

(No. 48.)



1863.

T A S M A N I A.
L E G I S L A T I V E C O U N C I L.

HALF-CASTE ISLANDERS IN BASS'S STRAITS.

REPORT OF THE VEN. ARCHDEACON REIBEY.

Laid on the Table by Mr. Whyte, and ordered by the Council to be printed,
August 26, 1863.



Hobart Town, 15th August, 1863.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to forward the Report of the Archdeacon of Launceston's last visit to the Islands, comprising the Furneaux Group, with a chart of the same, for the information of the Executive Council.

You are aware that a sum of £250 was placed on the Estimates for 1863, to provide instruction to the numerous children residing on those Islands, provided a similar sum was collected by private subscription. I regret to say that only £80 was thus collected, which I hope will be met by an equal sum from the £250 voted for 1863.

During the last year the Islands have been visited three times,—twice by Ven. Archdeacon Reibey, and once by Rev. W. Richardson.

I also beg to call the attention of the Governor in Council to the fact that a pension was voted to Maria Scott, an old woman, native of Tasmania, and now residing on Tin Kettle Island, but she has never received it. I think it desirable that this pension should be paid through the Archdeacon of Launceston, who will take care that it is appropriated as intended.

Archdeacon Reibey will shortly leave this diocese for England. During his absence I shall be happy to look after the spiritual and temporal welfare of the interesting people to whom his report refers.

I perfectly agree with the Archdeacon, "that there is no case which has a stronger claim upon the inhabitants of this land; and that sin will lie heavy at our doors if we, blessed with civilisation and Christianity, neglect to fulfil to them the simplest duties laid upon us by the requirements of Christian charity."

I hope, therefore, that the sum of £250 may be placed on the Estimates for 1864 without the restrictions of 1863.

When the present Session of Parliament has closed, it may, perhaps, be desirable for the Governor in Council to consider if it would not be advisable to send the six Aborigines still remaining at Oyster Cove to their relatives at these Islands. I am informed that they are anxious to go, and their friends willing to receive them.

I remain, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,
R. R. DAVIES.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.

Entally, August 1, 1863.

MY DEAR ARCHDEACON,

I REGRET that I have failed to send you a short account of my late visit to the Islands in Bass's Straits before this. I will do so without further delay, with the hope that it may be interesting to you to have a memorandum which will give you a true account of the number of the population, and a list of the islands upon which the sealers and half-castes are located.

Sunday, June 14th. At 7 A.M., accompanied by the Rev. John Fereday, I sailed from George Town Heads in Long's little cutter of 8 tons. A light and fair breeze soon carried us to Waterhouse Island, a distance of 45 miles; but when we entered Banks' Straits the wind drew ahead, and prevented our making a quick and pleasant voyage to Badger Island, which island we had

intended to visit first. A nasty sea and strong wind compelled us to heave-to during the whole of a long cold and dark night, in sight of Swan Island Light-house, and to wait for daylight before we dared approach any of the Islands. As soon as the day broke we were able to fetch the roadstead between Long and Barren Islands, where we anchored about 8 A.M. Monday.

Monday, 15th. Spent the day in visiting the families settled upon Long Island; viz.,—Richard Maynard and wife and 8 young children. Maynard is one of the old sealers, and his wife is a native of New South Wales. Also, William Maynard, half-caste, and wife; William Brown and wife, half-caste. Old Maynard is a boat-builder by trade, has lived for many years upon Long Island, and has a very decent little cottage in which he resides. We visited each family, read and talked to them, and left a number of very useful tracts with them. There are six adults and eight children upon the Island at the present time.

Tuesday, 16th. Having secured a Pilot to guide us, we sailed at 8 A.M., intending to visit the islands in the Sound between Barren and Flinders. A contrary wind, and having to beat many miles to secure safe anchorage for the night, prevented our calling at any island but "Woody" during the day. Here reside a very old sealer, George Everett, and his wife—a native of Tasmania—and three young children. By a former wife, also a native of this Colony, Everett had a son and three daughters, who are married and settled upon these islands. There is a poor orphan child living with the Everetts; making two adults and four children resident upon Woody Island at this time. Neither Everett nor his wife could read, but they were glad to receive some tracts and books which we left with him, hoping that their neighbours, when visiting them, would read to them. At a late hour this evening we anchored in "Badger's Corner," Flinders—a safe and snug little Bay.

Wednesday, 17th. We left the Cutter for the day at anchor in order that Mr. Long might fill up the water-cask and lay in a fresh supply of firewood; and engaged John Maynard, of "Little Dog" Island, to take us in his boat to the islands Little Dog, Big Dog, and Green. We landed first at Little Dog, and were particularly pleased with John Maynard's cottage and family; everything had an appearance of cleanliness and comfort. Maynard's wife, half-caste, is a daughter of old Everett by his first wife, and is a very intelligent woman: she has four young children, about whose future she is very anxious. We promised to send her, at her request, a supply of useful school books. Not far from Maynard's cottage we found old "Margery Munroe," a native of Western Port, living in a wretched hovel with her son Robert and daughter Polly. Polly, a woman of about 40 years of age, married a man called Bligh, some 18 years ago, who left her to search for gold when the Melbourne gold-fields were first discovered; and she has not heard from him, or of him, since. "Polly Bligh" is certainly the most extraordinary looking woman I ever saw; she is very stout, immensely powerful, and much darker in colour than her mother Margery. She has two interesting and pretty daughters living with her; the elder 17 years old, the younger 14 years. The younger, "Emma," I baptized. When I visited the islands last year, I found old Margery at Chappell Island, quite destitute, and existing upon the charity of the sealers and half-castes; but I am thankful to state that she is now receiving again a small pension of 1s. per diem from the Government of this country; which was granted to her by Sir John Franklin many years ago, for services rendered to the Crown. This sum has been paid to me by the Colonial Treasurer since January, 1862, and it enables me to supply her with many necessaries; and so the poor creature, now very old and decrepid, is, apparently, quite happy. Robert Munroe is, as far as I could learn, a kind son and affectionate brother.

On "Big Dog" we found John Lee, another old resident, his wife Bridget and three children. I baptized their youngest child "Rosina," 6 years old. We were much pleased with our visit to this family; their humble little cottage gave us the impression of real comfort, everything was so thoroughly clean and in order.

From "Big Dog" we sailed to "Green Island," the last in this part of the Sound, and spent about an hour with the people living upon it; viz.—Robert Dunbar, a sailor who has lately settled upon the Island, James Lawton, another sailor, and his wife, and an old man called Rowley.

At each Station we left some useful tracts and books. Returned to the Cutter shortly after dusk, having done a long day's work, and feeling tired and hungry.

Thursday, 18th. We started early this morning, leaving Badger's Corner at 7 A.M., and sailed across the Sound to "Vansittart" or "Gun-carriage" Island. On landing we were received by old Mr. Riddle, 78 years of age, the lessee of the Island, who, having heard of our arrival in the Sound, was anxiously waiting for our visit, in order that we might bury the body of Elizabeth Kennedy, who had died on the previous day. This poor woman had been a great sufferer for three years and more; she was 59 years of age, and died, so we learned from old Pollard, a good old man with a most benevolent expression of face, very happily, only desiring to see her husband once more before she departed, who happened, unfortunately, to be absent from the Island. It was very gratifying to see how much care and feeling was shown in every preparation for the burial; it was all very simple,

but so much thought and tenderness were evinced, that I never felt more deeply affected than when reading our beautiful Service over this woman's corpse. I buried her body in Mr. Riddle's garden, (where several other graves were to be seen), in the presence of eighteen persons, whom, after the service, I addressed, taking for my text,—“In the midst of life we are in death.”

Upon “Vansittart” reside Mr. John Riddle, 78 years of age; Mary Bates, housekeeper; Elizabeth Bates, 17 years of age; William Pollard, and William Kennedy. Here again we left tracts and books, and would have sailed next to Charles Harley's Station on Barren Island, but we found from Mr. Riddle that Harley and his wife had gone to Launceston, leaving their five children with him during their absence; therefore we sailed to “Apple Orchard,” Barren Island, and anchored for the night. At this station Mr. Stafford, wife and five little children, reside, and is a comfortable little home with a young garden attached. Stafford has seen better days. He once commanded a merchant vessel from London to Sydney, and is now, I regret to say, from some misfortune or other, compelled to bury himself, wife and children, in Bass's Straits. He is a most intelligent man, a good mechanic, and appears to take much interest in boat-building. We were more pleased with this station than any we had before seen; and it is here that I recommended to the late Colonial Secretary, the Honorable W. Henty, at the suggestion of Lucy Beedon and many of the parents, that a Catechist and Schoolmaster should be stationed. It is the most central position, very accessible; there is an abundant supply of wood and good water, and very fair land for garden and agricultural purposes.

Friday, 19th. At 8 o'clock A.M. we again sailed, and called at Tin Kettle Island, known on the chart as the larger of “Anderson's Isles,” the only island we did not visit on our voyage down the Sound. Here is a very interesting family, John Smith and wife (half castes), and eight young children; also an old sealer called Rew, Anne Snailhouse, Elizabeth Rew, a child six years old, deaf and dumb, and Marian Scott, a native of this Colony, nearly 80 years of age. This poor old woman is perfectly destitute, and depends entirely upon the charity of the Smiths for her daily bread. She told me that she had lived for 30 years upon King's Island, and was most useful to David Howie in catching kangaroos for him; and that she once received a pension of 1s. per diem from this Government, but lost it when she removed to the Furneaux Group. Since my return I have made her case known to the present Colonial Treasurer, and applied for the payment of her pension. I held a short service in Smith's house, baptized his eighth child, married old Rew, 63 years of age, to Anne Snailhouse, 65 years of age, and distributed a number of tracts and books. I met old Kennedy here, and broke to him the death and burial of his wife; the poor old man was greatly grieved. Returned to the cutter and sailed to Badger Island; a strong wind and heavy sea prevented our landing, and forced us to run for safe anchorage under Chappell Island.

Saturday, 20th. Early this morning Harry Beedon came from Badger Island, and offered his boat and services. The wind being fair, we first visited Goose Island, where we were very kindly received by Captain and Mrs. Davis; but having to beat back to Badger, we could only stay a short time. We landed at Badger late in the evening, having been for 5 hours beating against a strong wind and nasty sea. We were kindly welcomed by Lucy Beedon, and found residing upon the island her brother Harry, wife, and three children; James Beedon, wife, and five children; Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Richardson,—Mr. Richardson, it appears, has gone to the islands with the intention of settling there as schoolmaster, and is at present teaching ten children. He was for some years the Church of England Schoolmaster at Avenel, Victoria; and since my return I have made enquiries about him. I regret that I have not received such a report of his competency as will justify me in desiring to see him appointed to this Station. Late in the evening we returned to the cutter, having promised to return the following morning, (Sunday) and hold Divine Service.

Sunday, 21st. During the night the barometer had fallen so much, and was still falling, that we were compelled to abandon the intention of holding Service at Badger, and with all haste to get our little craft under weigh, and run to Preservation Island for safety. A quick run soon brought us to safe anchorage under the lee of the Island, and enabled us to spend the afternoon in visiting the families on shore. George Everett, wife, and four children, (half castes), and old Beedon, father of Lucy, are living at this Island; also, old Mansell, and wife Judy, a native of Tasmania, 67 years old, born near Swanport, and remembers the late Mr. Meredith.

Mansell, junior, wife, (half caste), and three children, Phil. Thomas, (half caste), Jane West and child, Henry Armstrong, (half caste), an orphan, and John Dobson, 104 years of age. Dobson has lived in the Straits since 1819. He is very feeble, and seems quite prepared for his eternal home. Baptized Everett's infant child, and spent a very interesting few hours with these people. During the night it blew a very heavy gale from the north west. At 3 A.M. forced to let go second anchor, and to pass some hours of anxious watching. Had we remained at Chappell Island, our boat would have been dashed to atoms upon the rocks.

Monday, 22nd. Blowing very hard all day, unable to land; a nasty sea running.

Tuesday, 23rd. Gale had abated, but we thought it prudent to remain at anchor.

Wednesday, 24th. Sailed with a light north-west wind from Preservation Island, with the hope that we might fetch the Heads before night; but when we were well in the Straits we were met by a strong gale and heavy sea,—so much so that we were forced to alter our course and run under Waterhouse Island for safety. For some time we endured great anxiety, and I can never feel too thankful that we had an old and able seaman like Mr. Long to manage our little craft; for it required all that a quick eye and steady hand could do to save our boat from being swallowed up by the heavy seas. We anchored under Waterhouse for the night.

Thursday, 25th. Sailed at 7 A.M., with a light north-east breeze, keeping close under the land. At noon wind died away, and we were becalmed all the afternoon and through the night.

Friday, 26th. Very calm all the morning, and making very little headway. At 4 o'clock, when off the Five-mile Bluff, East Beach, we were met by a south-west wind, and a very heavy swell from the westward. Passed the night beating against a strong breeze and heavy sea outside the Heads, and in a dense fog. It was a very rough, cold night, and a very anxious time.

Saturday, 27th. Anchored at 2 P.M., Pilot's Bay, George Town Heads. We were all thoroughly worn out with fatigue and the anxiety of a long cold night's watching, and truly grateful to our Heavenly Father for our safe return.

This short, but very imperfect, sketch of our trip to the Furneaux Group Islands may be interesting to you. I was much pleased with the Sealers and Half-castes, and notwithstanding anything which has been said to the contrary, I can only repeat my former words and say, that "I found them 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;" and testify to the truth of a brother Clergyman's statement in a letter to me,—“Their simplicity and native modesty are calculated to awaken the liveliest interest, and their conduct and conversation, under the serious disadvantages in which they are placed, are truly admirable.” There are, it is true, two or three men of inferior character amongst them; but is it to be wondered at? And is not this all the greater reason that we should not fail to tend the rising generation with all Christian care, and so, by God's blessing, stay the increase of the evil? I can imagine no case which has a stronger claim upon the inhabitants of this land; and, therefore, I deeply regret that for a season I must not only relinquish my work here, but the privilege of visiting these people. But, if I am permitted to return again to my post, I shall hope to be able to repeat my visits, and to devote both time and care to their spiritual and educational interests.

In the working of the laws of God's providence, we have dispossessed these poor people of this fair land. In that, we may hope, there was no sin; but surely sin will lie heavy at our doors, if we, blessed with civilisation and Christianity, neglect to fulfil to them the simplest duties laid upon us by the requirements of Christian charity.

I am sincerely yours,

THOS. REIBBY.