

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

# GOVERNMENT RESIDENT'S REPORT ON THE NORTHERN TERRITORY FOR THE YEAR 1889.

No. 69/90.

South Australia, Northern Territory: Office of the Government Resident,  
Palmerston, February 3rd, 1890.

Sir—I have the honor to place before you my report on the affairs of the Northern Territory for the year 1889.

### PASTORAL.

In my report for 1888 an unfortunate clerical error occurred in the first line, the word "figures" was copied instead of "rents," so that it should have read "the rents connected with the pastoral interest show a very satisfactory result," referring to the increased amount received for rent of £9,707 over that of 1887. This error led to some contradictory statements in Parliament and the press; I therefore give this explanation and correction.

The serious character and extent of Redwater is a subject which must be dealt with if pastoral settlement is to progress. I have now for some years urged upon the Government the advisableness of instituting a thoroughly expert inquiry, so as to ascertain what steps should be taken to eradicate it. I beg to state in the clearest and most emphatic manner that until this is done it is useless for the Government to expect that pastoral lessees and cattle-breeders will run the risks of stocking up their country.

The letters and reports of Mr. H. W. H. Stevens, J.P., and of Mr. Alfred Giles, J.P., contained in my report for 1888, show the magnitude of this evil, and the urgency which exists for investigation. Other pastoralists, with whom I have been in correspondence and conversation, are equally pressing in their demands for Government action.

There has been, I understand, a general acceptance all round of the proposal that the pastoral lessees of the country affected should share in the expense and assist as a board of advice to any scientific veterinary surgeon who might be commissioned by the Government to conduct the inquiry. I can only repeat and reurge the recommendation contained in my last report that "a thoroughly expert veterinary surgeon, who is also an analytical chemist and botanist, should be engaged to spend a wet and dry season in the dangerous district, gather his data, and report his conclusions."

I may add that, from a merely revenue point of view, to institute this inquiry and thoroughly investigate the cause of this disease or these diseases, and show how they may be avoided or cured, would be a policy of the extremest economy. The rents from the pastoral areas, which now are waste lands of the Crown, and the revenue that would flow into the treasury of the Northern Territory through the Customs and other sources, would, in a single year, probably cover the expenditure required. In addition, it would free the Northern Territory from an odium and a disparagement which persistently cling to it in the minds of overlanders and stockowners; and as our own country, and also that of Western Australia, must be stocked from the eastern and southern colonies, safe stock routes could be laid down.

I wish to direct attention to my last report *re* Redwater, in which the Elsey was mentioned in connection with a stock route; and in Mr. Stevens' letter the following sentence occurs:—"Mr. McIntosh, of Queensland, was travelling through to West Australia, with some 700 mixed cattle, and lost over 300 head about Abraham's billabong, this side of the Elsey Cattle Station." On this I have received from Mr. G. Warland, J.P., manager of the Elsey Station, a letter complaining of these statements, as casting a "stigma" on the Elsey Station, and further stating that "for nearly five years this run has been under my own personal management. Neither Redwater, as it is called, nor any complaint has been ever on the run or in the Elsey herd of cattle." I have informed Mr. Warland that the paragraphs in the report, which, indeed, in no way reflected upon the Elsey Station, were written on the authority of Mr. Stevens, who gave his name. Since then Mr. Stevens has communicated with Mr. McIntosh, who has replied as follows, under date December 20th, 1889:—"I am very glad to see that you are trying to get the Government to send a competent person to find out the cause of the "Redwater" disease. I trust your efforts to do this will be successful, as I have no doubt the result will prove to be for the benefit of the Northern Territory generally. My losses were about 310 head out of 637, and I attribute this loss to the waters of the Red Lily lagoon, Duck and Elsie creeks. The first symptoms of the disease showed out about a week after passing these places, at Abraham's billabong, and these were a drowsiness and sluggishness and an utter indifference to feed." It is generally stated that "Redwater" (so called) does not attack acclimatised or Territory-born stock.

Under the circumstances above mentioned, it is to me a source of gratification that the pastoral industry is in so good a position as it is. Naturally, with disease sweeping off hundreds out of travelling herds, a falling off in the area held under lease and the area declared to be stocked would be expected to result. It is surprising to me that the diminution is so small.

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kong and the Straits Settlements, for the control of such societies, should be passed by the South Australian Parliament. It is to be noted with deep regret that for some months past the European population has been seriously reduced, and every safeguard should be adopted to maintain law and order. My views on the general question of Chinese as settlers are well known. The fact to be considered is that at least 6,000 of them are here—some by the direct introduction of the Government, all of them by the sanction of Parliament. If the present Act is maintained they will undoubtedly be a diminishing quantity in the population, as there will be more emigrants than immigrants, and there will, of course, be deaths. I will only add this, that there appears to be a most inveterate misapprehension in the minds of some South Australian legislators as to the true state of affairs. There are as many Chinese here as are required for all general purposes, and if at any time more were required for special purposes, there is power under clause 3 of the Act to declare exemptions and introduce them.

#### THE ABORIGINES.

In the neighborhood of Palmerston and the settled districts north of the Katherine the natives have been peaceful. From the best information I can obtain the tribes who originally possessed the country which is now goldfield A are gradually withering away. The Larrakeeyahs around Palmerston appear to be maintaining their numbers. But the reports from the outside country, east and west, are that the blacks are beginning to understand the conditions under which the white man holds the country of which they consider they have been robbed. A station-manager informed me some time ago, that an "old man" blackfellow said to him, "I say, boss, whitefellow stop here too long with him bullocky. Now time whitefellow take him "bullocky and clear out. This fellow country him blackfellow country."

After careful inquiry I am of opinion that this is the attitude of the aborigines towards Europeans. Entrance into their country is an act of invasion. It is a declaration of war, and they will halt at no opportunity of attacking the white invaders. The well-known experiences of those who have been on the north coast of Australia, and those who have visited Melville Island, conclusively proves that the wild blacks are utterly unreliable and incapable of appreciating kindness. My own experience on the trip across Melville Island is to me conclusion sure that it is useless to attempt to win the natives by tucker or gifts. We were a strong party. So far as we could understand the gesticulations of the "old man" who came to our camp, we were ordered away and warned that if we slept there blackfellows would come from each point of the compass to spear us. We tried to propitiate this ancient islander, his gins, and an outskirmishing scout who was in attendance, by going out to them with food, nagras, and handkerchiefs. They would only take anything from the end of a long pole, and then apparently threw everything contemptuously away. That night they attacked our camp. The next day they speared our leader, Mr. Phil. Saunders. On the last day we were on the island, although not a bullet had been shot, except in self-defence, nor a revolver had been even aimed at a blackfellow, just while we were leaving an island we had tramped across with great fatigue, they flung five spears in the midst of and around us. Fortunately no one was hit, but so far as the blacks were concerned they meant to spear and kill five white men.

In accord with this experience of my own are the reports I have received from the inland stations. The primary fact which philanthropists must accept is that the aborigines regard the land as theirs, and that the intrusion of the white man is a declaration of war, and the result is simply "the survival of the fittest."

I am well aware that there are many odious things done by whites, but I believe I express the opinion of nine-tenths of those who have taken their lives in their hands and gone into the back blocks when I say that occupation of the country for pastoral purposes and peaceable relations with the native tribes are hopelessly irreconcilable. There is a straight issue presented for the philanthropist, the statesman, and the capitalist to consider. Does the land inalienably belong to the aborigines, who have from time immemorial occupied it and exercised tribal rights over it? If so the pastoralist must clear out, and the philanthropist and the missionary must come in. If the land is, however, too wide for the nomadic population, how shall the "real property" interests of the aborigines be preserved?

I have been compelled by my official position and circumstances to give serious attention to this question. I have had long conferences with Inspector Foelsche and Mr. E. O. Robinson, than whom there are no two gentlemen on the north coast of Australia who know so much about the blacks, their habits and rules of life. For the most part I think the Malthusian principle of keeping down population is only practised to a limited extent. The rivers with their swarms of game, the billabongs with their fecundity of lily-roots, the plains with their lizards, snakes, iguanas, and ground game, offer an almost inexhaustible supply to the wily native. They are all nomads. Except in the immediate neighborhood of Palmerston, they erect few humpies. They have no settled camping place, except as arranged by dry or wet season arrangements, and the different tribal practices connected with the "making of young men" and other matters belonging to their tribal life.

During the period I have been Government Resident I have pressed upon successive Governments the absolute duty of the State to consider the conditions and provide for the future protection of the wild tribes who are living on this coast. Up to date all my suggestions, which have been printed in the Government Resident's annual or bi-annual reports, have passed without much attention from either Parliament, press, or pulpit. This fact, however, remains; there are thousands of aborigines here, who, from a physical point of observation, are fitted for all the conditions of an active, useful life. What will the Government do with them? I state most confidently that the first duty of the State is to declare reserves, and within these reserves to give the native tribes absolute rights and sole control.

It will, of course, cut off some pastoral tenants from access to some river sides, and also exclude some billabongs; but the "bullocky" and the blackfellow cannot live and drink at the same places.

If reserves are declared, I believe the pastoral tenants of the Crown will honorably abide by them. If reserves be not declared, then, so far as I can see, the inevitable result of a white race intruding itself into a country occupied by blacks must follow. We have the teachings of history before us. Tasmania has civilised the native race off the island. In New Zealand, the Maories, with all their magnificent bravery, are perishing before European settlement. In South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales, the blacks have almost died out. Rum, the bullet, and syphilis have mowed them down. In Queensland, especially in North Queensland, the black survives, and is a potent factor. There they have a native police, and on occasions of outrage this force is sent out to discover, overtake, and disperse. On our western border, under the Imperial rule, I find it difficult to ascertain what is the settled policy of the Government.

However this may be, here there is an ethnological necessity which clamors for and must have Government consideration. There are on the north coast of Australia strong tribes of natives, who, so far as I can learn,

learn, live in amicable relations with each other, who have distinct tribal boundaries which are never passed except by notice. They do not wish to enter upon one another's country, and they feel they have sufficient for themselves in their own territory. But what is the State to do? One line of policy is clear with certain result; leave the native question alone and the natives will be obliterated. The other line of policy is one which I approach with almost a feeling of hopelessness. If the North Australian blackfellows were like the Papuans of New Guinea, if they would or could be induced to be villagers and cultivators, I would strongly recommend legislation accordingly. But my experience and conference with those who are best competent to deal with this question shows that we have to deal with the natives as a most difficult element of population.

I therefore again submit to the Government of South Australia that they must take some decisive action, and state a policy for the aborigines of the Northern Territory.

The following report is supplied by Mr. Inspector Foelsche, after perusal of the above.

The tribes north of Katherine, whose country the telegraph line runs through, have no doubt been peaceful, and with the exception of thieving, which is their natural propensity, have committed no serious offences for years past.

The tribe withering away fastest is the "Woolwonga," inhabiting both sides of the telegraph line between Callet's Creek and Pine Creek. My private opinion is that a good many have been put out of the way by bullets. With regard to the "natives beginning to understand the conditions under which the white man holds the country, of which they consider they have been robbed." I doubt very much whether the natives' ideas reach as far as that; but no doubt they comprehend that the taking possession of their country by the whites, especially squatters, deprives them of that freedom of roaming about as they have been accustomed to in days gone by. Inland lagoons and billabongs have always been favorite places of resort for them to hold their periodical tribal corroborees and ceremonies of making men, as well as frequent meetings of various tribes; but these are the very places the natives are hunted away from by the squatters, for wild cattle will not go where natives are, even if they do not interfere with them. This deprives the natives of a great deal of their accustomed amusement and pastime, as well as of food during the dry season, when they visit these waters for game, fish, and lily-roots; and that is the very time the squatter wants these waters for his cattle; and in my opinion this is the chief cause of cattle being killed by natives, partly for food and partly to mark their displeasure at the squatter monopolising all the waters. This of course tantamounts to some degree their beginning to understand the conditions under which the white man holds their country; but I do not think their minds comprehend it in a very clear light. The natives are now more actuated by a spirit of revenge or retaliation, which is instilled into their mind in infancy, which may be seen almost any time one visits their camps. If one child hits another, it is taught to hit back again. I do not think the idea of exterminating or driving the white man out of the country ever enters a native's head; his brain-power is not strong enough to engender such an idea.

A native in the bush is, if he kills a white man, highly honored by his tribe—like "Wandy-Wandy," who, after killing Mr. Price in Torres Straits, was sent for by the Croker Island natives to murder Wingfield. Such a man is looked upon as a hero; but the same rule or custom applies to their own race; they glory in killing a native of a strange tribe and rarely let an opportunity pass by.

Legislation on the subject of aborigines is no doubt absolutely necessary unless the State intends to assist in exterminating them as soon as possible, but it is a question very few care to undertake and less are competent to deal with it. No doubt the first thing that suggests itself is to set aside suitable reserves, but it will be a difficult matter to get the natives on to these reserves, and to keep them there; besides, the question of tribes will have to be considered, each of which possesses its own country, the boundaries of which are sacredly respected, and I think it is out of all question to have a reserve for each separate tribe, for some tribes are very small. Neighboring tribes as a rule are friendly with each other and interchange friendly visits; but frequently—principally through superstition—they have serious quarrels which often end in warfare; and I fear several tribes put on to one reserve, if such can be effected, would be constantly at enmity with each other. Besides, the reserve, wherever it may be, will be the property of one particular tribe which will never surrender the right and, so to say, title of it to any other tribe. In my opinion there would be constant warfare among them. However, it is no use my going any further into the matter, for it seems to me almost an inexhaustible subject, which requires time and mature consideration to write about.

#### LIGHTING THE APPROACHES TO PORT DARWIN.

As the money has been borrowed for erecting a lighthouse at Charles Point and Cape Don, the delay in calling for tenders causes much dissatisfaction. I would respectfully urge that these much-needed light-houses, with a leading harbor light in Point Emory, be at once commenced.

#### PORT DARWIN AS THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL AND FEDERAL NAVAL STATION, &c.

It is very gratifying to find that Major-General Edwards thoroughly agrees with the views expressed by Lord Brassey and Captain Madear, R.N., as to the claims of Port Darwin as the Imperial and Federal Naval Station, coaling station, site for dock, &c. As I have in former reports fully discussed this most important subject, I will only express the hope that the Federal Convention will have it brought under their notice at an early date.

#### CUSTOMS RETURNS.

The full and interesting returns supplied by the Sub-collector of Customs, Mr. A. Searcy, will be found with the appendices.

#### RAINFALL.

Mr. J. A. G. Little, the senior and inspecting officer, has again kindly furnished me with the returns for 1889.

I have, &c.,

J. LANGDON PARSONS, Government Resident.

The Honorable J. H. Gordon, M.L.C., Minister of Education and the Northern Territory.

APPENDICES.