

(No. 17.)



1862.

---

T A S M A N I A.

---

LETTER FROM THE VENERABLE ARCHDEACON REIBEY,  
ON THE SUBJECT OF THE HALF-CASTE ISLANDERS  
IN THE STRAITS.

---

Laid on the Table by Mr. Henty, and ordered by the Council to be printed,  
22 July, 1862.



Entally, 31st March, 1862.

SIR,

HAVING visited the Islands in Bass's Straits, I desire to offer one or two suggestions with regard to the proposed appointment of a Schoolmaster and Catechist, and to recommend Mr. Mitchell, who has applied for the office, as a very fit man for the duties in question.

I found the Islanders an intelligent and interesting people,—simple and primitive in their habits, free from the vices of a more civilised life, and very anxious about the instruction of their children. There are 66 children at the present living on the various Islands; and it is a matter of deep importance that steps should be taken, without delay, to provide for them the means of instruction, and so endeavour to prevent another generation from growing up in the ignorance of their parents.

The children are scattered over the various Islands, and are located thus:—4 on Badger Island, 10 on Long Island, 6 on Woody; 6 Little Dog, 6 Gun Carriage, 8 Clarke's, 11 Tin-kettle, 9 Barren, 6 Green Island.

The great difficulty is, to decide upon the best site for the Master's residence, so that the children may be able to avail themselves of his services with as few impediments as possible. The strong currents and heavy seas, during many months of the year, render it a perilous undertaking for the most experienced seamen to move from Island to Island,—during certain seasons it is impossible. Therefore, I cannot recommend that the Master should be bound to itinerate and teach the children at their own homes,—without a superior boat and experienced crew he could not; and as this, even if it were desirable, would involve the annual expenditure of a large sum of money, I beg to suggest, that one of the most central of the Islands should be selected for his residence; that buildings for his accommodation and the reception of children as *boarders* should be erected; and that the parents should be induced to take their children to the Master, and leave them under his care for the greater part of the year. This is, I am convinced, the only plan to be adopted, if the appointment of Schoolmaster is to be of real use. For about £300, suitable buildings, of a simple kind, and fitted for the climate and customs of the people, might be erected; especially if the Government would allow the bricks and timber from some of the old buildings at Flinder's to be used,—materials now utterly useless, and fast falling to decay.

The settlement at Flinder's possesses some advantages, and would make an excellent site for the Master's residence; and the old buildings might be easily repaired: but it is, I fear, too distant from the mass of Islands to be acceptable to the people. The water is very bad, and the Islanders are prejudiced against the place,—partly from the fact of its having been the prison of their forefathers, and partly from the impression that the bad water helped to shorten the lives of the natives. This would militate against the selection of Flinder's as the head quarters of the Schoolmaster; otherwise, as I have said, the buildings now in existence, and which have always been unused by the tenant of the Island, could be made available for the purpose.

I felt it my duty to get the parents together as much as possible, and learn from them their wishes and opinions on the question; and I found that the more intelligent recommended the selection of one of the central Islands, expressed their willingness to pay for the board and lodging of their children, and to leave them under the care of a Master. Two Islands—Barren and Green—were suggested to me as being the most accessible during the whole year, and the most desirable on account of the goodness of the water and the abundance of firewood. Copy of notes made:—“On Barren Island, near Crooke's River, nearly opposite Tin-kettle, an excellent site could be chosen; land good; 4 to 5 acres, in patches, fit for garden ground; water very good; firewood abundant; building materials—stone, limestone, tea tree, and gum—easily to be obtained.” “Green Island—fair patches of garden ground; water good; firewood to be had, very easy of access.”

I therefore recommend to the Government, that the Schoolmaster should be stationed at either of these Islands (I would prefer Barren Island), that 10 or 20 acres of land be reserved for his use, and that a dwelling be erected for him.

I beg to recommend Mr. Mitchell, one of the present Masters under the Board of Education, very strongly for the office. I have known him well during the last 7 years; he is a superior man, and possesses qualities which would make him most useful in such a position. Mrs. Mitchell is a very excellent woman, and would soon win the confidence and esteem of the Islanders.

It is of the deepest importance that, in making this appointment, the *character* of the Master should be well known, as well as his fitness to teach. It would be better not to send a Master at all, than to appoint a man whose daily conduct and bearing would not bear the closest observation. The half-castes are peculiarly observant, are easily prejudiced,—and therefore much, if not everything, will depend upon the opinion they are led to form of the Master in his intercourse with them.

On Sunday, the 23rd, I held Divine Service at Chappell Island, where I found most of the people congregated during the Mutton-bird oiling season. In the morning, 65 attended, and 10 little half-castes were baptised. In the evening, between 20 and 30 assembled together. I enclose you a few Photographs taken by the Rev. Mr. Fereday, who accompanied me; and I shall be glad if you will let the Governor see them.

As my trip was made in a little open-decked cutter, of 10 tons, I had to hasten back sooner than I intended; but the smallness of the craft rendered it necessary not to run the risk of a long detention,—as it was, we endured much tossing about, and many discomforts.

Before concluding this letter, I desire to call your attention to the neglected and disgraceful condition of the grave-yard at Flinder's. The fence is *entirely* destroyed, and sheep and cattle bed upon the graves. It was painful and humilitating to witness the fearful neglect and desecration—grave after grave trodden down,—the whole yard bearing every sign of neglect. I know not whose fault it is, but I should not feel that I had performed my duty had I neglected to call the attention of the Government to the fact.

I am, obediently yours,

THOS. REIBEY.

*The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.*