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REPORT

OF THE

SUB-PROTECTOR OF ABORIGINES

FOR

YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER, 1879.

Crown Lands and Immigration Office, Adelaide, 10th Feb., 1880.
THE following report of the Sub-Protector of Aborigines for the year ended 31st December, 1879, is published for general information.

T. PLAYFORD, Commissioner.

Aborigines Office, Adelaide 31st January, 1880.

Sir—I have the honor to submit for your information, the following report in reference to the aborigines, for the year ending 31st December, 1879,

During nearly fifty years European occupation of this province, our intercourse and dealings with the native tribes have on the whole been characterised by a more humane and liberal policy than that pursued in other portions of the Australian Continent, and we have, in this respect, been happily free from the stigma that other colonists have laid themselves open to.

Of course, in a work of this nature, favorable results must naturally be of slow growth. Evidences, however, are not wanting to show that the efforts made on behalf of the aborigines here have not been wholly fruitless; some improvement at least has taken place in their condition. This is evident from the statements collected and forming part of the appendix to this report; they supply a good deal of interesting information tending to point out that a better state of affairs now prevails than has hitherto existed.

Civilisation has proved very destructive to savage life; when they first come into contact, it has been truly remarked that "The sun of civilisation extinguishes the feeble light of savagedom."

At the various mission stations a fair amount of progress appears to have been made, and the future prospects of these institutions are referred to in hopeful and encouraging terms. It would seem as if the new generation of aborigines were raising themselves above a mere animal existence, and becoming more susceptible to civilising influences, and showing an increased disposition to enter into useful and profitable employments.

The birth and death rate has been nearly equal. This is an unusual circumstance, as the records of previous years show that the mortality has invariably been excessive.

I visited the Murray district a few months ago, viz.:—Morgan, Blanchetown, Mannum, and Wellington. The natives had not all returned from the various stations at which they had been scattered during the shearing season; I therefore met with but a small number—about thirty; these appeared generally in good health and condition. I noticed only three cases of sickness among them.

The able-bodied find no great difficulty in making a living by their own exertions, and the depôts, which are sufficiently numerous and judiciously distributed, afford the necessary relief to the old, sick, and infirm. I would recommend that a few more canoes be supplied to deserving natives who have families and other relatives depending on them for support; this will relieve the depôts, while it assists these people to lead a life of industry in a way that accords with their natural habits and instincts.

A considerable sum of money is earned every year by the aborigines on the Lower Murray and Lakes, probably amounting to not less than £1,500. They do not, however, derive much real advantage from this—a few purchase useful articles, such as clothing, guns, and boats, but the majority squander the money, chiefly in exchange for intoxicating liquors. The blacks fall an easy prey to the enticements and

temptations which, I fear, are constantly presented to them by persons who ought to know better.

To put a stop to these practices would be difficult, but they might be lessened by the exercise of some stricter system of supervision. It might, perhaps, be worth while trying as an experiment, the opening of a branch Savings Bank at Point Macleay or Wellington, with a view to induce the natives to practise habits of greater economy and self-denial.

It is to be regretted that in former years an aboriginal reserve was not set apart for a mission station on the Murray, somewhere between Overland Corner and Blanchetown. Under the management of a society like the "Aborigines Friends' Association," such would, in all probability, have become the means of doing some good work.

By the loss sustained, in June last, of the Rev. George Taplin, superintendent of the Point Macleay institution, the aborigines of that and surrounding districts (numbering about 500) have been deprived of one who took an active interest in their welfare, and whose self-denying labors during a period of twenty years did much to benefit them; his knowledge of their habits, character, and languages, fitted him in a peculiar way to carry on a useful work and overcome difficulties that would probably have discouraged a less energetic and enthusiastic man. His studies and researches in ethnology and questions of an anthropological nature enabled him to make some valuable contributions to Australian scientific literature. The last work of the kind that engaged his attention, and which he brought to a successful termination a few days before his death, was editing for the Government a series of papers on the folklore, manners, customs, languages, &c., of the South Australian aborigines. Of the first edition of this work, published in August last, a few copies only remain on hand.

So far as the means at the disposal of this department will permit, every provision is made for the care of the sick. In most of the country districts the medical officers who have charge of the "destitute poor," are also appointed to look after those natives who may be in need of their services; in other localities special arrangements are made for the same object. In a few places, where the aborigines locate in considerable numbers, sheds have been erected to shelter the old and infirm, and to afford temporary hospital accommodation to the sick.

I have, &c.,

E. L. HAMILTON, Sub-Protector.

The Hon. Commissioner of Crown Lands, &c.

APPENDIX.—SUB-REPORTS.

Mr. Buttfield, S.M., Blinman, Sub-Protector, Far North, reports:—

It is my pleasing duty to again record the general good behaviour of the aborigines within my district, notwithstanding the hardships they have had to encounter during the first six months of the past year, and the effects of preceding unusually dry seasons, by which they were almost deprived of the use of native animals, the frequent and general complaint being "No butter; sit down along kangaroo and emu." Indeed, hundreds of native animals died from sheer want.

Beyond the limits of my district the blacks were more favourably circumstanced. In the Far North and North-West, the rainfall had been more abundant, consequently food was more plentiful. The numerous depôts established here averted suffering and privations which otherwise must have been entailed upon the recipients. As a rule, the depôts are under the supervision of gentlemen who dispense the provisions committed to their charge wisely and well. Very little sickness and but few deaths have occurred during the past year.

Reports have been circulated as to the miserable condition of the natives in the Far North and North-West. I have very reliable authority for stating that such was not the case. To meet the requirements of the aged, sick, and infirm, depôts have been extended North

