

1922.

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

NORTHERN TERRITORY.

REPORT OF ADMINISTRATOR

FOR THE

YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE, 1921.

Presented by Command; ordered by the Senate to be printed, 20th July, 1922

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From the extremist element the Minister met with hostility and disrespect throughout his stay; these people, by some curious process of reasoning peculiar to themselves, having apparently concluded that it would be an advantage to the Territory to render the Ministerial visit nugatory and barren of results, but the hearty welcome and cordial assistance to the Minister in his quest for information, offered by the wiser section of the population, frustrated their efforts in this direction. The cordiality of the people generally was very noticeable at the country centres visited by the Minister, and the honorable gentleman was enabled to achieve the objects of his visit, and on his departure, despite a somewhat feeble demonstration organized by the malcontents, received a hearty send-off from his many well-wishers.

ABORIGINES.

The report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines will be found of interest, and his statistics in relation to half-castes have a certain significance which should command attention. I am in accord with the suggestion of the Chief Protector anent the establishment of an industrial school which I would rather call an institute for vocational training, for half-caste boys and girls, but until I am able to personally inform myself on these matters I do not propose to make definite recommendations. An opportunity to obtain the necessary knowledge will, I hope, occur as soon as conditions permit of travelling in 1922.

AGRICULTURE AND BOTANIC GARDENS.

The report of the Superintendent of Agriculture and Curator of the Botanic Gardens is of importance, and should be of deep interest to all concerned in the agricultural progress of the Territory.

The paragraphs relating to peanuts, cotton growing, tobacco, and timber, are deserving of special attention as indicating the possibilities of the Territory in regard to these products being grown on a large scale for profit, as also the final paragraph referring to the work of Mr. Verberg, on the Adelaide, whose farm on the Adelaide River I have twice visited, and who alone and unaided has demonstrated what can be done by practical ability and untiring industry.

MARINE AND SHIPPING.

The reports of the Shipping Clerk and Harbor Master make rather sorry reading. The whole of the shipping trade as between Territory ports is under review, and efforts will be made to reduce cost and increase efficiency, but the matter is one involved in difficulties and hampered by local conditions such as high wages, shallow waters, and the absence of buoys and beacons from the entrance channels to the rivers leading up to the various ports.

POLICE.

The report of the Inspector of Police shows that the amount of serious crime amongst the white population is negligible, and that drunkenness has decreased, while the amount of crime amongst the aborigines is not great, and is of the nature to be expected wherever there is a considerable aboriginal population.

A new police barracks is very necessary at Darwin.

GAOL.

The report of the Gaoler at Darwin indicates an increase in the number of confinees as against last year. The matters of a reserve, repairs, painting, &c., have been noted for attention when circumstances admit of it. An inspection of the gaol did not please me at all. The design and buildings struck me as being quite out of date, and if finances permitted I should be glad to see it replaced by a modern structure.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH.

A serious feature of the report of the Chief Health Officer is the increasing prevalence of leprosy among aborigines, and I am inclined to fear that such cases as we hear of and are able to bring in are not a true index of the numbers actually affected. Rumours have reached me of the existence of leprosy along the coast and among the adjacent islands, but in the absence of any vessel for administrative purposes I can neither go myself nor send an officer to inquire into the matter.

REPORT ON ABORIGINAL DEPARTMENT FOR YEAR ENDING 30TH JUNE, 1921.

I have the honour to furnish a report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory for the year ended 30th June last, and regret that the many duties I have to attend to have not left me as much time as I would desire to attend to this very important matter.

I estimate that there are about 20,000 aborigines in the Territory—8,500 adult males, 8,000 females, 2,000 male children, and 1,500 female children.

There are 550 half-castes and quadroons in the Territory, viz., 122 adult males, 147 adult females, 136 male and 145 female children.

The births of twenty half-caste and quadroon children were registered during the year, and in only one instance was there sufficient evidence to allow of the Court making an order compelling the father of the child to contribute to his support.

At the Bungalow, Alice Springs, some men are supporting their half-caste children. This Bungalow has been, and is, very unsatisfactory, being in immediate touch with the public and near an hotel. Girls leave the premises and visit men at night, returning to the bungalow before daylight. Some boys and girls have been hired under agreement to reputable persons in South Australia, and their behaviour has been satisfactory. Perhaps if an advertisement was inserted in the southern papers notifying that half-caste boys and girls could be employed by farmers and others, it may have a good effect in providing employment and perhaps homes for these unfortunates.

Most of the half-caste women are prostitutes, but a few are married to white men and Malays. Perhaps the establishment of an industrial school may be worthy of consideration, as there is little doubt these girls can be raised much above the level of their black sisters and become useful servants.

Natives, with but few exceptions, are well treated by their employers, and I doubt if many stations could be worked without native stockmen.

Cattle killing is an offence frequently committed by natives, and I submit it is no punishment to take them from their surroundings in the bush, where they have little to eat, and confine them in gaol, where they get three meals daily, tobacco, clothes, bed, and very little work.

In my opinion aboriginal stations or reserves on the mainland are useless, as the occupants can come and go as they please, and are easily enticed to leave.

When in Melbourne in 1911 I discussed this matter with the then Acting Minister for External Affairs, and stated that the only suitable place for an aboriginal reserve or station was at Melville Island, where half-castes could be successfully educated, and that native prisoners should be sent there, where they could be made to do some useful work, there being no means of escape, except by boat, which was unlikely; further, that the place could be made self-supporting in three or four years. Furthermore, if native prisoners were sent there it would mean a guard or two less at the gaol.

At this time Mr. Robinson (lessee of the island) applied to transfer his leases, but was refused, as I understood my suggestion was under consideration. About six years ago the lease was transferred to Messrs. Vestey Bros., but no improvements have ever been made or the island stocked, or even any attempt made to do so. Perhaps you may be pleased to give this some consideration.

I have not received annual reports from the Protectors at Daly River and Oenpelli. At the former there is little to do except repair fences, take care of machinery, and issue rations to the old and sick natives. I recommend that it be discontinued. Considerable expense is incurred at Oenpelli, as in addition to the Protector there is a stockman at £4 5s. a week, and eight natives at 25s. a week each employed. As this expenditure appears to be incurred on account of the Stock Department, I submit that it should not be charged to the Aboriginal Vote.

The natives between Darwin and Maranboy are fast dying, and few are now left where 20 years ago they were in hundreds. Food is sent regularly for the old and sick, and this is being distributed by the police.

Stores are also sent for natives to the Telegraph and Police Stations on the Overland Telegraph Line, and if possible the natives should keep the road clear as some recompense for rations, but it will be difficult to get the work done without supervision. Perhaps the Supervisor of Wells could attend to this.

The military authorities supplied this Department with a lot of blankets and clothing, which were found useful, although a lot were torn and useless.

The health of the natives during the year has been good, except at Lake Nash, where there was an outbreak of venereal disease, which the constable there attended to under the direction of the Camooweal doctor. Dr. Basedow visited the southern part of the Territory and gave some valuable advice. Having medicine chests at police stations is a great boon to natives, who frequently come for medicine, &c., which the police dispense.

I presume the Superintendents of the Mission Stations at Roper River, Bathurst Island, Goulburn Island, and Hermansburg are reporting to you.

I attach report from the Protector at Darwin, which shows that good work has been done at the Aboriginal Compound, Kahlin Beach.

(Sgd.) N. WATERS,
Acting Chief Protector.

REPORT ON THE ABORIGINAL COMPOUND, KAHLIN BEACH, AND DISTRICT OF DARWIN FOR THE YEAR ENDING 30TH JUNE, 1921.

I have the honour to report the following in connexion with the Administration of the Aboriginal Ordinance No. 9 of 1918, and the supervision of the Kahlin Beach Compound, &c.

The efficiency of the Aboriginal Ordinance No. 9 of 1918 and the regulations thereunder leaves much to be desired; or instance, legal assistance employed on several occasions failed to secure convictions in cases which called for urgent application of the law.

Many sections of this Ordinance should be submitted to the Crown Law Department for redrafting.

KAHLIN BEACH ABORIGINAL COMPOUND.

The supervision of the Kahlin Beach Compound and its many activities entail very considerable work on behalf of myself and the matron, Mrs. MacDonald, very often by night as well as by day, and continuously on Sundays, and reference to the following work and its peculiar nature will show that our whole time is devoted to the welfare of the inhabitants of the compound.

To enable you to understand how continuous our work is, a brief enumeration of our duties will not be remiss at this juncture.

The habits of aboriginals and half-castes demand, after our being in attendance at a late hour at night, our appearance in the compound at about 6.45 a.m. each morning, when we have to actually see inmates called, rations distributed to staff, children and old and infirm aboriginals, children attended to and prepared for school, aboriginals despatched to various employments, attention to applications for aboriginal labour, inspection of clinic, and patrol of camps for illness and cleanliness, supervising repairs and renewals, attendance at the feeding of horses, cleansing of buggies, harness, and stables, and despatch of buggies and carts to various Government Departments, as well as carrying out the duties of keeper of the Darwin Pound.

Following upon this comes the matron's attendance as teacher of the compound school, her hours of duty there being from 8.30 a.m. to 12 noon and 2 p.m. till 4 p.m., the rest of her time being taken up with the manufacture of clothes for the compound children, she having to make as many as 300 frocks and rompers per year. In addition to this she attends the compound during my absence at our Darwin office and my day and night patrols of the District of Darwin.

My duties at the Darwin office include attending to all requirements of aboriginal stations in the Northern Territory, including the supply of blankets, clothing, &c., issue of licences, inquiring into complaints against aboriginals, attendance at Court in defence and prosecution of aboriginals, keeping stock books of plant, &c., at aboriginal stations, keeping records and assisting with general correspondence; further, my presence is imperative at the despatch and arrival of all trains at Darwin. Very often I have to visit the police paddock, where numbers of Chinese and other coloured people are encamped, and occasionally, especially on complaint, I have to patrol the Districts of Parap, 2½ Mile, 4 Mile, Rapid Creek, 10 Mile, and Shoal Bay.

Our evening and night duties include the complete isolation of the infectious cases at the clinic, the night control of aboriginal and half-caste children, attendance on telephone for the reception of town and suburban complaints, issuing permits and controlling the attendance of aboriginals and half-castes at picture shows, and the preservation of order in the compound, where as many as 400 aboriginals and half-castes are congregated at night.

KAHLIN BEACH COMPOUND SCHOOL.

The matron, Mrs. MacDonald, teaches the school under the direct supervision of Mr. Lampe, head teacher of the Darwin Public School, whose reports have been very favorable. This school has an average attendance of 30, about three-quarter female and quarter male, nearly all of whom are half-castes and quadroons.

The lessons include reading, writing, arithmetic, sewing, domestic work, and general deportment, and it is more than apparent that Mrs. MacDonald, who is a qualified teacher, has left an impress and obtained an influence over her present and past pupils, many of whom, now engaged in domestic duties, return to consult her.

ABORIGINAL CLINIC.

This clinic, which is now in its sixth year, has an average daily attendance of twenty, 70 per cent. of which are females. These patients are collected in many instances from long distances, and the clinic is a great benefit to the aboriginals and half-castes of the Territory, as well as being a check upon infectious diseases. One has only to compare the system in vogue now with that of the old days, when, for instance, an aboriginal attended at the Darwin Hospital and received medicine, with written instructions on the bottle, "One tablespoonful to be taken three times a day," and also lotions, &c., for eye trouble, labelled "poison," with the result that bottles of medicine and lotions were deposited in the first convenient hiding place.

The in and out patients at the clinic are now attended to daily by Dr. Jones, who gives the aboriginals up-to-date and effective treatment. The clinic is popular with the aboriginals, who are not afraid to attend as they were in other days at the Darwin Hospital. In those days it was customary for the aboriginals to conceal their diseases.

OLD AND INFIRM ABORIGINALS.

One of the greatest benefits conferred on the aboriginal population is the care of the old and infirm members, who now receive rations, clothing, blankets, and medical attention; approximately the number of old and infirm aboriginals in our care at the compound amount to 50. The reproach that the old aboriginal was allowed to starve and die in the bush, as far as Darwin districts are concerned, no longer exists. The usual yearly supply of blankets and clothing was distributed.

ABORIGINAL LABOUR SUPPLY.

All aboriginals employed at Darwin are located at the aboriginal compound, Kahlin Beach, at night time, except when special permission is given for an aboriginal to sleep on the premises of the employer; with the exception of the old and infirm, no idle aboriginals are kept at the compound.

Practically all the domestic labour in and around Darwin is performed by aboriginals and half-castes; in addition to this the greater part of the manual labour employed in and around Darwin is supplied from the compound. Many efforts have been made by me to improve the status of the aboriginal and half-caste worker. I was instrumental in having the various Government Departments increase the rate of payment of their aboriginal employees from 25s. to 30s. and keep themselves.

As far as private employment of aboriginals and half-castes is concerned, the whole matter is most unsatisfactory and considerable trouble is experienced in procuring labour for a certain class of employer.

I would suggest that employment and all moneys in connexion therewith should be controlled wholly by this Department, and a regulation gazetted dealing with this matter. Very often the employer gives articles, such as clothing, &c., to his aboriginal workers upon which is placed a fictitious value, and when moneys due are requested the aboriginal fails to understand why any deductions are made. The clothing of the aboriginals by private employers is a matter requiring attention, and decided improvement is called for in this direction. The only remedy I can suggest is that aboriginals entering any employment should do so in accordance with conditions embodied in an agreement drawn up by an officer and filed. This suggestion applies to the Darwin district only.

The Government stables, plant, &c., were handed over to me in 1917, since when all the work in connexion with these stables has been performed efficiently by aboriginals under my supervision, a considerable saving being effected by this means.

Before the wet season sets in each year a number of aboriginals comes from inland for shelter. This number exceeds the demand made by the local labour market, and employment is found for them by use in the performance of such work as destroying noxious weeds on Crown lands, as well as clearing work at the Botanical Gardens.

An interesting feature of the aboriginal and half-caste labour supply is the domestic and other work performed by the girls and boys who were trained by us at the compound school, such as nursing and general household work, messengers at Government offices, and station hands. Employers speak very favorably of these young people.

HEALTH.

The health of the inhabitants of the compound has been good during the past year, no cases of infectious diseases having occurred and no infection traced to our inmates.

A marked improvement has taken place in the physique of the younger inmates of the compound. I may state that during my seven years as superintendent no deaths have occurred amongst the aboriginal and half-caste children in the compound.

BEHAVIOUR.

Generally speaking, the behaviour of the ordinary inmates of the compound while under supervision is good, but at times trouble is experienced with another class of aboriginal placed under my control. These include aboriginals who have been expelled from their country for various reasons.

In order to make our control and influence more effective, by-laws should be gazetted for the control and management of the compound. Notwithstanding my endeavours in this direction, no action has been taken up to the present.

POPULATION.

The population of the compound varies in the wet and dry seasons, and on the night of the 4th April, 1921, which is our minimum season, the census figures were 410 persons. Of these the average daily number for the year receiving rations amounted to 74; in these are included school children, Government messengers, clinic patients, and old and infirm aboriginals, the cost per head per meal being fourpence halfpenny.

SUPPLY OF BLANKETS, CLOTHING, ETC.

On my application a large consignment of blankets, clothing, &c., was received from the Defence Department, and all the requirements of the aboriginals throughout the Territory in this direction were supplied by me during the year.

INDUSTRIAL.

Although aboriginal labour now fulfils many spheres of usefulness, there are other avenues in which the aboriginals could be employed, such as supplying firewood to Government institutions, sanitary and garbage services, road making, clearing land, fishing, &c.

On several occasions when certain contracts were being let I made an effort to enter the competition, but on account of the industrial sentiment reigning I was not allowed to compete. In conclusion, I may state I am conscious of the fact that my association with the aboriginal in Darwin during the past seven years has been the cause of the aboriginal taking more kindly to settled employment, and of his being able to make an effort to secure the few concessions allowed him in the Northern Territory.

(Sgd.) R. MACDONALD,
Protector of Aboriginals.

REPORT ON THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND BOTANIC GARDENS FOR YEAR ENDING 30TH JUNE, 1921.

The staff for the year consisted of—

- (1) Two white labourers.
- (2) Three black boys.
- (3) Prison gangs of blacks.

The principal work undertaken has been directed with the intention of—

- (1) Experimenting with economic crops.
- (2) Improving the ornamental aspects of the gardens.
- (3) Raising from seeds, &c., plants for future planting out in the gardens and for general distribution to settlers and others in the country.

Correspondence and exchange has been carried on with many institutions, such as Botanic Gardens, Departments of Agriculture, &c., in all parts of the tropics. Considerable assistance in the naming of plants, and also in presents of seeds, bulbs, &c., has to be acknowledged to Mr. Maiden, Director of Sydney Botanic Gardens. Through the exchange of seeds a gradual increase to our collections of economic and ornamental plants is taking place. Many hundreds of plants were given away during the year to the local inhabitants; but the supply in the gardens nursery is always increasing and only surplus plants are generally so disposed of.

The Gardens.—Work has been carried on making new roads, digging and manuring the borders, and generally tending the trees and shrubs. The old lawn has been top-dressed and the lily-pond lawn levelled. Results have been very satisfactory, and there is a great difference in the general conditions in the gardens to what obtained two years ago, when I took charge after four years' absence. The great want is water—in the wet season the rains are plentiful, but during the long dry months, April to October, the water supply is wholly inadequate, and the flower beds and lawns have to be attempted on a very small scale. Given sufficient water, the cool season is a perfect growing time for a great variety of flowers, and lawns could be maintained equal to anywhere in the tropics. It is recognised that the present time is, however, inopportune to write of extra expenditure in this direction.