much larger part of the country, from Port Lincoln in the north, to far beyond Franklin Harbour and across most of the interior. They divided into two smaller tribes, namely "Wambirri Gurarri", meaning coastal people, and "Battara gurarri", meaning rubber tree people, named after their habitat in the interior, where the rubber tree is abundant. However, it must be said that these tribes are not so separated that they do not occasionally mix. On the contrary, they often visit each other in small groups, which explains why stolen property is often found in other tribes rather than just being involved in robberies or murders. The natives of the western and eastern coasts have always and unanimously stated that the murders on Mr. Brown and Mr. Biddle's farm were committed by the "Battara Gurarri" tribe or the inland tribes. It might not be wrong to name those who are referred to as murderers. They are the following:

Milli, Mita, Multa, Mulya, Nung-a, Ngaltia, Nganki, Ngnarbi, Ngurpa, Tyinga,
Wonda, Yailga.

Half of them are said to have been present at the murder of Mr. Brown and his butler.

On **April 2nd**, four days after the death of Mr. Biddle, a mounted group led by Mr. Driver began a pursuit of the murderers, accompanied by me and six natives as guides. At Mr. Driver's request, I went with the group, partly as an interpreter between him and our guides, and partly to communicate, as far as possible, with the natives we were searching for.

Towards evening, we encountered them on our way west, four miles away from Biddles Farm in a narrow valley, surrounded by rugged hills. All of them fled the moment they saw us, except for one, who tried to hide behind a tree, but was shot by one of our group. Three or four others, who stopped halfway up the hill, were also pursued and fired upon, but none of them were hit. We made a short round over the hill and returned to the native camp where our guides had stayed, with whose help we observed four more foreign natives. Three of them ran away, but Ngulga, one of the two natives who first provided information about the details of Mr. Brown's murder, declared that he was not a murderer and was supported by our guides, for which he was tied up. The group followed those other three, but they immediately disappeared into the thicket, and when we returned, not a trace of a native could be seen, even the man who was shot had disappeared.

We now camped in Malli (the name of this place), where we collected a large number of spears, wallets, coats, etc., all of which were burned, and a considerable amount of stolen property, including a chair and a wheelbarrow. Towards morning, we went to Biddles Farm, hoping to find our guides there, as they had been told that we would go there before heading to the killers. However, they were not there and we had to return home, convinced that we would not be able to find the killers without a guide.

A day or two after we returned home, our guides also returned, bringing with them half a dozen valuable forks and spoons from Malli that we had overlooked. It appeared from what they said that they had been frightened because they had misunderstood one of our group who had asked them to show us the refugees, and that they had camped not far from us under the hills on the night we passed through Walli. They had learned from some of the fleeing natives that two men of Mr. Tubbs, Mr. Biddles' shepherds, had been shot, that one was in a dying condition, and that the other, who was the same man who was shot by one of our group, was wounded in the leg, which is why he could not run away with the rest. In addition, another native was injured by our group while they were running up the hill.

I think it's fair to say that I accompanied the group because I was given to understand that the killers, if possible, should be taken prisoner and not shot, if I could help with that. If I had known the type of action that was previously assumed, it would have been my duty not to be present.

On **April 19**. The soldiers and a mounted group went out that day to pursue the murderers. Messrs. Driver and Hugonin wanted me to accompany them to point out the tribes of natives who had not participated in the subsequent murders. The latter gentleman said that his instructions were to take all the natives from Port Lincoln, dead or alive, without discrimination, but when he understood that there were different tribes and that the murders had been committed by only one tribe, he thought I should go with them to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. Under these circumstances, I found it better to reconsider my earlier decision than to have to blame myself later for the shedding of innocent blood through my inaction, and I accompanied the group with two guides from Port Lincoln.

On **April 22**, the headquarters were relocated from Biddles Farm to Palanna, a place about 15 miles west of the city. As we approached this location, our guides observed fresh tracks and told us that there were natives camping in Palanna. The group was therefore split up to surround them, but they must have heard us coming, because they were gone by the time we reached their fires. By this time, it had become quite dark, so a pursuit was no longer possible.

The next morning, the mounted group arrived at a rugged plain towards Coffin Bay, where a fire had been observed. We soon came across numerous traces of natives, which we followed for four miles to Coffin Bay. But by this time, it was already so late and the terrain so rocky that we decided to return to the camp and resume the pursuit on foot the next day.

On **April 25th**. We set off on foot towards Coffin Bay, where the natives we had been tracking the day before yesterday were supposed to be found. The group consisted of Mr. Hugonin and the military unit under his command, Captain Hawson, me, Tunba, a native from Port Lincoln, and a native from Adelaide. As we approached the beach, we heard the voices of natives about a mile away, so we walked some distance from the beach through trees and bushes to prevent the natives from seeing us. Tunba now said it might be Yumbalta and his friends or other natives of the Nauo tribe, and he wanted me to tell the rest. I informed Mr. Hugonin of this and added: "It wouldn't be clear who the natives were and what they were before he allowed them to be fired upon; if it came to that!" His response was: "We'll soon see what they're made of when we get to the beach."

As soon as we had advanced so far that the natives were between us and the sea, we ran towards them in such a way as to surround them. Tunba, who saw them first, now shouted to them: "Leave them alone, it's just Yumbalta", but he was told to be quiet, as it was feared that he might give them an opportunity to escape, which the natives had often done on previous occasions. The moment the natives saw us, they jumped up and declared that they were not the killers. Mr. Hugonin directly ordered not to fire, saying: "That's enough, no! No!" And I myself shouted as loudly as I could not to shoot, but not one of the soldiers stood there who grabbed a pistol from Yumbalta, which, fortunately, was not loaded.

There were three men, two women, and a few children, who were busy frying fish, but then a fourth native joined them, who looked quite wild and presented a most horrifying sight. A musket ball had gone straight through his stomach, so that his entrances from both wounds were pressed. He said to me: "I am Kappler, very well, I am not a murderer, you saw me in Wadnelli, I am an acquaintance," and similarly, other natives accused me of the same. All of this was very true, I saw them on the day when Mr. Biddle was murdered in Wadnelli, a place just two miles from the city, and Numma, the wounded man, had been so familiar in my house that he adopted the name of my servant boy, Kappler.

The soldier who shot him claimed that the native had a spear and was trying to spear him. It was true that he had a spear, but the other natives said that the native was in the water when he was shot, and that several fish were lying by the fire, quite fresh, and a further number were playing in the sea. The soldier also gave himself away, because I heard him say that the native ran back into the water when he saw him aiming the gun at him.

Some items were found in the wallets of the natives, which seemed to have been taken from Mr. Biddle's station. Yumbalta, who had been one of our guides to Walli, identified them by saying that he had picked them up at that place. Mr. Hugonin initially intended to take the wounded man to his doctor and the remaining prisoners, but upon my explanation that I had seen them on the day Mr. Biddle was murdered, he abandoned this plan. Numma begged so earnestly to be allowed to stay where he was that it seemed cruel to take him away, and he was clearly visibly dying. As we were leaving, he reached out for my handkerchief, with which he covered his face, and said once again: "I Kappler very well".

Before we left the 12 or 25 natives, other natives of the same tribe approached us, likely attracted by the report of the musket. Tumba met them and they approached unarmed, but timidly. I knew all of them except for three or four, whose names, however, did not correspond to those of the killers. They seemed friendly, but paid little attention to the wounded man, but urged us to leave. As soon as we had gone, they began a loud and pitiful lament over their presumably deceased friend. After the crying had stopped, a voice could be heard making very violent and abrupt noises. I asked Tumba what it meant, to which he replied that they were scolding him for bringing us to them, and that they would gradually spear him.

When I now saw that the object of my companionship was frustrating the expedition and that it would probably not suffice for the future, I left the group the next morning and returned to the city. I felt that it was incompatible with my character as a missionary and harmful to my good faith with the natives to witness transactions like those described above. The group returned about a week after me, without having seen any more natives.

On **May 7**. Following a report brought to the city by some fishermen, there was a large group of natives on the south coast of Port Lincoln, who were searching for soldiers and some volunteers in a small group. From the fact that the area where this community of natives had gathered was in Nauo land, and from the description of one of those who had seen and hunted kangaroos with them, namely that they were all painted white (which is the sign of mourning among the natives of Port Lincoln), I was convinced that they could be none other than the Nauo tribe.

The following day, the group returned and brought Palulta, an old, white man who was already senile, and two women with their small children as prisoners. I heard that two men had been shot and that several others must have been wounded. Wornawa, one of the female prisoners, stated that five had fallen, namely Munta and Jubus, two of our former leaders, Tyilye and Jalerilla, two boys aged about 10 to 12, and Ngulga, who was found among the killers in Malli's camp. Some stolen property was found with the natives. The prisoners admitted that part of it had been given to them by the murderer Ngarbi, and the other part, a dog and a piece of canvas, which were stolen after the murders at Mr. Driver's farm, had been left with them by Tyukalta, a member of the East Coast tribe. They were released by the judge on the same day and went back to their tribe or the next morning.

Because this time, no natives have come to the settlement, and I fear that they probably won't come for some time, at least not in a friendly manner.

I have the honor, most esteemed sir, to remain your most obedient servant.

C. W. Schürmann