

pr[esented] in Dresden d. 27/3 [18]43

Pastor Wermelskirch
in Dresden.

Adelaide, August 22, 1842

Dear Pastor!

First of all, I must apologize to you for my long silence, or, if I fail to do so, at least ask you to attribute my lack of writing to reasons other than my laziness or perhaps even a lack of love. Frequent changes of residence, preoccupation with mundane matters, and especially the intention to wait and see how things develop in Port Lincoln in the future, have so far delayed my writing.

I have now been in Adelaide for two months, where I was called to assist in the interrogations of three natives from Port Lincoln. I could have returned earlier, if it hadn't been for the government's indecision about whether to abandon the settlement in Port Lincoln or not, which has kept me in uncertainty until now. Moreover, I myself was not sure whether it would be wiser to stay at my post until news from the company could be obtained, or to give it up immediately. I would have decided without hesitation for the latter, if I could have found a suitable and permanent sphere of influence in another part of the colony, and means of subsistence for at least a year.

I won't need to say much about my activities and the noteworthy events in Port Lincoln since my last letter, because the former have been almost exclusively limited to learning the language, and the latter are largely described in the attached reports to the protector of the indigenous people.

Among these, it should be mentioned that a native named Kungka was shot in an extremely brutal manner by a white man a few months before the tragic murders; however, he survived. He immediately came to me to complain about his suffering, after which the perpetrator was arrested. But since natives are not allowed to testify under English law, he was released again. As there have also been several cases of this kind in Adelaide, I cannot refrain from noting that the protection and privileges that the natives are supposed to derive from the much-vaunted English subjecthood are actually very precarious. According to this law, they can be legally interrogated and punished as soon as a Christian finds himself, with a good or bad conscience, swearing an oath against them; but they can never invoke the protection of the laws for themselves, as they are not allowed to swear an oath and their statements are not valid without one.

My dictionary, which I collected during my stay in Port Lincoln and which consists of nearly 2000 words, I handed over to the governor at his request in a transcript, which he sent to the Royal Geographical Society.

Since my salary from the government sufficed for my needs and I received no other support, I feel compelled to make up for the shortfall through my own work. Last year, I had two English mornings of excellent wheat, which together yielded 45 bushels. This year, I have only four. During my stay in Adelaide, I hoped to persuade the government to increase my salary to £100, but I received no response. Instead, I noticed from the cost estimate for 1843 that it was set at £50. Since this sum is by no means sufficient and Port Lincoln seems to me to be an entirely unsuitable mission station, it is my intention to terminate my relationship with the government after the end of this year, or at the latest after receiving a response to this letter. I have no doubt that the society will grant my request to be transferred to another people as a missionary. Perhaps this request comes as a surprise to you, but I have considered it carefully and believe I can cite reasons that you will consider valid and sufficient.

I firmly believe that the almighty power of the Gospel can grasp and change even the most ignorant and depraved people, if it is possible to implant it thoroughly and persistently in their hearts. However, the latter is the knot that seems indissoluble to me regarding the South Australian natives, at least for the forces of the Lutheran Society. The natives are a nomadic people, as is well known; going with them to learn their language and then preaching to them might not even be safe in many cases, and considering how scattered they are in small groups and how costly such a way of life would be, I do not recommend it at all, at least not as a rule. Where large cities or other sources of food gather the natives, such as Adelaide and in Encounter Bay for several months of whaling, their way of life does change, but it is not much more beneficial for the missions.

From morning to evening, every day, not excluding Sundays, you can see them begging at the doors of the Whites or carrying salt and water to earn a very meager living. As a result, the missionary only has limited opportunities to provide them with the essentials, and in addition, they learn all sorts of bad habits in speech and behavior, and fall into a terrible disease that usually either kills all newborns and many adults, or disfigures and paralyzes them. The only way to save these unfortunate people, as I have always believed, is to settle them in their own places, perhaps following the model of the Brethren communities among the Hottentots of South Africa. I am so firmly convinced of this view that I would not mind even using moderate coercion if the natives were unable to recognize their own salvation.

But where are the resources for such companies? The government does nothing and will do nothing as long as Grey is at the helm. The colonists can do even less, because they are usually busy with their own affairs. Society (and I wholeheartedly agree) has declared the principle of donating its resources only to promote the Kingdom of God and not to engage in colonization. So who should help here? Of

course, the government could and should do it, as it has either cut off or greatly reduced the natives' food sources, but who can motivate them to do so?

If success were more likely than can be expected after the events in New South Wales and Port Philip, she might be more inclined to take risks. However, Governor Grey firmly believes that the indigenous people will disappear within a few decades, which naturally implies that he considers all the resources spent on them to be wasted.

From all of this, I have come to the conviction that society would do well to abolish the entire mission in South Australia as soon as possible. This is certainly a harsh statement that no one likes to hear, and I am reluctant to say it; nevertheless, I consider it my duty to present the state of the mission to them as I see it, so that society will not be deceived. The other brothers are actually of the same opinion, because even if they do not all vote for giving up the mission, they nevertheless view the situation of the natives and the resulting difficulties in the same light as I have just described. Our old friend, Pastor Stow, said a few days ago that after the cessation of Angass's support, there could no longer be any reason for the Dresden Society to maintain missionaries in the colony. This field does not seem suitable for our society, because a missionary society should have general purposes and cannot devote all its efforts to a particular, not very promising (if we assume the best) point. You may perhaps refer us to the recently established Mission Aid Society, but you can be sure that it will end just as quickly and unnoticed as many other similarly enthusiastically undertaken projects in the colony.

Moreover, they collect or demand their contributions in a way that no one can find acceptable, and this has led me to decide not to take a single penny from them, unless necessity forces me to do so.

It seems natural to me that when you read this letter, you will ask: if it's about the natives and the mission, what could have prompted you to write about the dispatch of Brothers Meyer and Klose? I admit that I haven't been able to forgive myself for this mistake yet, but the lack of experience and the vigorous way in which the excellent Governor Gawler dealt with the natives will hopefully excuse it to some extent.

Added to the hopeless prospects of the mission, which weigh heavily on the mind, are all sorts of other things that are not conducive to a cheerful mood. Here I lead my solitary life in Port Lincoln, and although I'm not currently suffering from a lack of necessary food, I must admit that I've grown tired of cooking. Moreover, a sensible and inexpensive sense of honor is often violated.

They know that the English, even the believers among them, are a cold-hearted, calculating people who do everything in a businesslike manner. Therefore, they cannot understand the society's stance that they are only willing to support us if their resources permit. Many people who know our situation, although they don't exactly consider us adventurers, do find us a bit foolish. It seems to me that the letter from

the Committee to the Society was written from this or a similar viewpoint, which I didn't like at all. You might say that all these things are so insignificant that they shouldn't bother us much. That may be true, but what else is there to hold onto when our professional work seems to be in vain or can't even be implemented? There's nothing left but a cold feeling of superfluity that haunts me forever, and I'll hardly ever forget South Australia.

Therefore, dear Pastor, I once again earnestly request a transfer to East India or wherever you deem fit, provided that the people to whom you want to send me are settled in one place. In Port Lincoln, you can see for yourself that I cannot stay, because even if the government does not give in to the settlement, it will never do anything for the local natives there.

They might advise us to go to Encounter Bay, but what would we do there? Learn a new language and preach? Brother Meyer could do that almost as well on his own as the two of us. Build houses and farm for the natives, perhaps? To make this the missionary's task without providing him with the necessary means is to remind him of the fate of that unfortunate man who was supposed to roll a heavy stone up a steep mountain, but could only get it a short distance, only to see it fall back into the abyss.

From the excerpts and letters of the missionaries Threlkeld and Huttfield, you will see that even with greater resources, they have achieved nothing and can do nothing among the Australian natives. The Wesleyans, it has been reported, intend to abandon their missionaries in Port Philip.

Perhaps the news that the Wesleyans intend to be our successors, should we vacate the field, might reassure society. Thus, the natives would not be completely abandoned if the society were to withdraw its support from us.

I just want to add that, if the society, despite the bleak prospects of the mission and my urgent desire, does not consider it appropriate to transfer me, it would certainly not be an unreasonable request from me and the other brothers to give us a fixed salary, namely by accreditation with a bank, so that we do not have to depend on always uncertain shipments from Europe. £ 125, in our opinion, is definitely not too much!

I would see the society spend an annual sum of £500 for South Australia, but if they were to demand that we stay here, I don't see how they could avoid biting the bullet. Their advice to try to make the mission independent of support from Germany seems to me only feasible if we become farmers ourselves, and if that's the case, then we're certainly not missionaries.

Well, I know, dear Pastor, that what I have written is a matter of no small importance; therefore, my sincere prayer is that the Lord may grant you and the other committee members wisdom and grace to come to such convictions and decisions in this matter

that are beneficial and salutary to the holy work.

My greetings to the dear Pastor and her family, the brothers in the seminary, and all other brothers and friends. Commending myself to your intercession, I remain

Your humble brother in the Lord.

C. W. Schürmann

Addendum from August 29th.

The governor has finally decided to allocate £100 to the Dresden Society for the coming year, on the condition that the society maintains a missionary in Port Lincoln. The title of "Sub-Protector" will be abolished, and the missionary will be under the control of the government's resident. After this decision, some parts of the previous letter will need to be understood, which I can't change anymore because I have to board a ship tonight. Although my external situation in Port Lincoln seems to be improving for the future, I'm still returning there with a heavy heart, convinced that I'll have little opportunity to practice my profession among the natives. Therefore, I'm not withdrawing my request for a transfer at all, but rather I'm asking that the society not be encouraged by the government's support of £100 to keep me in my hopeless field of work. What's the use of money if the door remains closed?

C. W. Schürmann