

No. 26

Received February 12, 1845

To the Committee of the
Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society
in Dresden.

Port Lincoln, August 19, 1844

Dear brethren!

Your letters of January 19th and 20th, the first one addressed to us, and all the others specifically to me, reached me the day before yesterday. Now that there's finally an opportunity to return to Adelaide and from there to London shortly, after a long interruption of almost two months, I'm rushing to reply to them, after first reporting on my missionary activities.

From my last letter written to Adelaide in March, which accompanied our joint report on the then-current state and prospects of the South Australian mission, you will have seen that my collection of words in the Parnkalla dialect was printed at the governor's expense. This work kept me busy until the middle of May, except for a few days around Easter, which I spent with Brother Meyer and his lovely family.

After the copies of the vocabulary you received with this, you want to assess the extent of my familiarity with the local language. It will not escape your notice that this is still very limited, and I am well aware of it myself. Language learning, which must precede any direct and actual missionary work, is a difficult and tedious task, which is not accelerated by diligence and zeal, but rather perfected by patience and perseverance. To a certain extent, one can indeed persuade the natives to share their language and explain the meaning of words; but when the physical scope of the language is exhausted and one comes to the intellectual realm of abstract concepts and notions, all tricks and efforts are futile. Here, the missionary, on the one hand, ponders and strives to understand the meaning of a heard word or to find a corresponding word for a given concept; but the native, on the other hand, often just as eager to make himself understood, but without a third means of communication, they cannot teach each other. Patient attention, quick comprehension, and a vivid imagination can alone make a difference here.

It's clear from your letter that you overestimate my progress in the language. When you mention the execution of a young native, you write: "Surely you're already familiar enough with the language to teach a poor wretch facing death the simplest concepts of repentance, mercy through the Son of God, damnation, and salvation." If only that were the case, then everything we're trying to achieve would be accomplished. Repentance and mercy through the Son of God - what do these words not presuppose? At the very least, an awareness of sin, and this in turn leads to a holy, just God who punishes sin, and mercy through the Son of God - can this be understood through the consciousness of the need for redemption? It's hard to find a word in all of New Holland that fully expresses this concept, at most the approximate "forgiveness", which I'm still unfamiliar with, perhaps because I've never seen a native ask for forgiveness for an offense committed. They're very reluctant to give up when discord arises, and they either end it with insults or blows, and then forget about it later.

On **May 19th**, I left Adelaide after having submitted a petition to the governor a few days earlier with Mr. Hook (a well-educated man from Lübeck with spiritual inclinations and a church-oriented mindset) to establish a settlement for the indigenous people of Port Lincoln, away from the city and the sheep farms. Mr. Hook, who is a professional landman, offered his services for a modest fee, and estimated the costs for the first year at £200, which included the expenses for draft horses, farming equipment, wages and food for a worker, but not his salary. The governor received the proposal very favorably, invited me to a verbal discussion about it, and said that although he currently lacked the funds to proceed, he intended to keep the plan in mind and hoped that Hook and I would do the same.

On ~~August~~ **May 22nd**, after a short and pleasant journey, I arrived back in Port Lincoln. I encountered the last traces of the significant upheavals that had occurred among the settlers during my absence, related to the indigenous people among them. When I left Port Lincoln, a considerable number of blacks were gathered near the city, some of whom had previously been accused of murder. I used to visit them in the evening, when they gathered in their huts, and warned the suspects not to be too bold, and to refrain from stealing in the future, which they promised to comply with.

They alone gradually began to steal grain from the fields, first the women during the day, who were allowed to pick up ears of corn, and were foolishly not immediately dismissed by the owner if they tampered with the sheaves. Emboldened by this, they stole entire piles of unthreshed wheat at night after my departure, and one morning, when the owner was retrieving what had been stolen, they threw two or three spears at him, probably just to scare him.

Afterwards, they broke into two uninhabited huts standing outside in the field and took grain again. One of these thefts was immediately discovered, and since it was already evening and the fires of the suspected perpetrators were seen not far away, they were pursued. When the pursuers arrived, all of them fled, and two of the latter

fired their rifles, but fortunately they did not go off, because it turned out that the two men who were targeted were among the best and most peace-loving people in the city. These have since told me that although they did not take the wheat, the guilty parties were present and escaped in the darkness.

Shortly afterwards, the ringleaders of these thefts, who belong to the northwestern tribe of Ngannityddi and rarely come near the city, attacked a herd of sheep and killed four of them, carrying them away in the presence of the shepherd, at whom they threw a spear, simultaneously warning him with signs and words not to come closer. The shepherd immediately rushed home, reported the incident, and led the owner on the trail, who pursued them on horseback, caught up with them, and shot one of them in the arm, but let him escape again immediately.

The victim is a foolish, clumsy person who probably couldn't run as fast as the others. The shepherd accused a young man, who always stays in the city and has a good reputation, of having thrown the spear at him, even though the accused came to the city fearlessly for the interrogation and all the other natives could prove that he had been elsewhere at the same time. Nevertheless, he would undoubtedly have been arrested and sent to Adelaide for investigation, if the shepherd hadn't had to admit that the distance was too great for the native to have intended to harm him.

Here, I cannot fail to mention that the Colonial Government has finally introduced a law, which is intended to enable the natives to give witness statements. As I hear, there's every likelihood that it will be approved by the legislative council and will soon come into effect. This is a measure that every friend of the indigenous people and justice will welcome.

If the incidents just described had aroused concern among the colonists, they were completely filled with horror when some natives brought news that a small cutter had been stranded about 30 English miles north of Port Lincoln, and it was believed that the crew, which could not be found anywhere, had been killed. No one could understand what the natives were saying; but the absence of the crew, the looting of the vehicle, and some bloodstains on the clothes found in a native camp and stolen from the ship seemed to clearly support this assumption.

A group of police and volunteers were sent out, but they returned without accomplishing anything. Whether by chance, or intimidated by the unfounded suspicion of the whites, most of the natives kept their distance. When finally a small number approached the city and their fires were seen in the evening, the magistrate sent two police officers to investigate who they were and how many there were. The natives fled, except for one, whom the police shot. The police said they wanted to arrest the man because they believed he was involved in the robbery of that cutter and the alleged murder of its crew; but he resisted and seized their two rifles. The other natives, who had initially fled, returned when they heard the gunfire and threatened to spear them, and they then shot the man in self-defense. However, the natives who

were present claimed that the police had crept up silently while they were sitting around their fires and had fired repeatedly, despite their protests that they were known individuals. They categorically denied that they had threatened to spear the police.

The police officers brought some Guineas [British gold coins], which were discovered on the Thistle Island, where a crewless cutter had been drifting from its anchor at night and stranded on the coast. They claimed to have found them in the murdered man's sack, but they cruelly abandoned the mortally wounded man to his fate during the long and cold winter night. Three residents, who visited the spot immediately afterwards, saw him lying helplessly there, and although he identified himself to them and called one of them by name, they passed by like the priest and Levite. The next morning, he was found still alive, but died on the way to the city, where he was buried in the prison yard like an executed criminal.

This poor man was named Padlalta, belonged to the Nauo tribe, and was of a gentle and extremely harmless character, so that he was generally popular among the colonists, some of whom expressed their dismay that it wasn't someone else who was killed instead of him. At the time when Major O'Halloran was here, he was captured, but upon my knowledge of him and his innocence, he was immediately released, for which he repeatedly kissed my hands. The day before his murder (for I can't call it anything else), he had still been in the city and had done small jobs for the residents. Only the police reports were reported to Adelaide, carefully omitting all other circumstances, such as the callous abandonment of the wounded man. The natives tell me that a woman stayed with him overnight, but the police didn't know this, nor could they have known it, but rather assumed that they wouldn't dare to approach him.

All of the above happened during my stay in Adelaide. However, I carefully investigated the facts and have since reported them to Mr. Forster, Angus's agent in Adelaide, because the reports from other sources were highly biased.

On **May 29th**, I started farming with the natives again, where Mr. Driver, the magistrate and government official here, promised to reward each worker with two pounds of flour from the government daily. We first cleared the land sown in previous years of the remaining tree trunks, and then sowed the wheat on June 4th, without plowing or digging the land beforehand. After that, we repaired the fence that had been burned down in the summer, and cleared the remaining three English acres, which were enclosed in the fence but had been too late to cultivate last year, of trees. Mr. Driver offered to provide his team of oxen and a plow if I wanted to procure the seed wheat and a driver. I had to buy the former, but I provided the latter myself, because the native inhabitants cannot be used to drive the oxen, partly due to their clumsiness, but mainly because the cattle are afraid of them and run away at their sight.

On the first of July, all the work was completed and the wheat was sown. Although the season was far advanced, as one usually sows here in the country in May, I still hope, with God's blessing, for a good harvest from the three last-sown acres, in the persistently wet weather; but from the first sown and only harrowed land, the seeds were completely eaten up by crows and magpies. These birds are a real scourge of the land, against which no amount of scaring or shooting can protect. Moreover, they not only eat up the seeds lying on the surface, but the crows dig them out deep from the earth with their long beaks, even after the germ is already visible.

In the past six weeks, it has rained continuously with only minor interruptions, and the valleys and hills have been so softened by the moisture that one can neither drive nor ride. For this reason, the monthly flour distributions, which are carried out by government officials on the day of the full moon and at a location about a day's journey from the city, but otherwise at any convenient place, and which I usually accompany, have been omitted. In the city, there were ultimately only a few native inhabitants, and those who are here are engaged by the residents in various ways, mainly with grinding on hand mills. To keep them as close to me as possible, I have bought such a mill, which will also be used next summer to grind their own wheat.

A great evil is that most residents keep them busy on Sundays just as they do on weekdays. If people wanted to stay with one master permanently, one could reasonably ask the latter to feed them for free on Sundays; but since they themselves change their employers almost daily and many do so several times a day, and they still want to eat on Sundays and no one wants to give it to them for free, I don't see what can be done about this bad habit. I try to draw them away from the house where I live on Sundays and talk to them as much as I can, after which they of course always expect something to eat. I then tell them about Jehovah (I don't use the English word "God" because the natives rarely hear it otherwise than as a curse), the great spirit or soul (Wilyatmanna), who made everything and hears and sees everything we say or do. He will take those who obey his commandments, which I can only explain in a summarized form to them, into his house in heaven, while those who disobey will be thrown into the fiery pit (gadlaiyappa) or, as they themselves correctively say, "stuck in it" (nudlutu). They listen to this and similar things (the preaching of the law is easier in linguistic terms than that of the gospel) and don't exactly doubt it, but they're not at all disturbed in their lazy indifference by it, believing and saying that this is the Europeans' talk (here as much as faith or tradition) and theirs is different. By this they mean: Your religion may be true and good enough for you, but it doesn't concern us blacks.

Brother Klose writes to me that he was asked by you to explain the term "Battara gurarri" used in my letters. "Battara" refers to a rubber tree and "gurarri" to men, both combined but are the name for a division of the Parakalla tribe, borrowed from the many rubber trees in the area where that division resides. These "Battara gurarri" are notorious among the settlers for the murder they committed against Biddle and Brown two years ago.

Since my arrival, I have come into contact with indigenous people from three different tribes. The first is the Parakalla tribe, which extends along the north coast, north of the tip of Spencer Gulf, and whose dialect I have been trying to learn exclusively. The second is the Nauo tribe, which lives in the west and speaks a dialect closely related to Parakalla, so that the two can understand each other. Finally, there is the Ngannityiddi tribe in the northwest. I am completely unfamiliar with the latter dialect, but it seems not to be very different from the Nauo language. In addition to these, the indigenous people themselves mention several other tribes, notably the Kukatus, who live far to the west and north, to whom they attribute various bad things, such as heat and drought, pampas storms, disease, etc. They believe that these men take the form of a large bird and can harm a hated person unnoticed overnight, causing their death. They call this imaginary bird of prey "Márallye" in their language. I have long intended to write a more detailed description of the local tribes, but I have postponed it so far because most of their customs are still unknown to me.

They used to have a definite aversion to letting a stranger see these customs, probably fearing that the women and children might find out about them, which they keep secret with anxious care. However, they have now promised to inform me in the future where and when they plan to perform them. They always choose the summer for this, when it's warm and they live together in larger numbers. In the winter, however, they disperse more and live in families or small groups in their territories, except for the Nauo's that live on fish, which usually live together or in larger groups.

With reference to the arrangement contained in your general letter to have six-weekly or at least quarterly conferences, I must ask you to make an exception for me, because traveling to sea more often would be too costly and time-consuming, not to mention the inconvenience. The round trip costs at least £4, and last time my journey to Adelaide took 10 days. It's not uncommon for a whole month to pass without any opportunity. I think once or at most twice a year should be enough, but I'm happy to provide the information you've recommended for the brothers across the water. So far, I've always sent my reports to the committee for your forwarding and prior review, and thus far, your intention has been fulfilled in advance.

Your special letter to me contains many complaints and accusations, which may be deserved in one way or another, and against which I therefore generally do not dare to defend myself; nevertheless, they also seem to me to be partly based on misunderstandings and a lack of understanding of the actual situation of the South Australian indigenous people.

So when they instructed me to ask the hanged Maltia about the senseless views of his people in the face of his death. The purpose of my question was to find out what was going on in his soul, whether he had anything to comfort himself with, and to perhaps find a starting point for further discussion about divine matters. By no means was it my intention to educate myself, because the natives' views on the state of the soul

after death were already well-known to me, and if they hadn't been, you would trust me that in those gruesome moments, I was just as little inclined to cold-hearted investigations as the poor man himself. His answer proved that his heart was only filled with the thought of his impending death and the desire to escape it, so there was little to talk about with him about the salvation of his soul, even if this had been within my power, which was not the case.

Furthermore, you say: I always complain about bad conditions, which are, however, far from as bad as those Egede and the messengers of the Brethren's Church found in Greenland and Labrador. If by 'bad conditions' you mean the personal hardships of the missionaries, I agree, but in that case I'm not aware of any repeated complaints, at least I don't remember them if they slipped my mind. But if by 'bad conditions' you mean obstacles and difficulties in instructing, converting, and educating the heathens, arising from their moral and social state, then I doubt that these were greater in Greenland or Labrador, or anywhere else in the world, than here. Supposing that among the Greenlanders and Eskimos superstition, infanticide, polygamy, or even more complete licentiousness regarding honest relationships prevailed, as among the Australian aborigines, and that they also led a nomadic life; then again, much was gained from the missionaries standing alone, thus forming the sole point of attraction for curiosity and not having to fight against annoyances from God and negligent Christians.

Although this is often mentioned, it seems not to be given enough attention that the lack of food and the resulting habitual nomadic lifestyle of the indigenous people of New Holland are the main obstacles to missionary efforts. The missionary should preferably overcome this with spiritual weapons, a struggle that seems very uneven. However, nothing is impossible with God, and once faith and love for the Lord awaken in the heart, then childlike obedience to God's will and all domestic and social virtues will not be lacking. But the question arises whether we have the right to expect these successes and the overall prosperity of our work before the Lord if we humans do not do our part. And here I consider it a duty to say on behalf of the indigenous people that we are failing. They often tell me that they want to gather and settle in Kunta, a region they like about 30 English miles from the city, if I live there, and acquire oxen, plows, etc. for farming and send them, i.e. they want me to command or guide them. However, I know from experience that one cannot rely too much on the promises of the natives, because they are always accustomed to giving in to their momentary desires. But I believe that they would demonstrate some seriousness in this case, and that especially the small number of European inhabitants should be considered a favorable circumstance.

All these considerations prompted me to submit a petition to the governor, the outcome of which I mentioned above. I often wonder, dear brothers, whether you, as a committee with your prestige and influence, and the resources at your disposal, could not influence the government to settle the native tribes? What we need is a piece of land, if possible secluded, draft animals, farming tools, and provisions for a

year. The longer we wait to settle the natives, the more difficult it will become, as people get used to wandering among Europeans instead of in the wilderness, as can be seen with the Adelaide tribes. The current situation is greatly hampering and preventing the employment of existing resources, as demonstrated by Brother Lührs, who gave up the original purpose of his emigration because he realized that he could not directly benefit the mission and the natives.

The merciful and faithful God, who wants to preserve us, the unworthy and incompetent, to look upon us with grace and to grant us what we and you ask of him, namely faith, love, patience and wisdom, and thus to distinguish us for the glory of his glorious name and for the piety of our poor fellow human beings, for the sake of the good of our beloved Savior. *

I remain with all respect, your fellow brother.

C. W. Schürmann