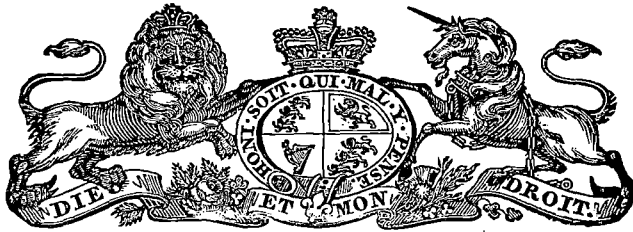


(No. 50.)



1879.

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T A S M A N I A.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

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B A S S ' S   S T R A I T S :

REPORT OF DR. VINES UPON THE FEVER IN THE ISLANDS.

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Laid upon the Table by Mr. Crowther, and ordered by the Council to be printed,  
October 1, 1879.



*Formby on Mersey, 13th August, 1879.*

DEAR SIR,

I SEE by the paper that a medical man is wanted for the Straits Islands to quell the present epidemic raging there. I beg to offer my services in answer to your proposition, and am prepared to go forthwith on receipt of the necessary instructions. I think it as well to enclose the telegram as a guarantee of my efficiency, only asking that it may kindly be returned. I am staying at Colonel Angelo's; there is no opening here; it is a pleasant spot, retired, and yet not quite cut off from the outside world.

I have, &c.

*The Honorable Colonial Secretary.*

EDWARD P. VINES.

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TELEGRAM.

*Hobart Town, 15th August, 1879.*

PLEASE state by telegram upon what terms you would be prepared to visit the Islands in the Straits professionally. Necessary medicines supplied from Launceston Hospital. A vessel placed at your service.

THOS. REIBEY.

EDWARD P. VINES, *Esq., Formby.*

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*Colonial Secretary's Office, Hobart Town, 15th August, 1879.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 13th instant, offering your professional services for the Islands in the Straits.

I enclose a copy of a telegram forwarded to you to-day, addressed Formby, enquiring upon what terms you would be prepared to visit the Islands. I return, herewith, the telegram enclosed in your communication above quoted.

I have, &c.

EDWARD P. VINES, *Esquire, Formby.*

THOS. REIBEY.

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TELEGRAM.

*Torquay, 15th August, 1879.*

I WOULD go for one hundred for one month, and fifty per month if services required for longer period.

E. P. VINES.

*Hon. THOS. REIBEY.*

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TELEGRAM.

*Hobart Town, 16th August, 1879.*

GOVERNMENT will give Fifty Pounds per month, and provide vessel and provision you. Please reply.

THOS. REIBEY.

E. P. VINES, *Esq., M.D., Torquay.*

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TELEGRAM.

*Hobart Town, 16th August, 1879.*

IF Government succeed in obtaining services of medical man to visit Islands in Straits, would you kindly ascertain if ketch *Alice Maud* could be engaged for the trip. If so, on what terms? Would you also undertake to find sailing master and crew, and provision the vessel.

MAJOR HARRAP, *Launceston.*

THOS. REIBEY.

TELEGRAM.

*Torquay, 17th August, 1879.*

I ACCEPT terms offered by Government, provided it includes all expenses incurred on Islands for food, lodging, travelling, &c. being defrayed.

Hon. THOS. REIBEY.

E. P. VINES.

TELEGRAM.

*Launceston, 19th August, 1879.*

HAVE seen Rev. Canon Brownrigg relative to ketch *Alice Maud* being engaged for trip to Islands, and find he has been negotiating sale of vessel with you, and pending sale of vessel in meantime the charge for trip would be Eight Pounds, Government being security for safe return of vessel in same good order as when leaving. I could find master and crew, and would undertake to provision vessel if necessary.

ALFRED HARRAP.

Hon. Colonial Secretary.

TELEGRAM.

*Hobart Town, 19th August, 1879.*

THE *Alice Maud*, properly provisioned, will be at your disposal for visiting the Islands in the Straits. The necessary medicines you can obtain on application to the Surgeon Superintendent, Launceston Hospital. Please telegraph when you can be in Launceston.

E. P. VINES, Esq., *Torquay.*

THOS. REIBEY.

TELEGRAM.

*Torquay, 20th August, 1879.*

CAN be at Launceston on Saturday, the 23rd instant.

E. P. VINES.

Hon. Colonial Secretary.

TELEGRAM.

*Hobart Town, 20th August, 1879.*

DR. Vines will be in Launceston on Saturday. Please engage master and crew, and arrange for ketch to start Sunday. Please provision for at least three weeks, including all things necessary for Dr. Vines, using your own judgment.

MAJOR HARRAP, *Launceston.*

THOS. REIBEY.

TELEGRAM.

*Hobart Town, 20th August, 1879.*

SHALL be glad to hear of your arrival in Launceston on Saturday. Everything is in training, and trust you will be able to start on Sunday.

E. P. VINES, Esq., *Torquay.*

THOS. REIBEY.

*Colonial Secretary's Office, Hobart Town, 20th August, 1879.*

SIR,

REFERRING to the several telegraphic communications which have passed between us on the subject of your visit to the Islanders in the Straits, I have the honor to request that you will proceed in the ketch *Alice Maud* to those Islands upon which you may ascertain there are any persons still suffering from fever; and, so far as may appear necessary or practicable, supply them with instructions and medicines upon your leaving to enable them to deal with fresh cases should they arise.

The Government are desirous to obtain your professional opinion as to the special character of the fever, and of the causes which led to the outbreak; and they would also be glad to receive any suggestions you may be prepared to offer which may tend to lessen the probabilities of such an epidemic in the future.

I have, &c.

E. P. VINES, Esq., Torquay.

THOS. REIBEY.

*Launceston, 19th September, 1879.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to inform you that, in accordance with your instructions on behalf of the Government, I proceeded on the 25th ult., in the *Alice Maud*, to the Islands in the Straits, returning on the 16th inst., on which date the *Alice Maud* entered Tamar Heads. Four Islands were visited, viz.—Flinders, Badger, Cape Barren, and Dog Islands. The two former we called at twice, medical aid being most needed there.

I have the pleasure to inform you that there is now only one case of sickness remaining—Mary Beedon, aged 14, on Badger Island, she having been ill eight weeks, and now simply suffering from prostration. With the medicines dispensed to her, and proper care, I have hopes of her recovery. Her sister, Lucy Beedon, aged 23, is just convalescent. Another member of the Beedon family was reported ill at Flinders, but on enquiry I ascertained that it was incorrect.

On visiting Cape Barren I found that two families, viz., the Everetts and Maynards, had suffered from the fever, but were all now either well or convalescent.

At Dog Island there had been no cases; and as there were no tidings of sickness further on, we made this the turning point, and revisited Badger and Flinders.

With regard to the extent of the late epidemic, I learned that 19 persons were attacked out of 105 engaged in mutton-birding on Chapelle Island. Of this number three deaths occurred, all in the Beedon family. I shall refer to this presently when speaking of the cause of the outbreak.

As to the nature of the epidemic, there can be no doubt that it was a fever of a low and malignant type, spreading by infection or contagion, but whether to be strictly defined as typhus or typhoid I had no sufficient ground to form an opinion from personal observation, though from the facts gathered I incline to the view that it was typhus fever that has visited the Islands.

With regard to the cause. The disease broke out last April at Chapelle Island, at a point on the Island known as North Boat Harbour, amongst the Beedon family and their connections, and by them it was conveyed to the adjacent Islands, the Everetts and the Maynards on Barren Island being closely related to them, and forming one party with them at the mutton-bird season. It is noticeable that none of the white population have suffered from this epidemic, and they, and the more intelligent of the Islanders in general, attribute the disease to the stench arising from the refuse heaps of mutton birds and the general unsanitary habits of the people. That this opinion is the correct one of the origin of the fever the following facts will show:—

The process of mutton-birding involves oiling, salting, and fattening; and it has been the custom of the mutton-birders for years to throw their refuse (consisting of the heads, wings, and legs, and often the entire birds out of which the oil has been squeezed) outside the doors of their cabins, so that year after year they have added to the accumulating heaps of filth and garbage, as they always keep to the same spot. The decaying bodies of birds in these heaps may be reckoned by thousands.

The last season was an exceptional one; the prevailing winds were easterly, and the weather was calm, with little or no rain. The effluvia under these conditions was observed to be unusually great. The water was likewise scarce and proportionally bad. It was thus that, in the middle of April, six weeks after the people had been gathered on the Island, that the disease broke out, and it showed itself first in that part which was most sheltered from the wind, and where the people were most crowded.

That a pestilence should originate under these circumstances is not to be wondered at, and the immunity that the people have hitherto enjoyed can only be due to the natural healthfulness of the situation and the prevalence of high winds and copious rains.

For the purpose of disinfecting, I thoroughly fumigated the houses where sickness had prevailed with sulphur. I should further recommend whitewashing the houses, as of more permanent good.

Were the Islanders to throw their refuse into the sea, instead of piling it in heaps at their doors, there would, I think, be no cause for apprehension of any similar epidemic in the future.

Should any cases of fever connected with the present outbreak still arise, they will doubtless be of a mild type, and give no cause for anxiety.

My belief is that the epidemic is quite subdued.

I have, &c.

*The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.*

EDWARD PRINCE VINES.

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*Colonial Secretary's Office, Hobart Town, 24th September, 1879.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your Report, under date the 19th instant, of your visit to the Islands in Bass' Straits.

I am glad to learn that you are of opinion the fever is dying out, and I trust the severe lesson the Islanders have been taught may induce them to pay more attention to sanitary precautions in future, especially as regards the removal of the animal waste of mutton birds from the neighbourhood of their dwellings.

I propose to communicate with Mr. Collis, the Schoolmaster, through the Board of Education, as to the possibility of securing the periodical linewashing of their houses by the Islanders, and a Report as to the improvement, or otherwise, in their habits of cleanliness.

I desire to thank you for the satisfactory manner in which you have fulfilled the duties you undertook, and I trust you found every needful accommodation prepared for you on board the *Alice Maud*.

If you will forward your claim to this office I will take the necessary steps for its early settlement.

I have, &c.

E. P. VINES, *Esq.*, *Torquay*.

THOS. REIBEY.