

1882.

VICTORIA.

CORANDERRK ABORIGINAL STATION.

REMARKS OF THE BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ABORIGINES
ON THE REPORT OF THE BOARD APPOINTED TO ENQUIRE INTO
AND REPORT UPON THE CONDITION AND MANAGEMENT OF
THE CORANDERRK ABORIGINAL STATION.

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY'S COMMAND.

SIR,

Office of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines,
7th April 1882.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the Report of the Board appointed to "enquire into and report upon the present condition and management of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station."

This Report has received the most careful attention of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, whose reply to it I now beg to submit.

The Board desires at the outset to draw attention to the striking want of agreement amongst the members of the Board of Enquiry, and to point out that they are almost equally divided for and against the opinions expressed in Addendum A.

With regard to the main Report, in which alone all the members concur, the Board desires to point out that the judgment expressed is virtually one of approval of the Board and its officers. The station is reported to be "clean and tidy," the people "orderly, and, to all appearance, well fed and clad." Both the rations and clothing "were of good quality," and the health of the Aborigines at least as good as at any other period. Nevertheless, the Report contains important criticisms to which the Board, having only the welfare of the Aborigines at heart, desires to give the most friendly and impartial consideration.

The Board begs therefore to remark upon them as follows :—

Par. 4 of the Report states that the Blacks do not obtain meat from the station, but buy it where they like out of their wages. This is stated to be objectionable, and it is recommended "that they should be fully supplied with everything, and their wages adjusted accordingly."

The Board would point out that, although no meat is supplied to the able-bodied Blacks and half-castes, they receive extra wages specially on that account. (When sick or too infirm for labor they receive a free meat ration.) It has been the policy of the Board to encourage the amount of self-discipline and mental exercise involved in their laying out the money themselves in the purchase of meat. (It may be here remarked that the Aborigines at Framlingham are now petitioning to be put on the same footing as regards meat as the people of Coranderrk.)

No. 15.

Par. 5 regrets the absence of vegetables on the station, but the Board would state that potatoes are planted yearly for the benefit of all, and garden seeds are supplied to the Aborigines on application, but only a few will take the trouble to cultivate their small gardens and raise a few vegetables.

Par. 6. The Board considers it cannot make a better reply to par. 6, which states that the Aborigines are "not satisfied with the management," than that supplied in the concluding portion of Addendum B, viz.:—"As for the wishes they (the Aborigines) expressed in favor of a change, they must be, from the nature of the case, the least capable of all persons in deciding how or by whom the station should be managed."

Par. 7. The Board at once admits that the management never has been all it could be desired. Although no fewer than five managers have during the last ten years had charge of the station—viz., Mr. Green, Mr. Stähle, Mr. Ogilvie, Mr. Halliday, and Mr. Strickland—not one of them has succeeded in producing results satisfactory to the Board. The Board fully endorses the remarks on this subject made in Addendum B, viz., "The close proximity of the station to Healesville, and the impossibility of preventing the Blacks from holding intercourse with persons who have no special interest in teaching them habits of self-restraint or content, and the opportunities they have of making complaints (which may be well or ill founded) to credulous sympathizers, appear to us to have rendered the task of superintending the station unusually difficult, and to have had much more to do with promoting disaffection than any want of interest or attention on the part of the Central Board or their officers in the welfare of the Blacks under their care at Coranderrk."

Par. 8. With reference to par. 8, the Board begs to state that the uncertainty that has for a long time hung over the future of the station has greatly hindered the making of improvements. Having recommended the sale of Coranderrk, and continually expecting its recommendation would be adopted, the Board would not have been justified in making extensive and expensive permanent improvements. If it be decided that the station is not to be given up, the Board will, so far as the limited means at its disposal will allow, gladly make many improvements, including those mentioned in clause 8 of the Report.

Par. 9. The Board is quite willing to adopt the suggestion in par. 9, viz., to reduce the number of acres of hops and pay more attention to the farm; at the same time it may be mentioned that hop-growing is the most suitable labor in which Blacks can be engaged, and is more remunerative than any other branch of industry tried on the station.

Par. 10. If the Board carries out the suggestion in clause 10, "That an hospital with proper medical attendance be provided," Parliament will have to increase the vote for the Aborigines. An hospital and proper medical attendance at Coranderrk would cost at least £250 per annum. And, if considered necessary at Coranderrk, it would also be the duty of the Board to supply the other five stations with hospitals and doctors. The Board fully agrees with the Report of the Board of Enquiry that the Blacks are not satisfied in the Melbourne Hospital, and but seldom cured; but at the same time it must state that, in its opinion, and in the opinion of those well acquainted with the Aborigines, an hospital on a station would never be occupied after one death had occurred therein. Mr. Hagenauer, in his evidence before the Board of Enquiry (q. 2084), states that he built, at Lake Wellington, an hospital of "five rooms;" but, "though furnished, it remained empty—they would not go in." After mature consideration, the Board hopes to meet the difficulty by having an hospital sent, which, in the event of a death, can be removed to another site, the Aborigines not objecting so much to the building as the land whereon anyone has died.

Par. 11. The Board has already taken measures to prevent the managers being accused of not having supplied clothing by making the Aborigines give a receipt for everything supplied to them.

Par. 12. The Board will gladly adopt the suggestion in par. 12—"Not to allow the Blacks to own more than one horse on each station, and no cattle."

Par. 13. The hiring out of the half-castes is a matter that has been frequently under the consideration of the Board. The difficulty (with regard to females) is not in finding people who would undertake to employ them, but in finding those who would also hold themselves responsible to the Board for their well-being, moral and physical. The Report of the Royal Commissioners (1877) refers to this subject, and it considers "hiring not advisable." Mr. Hagenauer, whose opinion should have weight, says, in his evidence before the Board of Enquiry, "I think it is a very dangerous thing that half-caste girls should be allowed to go out into service, as we have to receive them back again with babies." The Board has no objection to the half-caste men obtaining employment outside; in fact, it is of opinion that the time has now come when those who are capable of work should do a great deal more towards their own support than they have hitherto done. The Board has always been under the impression that the intention of Parliament was not to maintain the residue of our tribes in idleness, but that it should endeavour—by education, by shielding them from temptation to debauchery and inebriety, by instruction and encouragement, supplemented by considerable supplies of food and clothing—to induce them gradually to adopt the white man's habits of self-reliance and labor.

Pars. 15, 16. If the Board can obtain an increase to the vote for the Aborigines it will with pleasure carry out the recommendations suggested in these paragraphs.

Par. 17. The Board agrees with this recommendation.

ADDENDUM A.

With regard to Addendum A, the Board desires to bring under notice several matters that detract considerably from the weight to be attached to the judgments and recommendations contained in it. It is said, "The Aborigines complain with unanimity of the entire absence of sympathy with them alike as regards the Central Board, the General Inspector, and the manager." The Board points out that this statement is not sustained by the evidence. Many of the people, even those who complain, make no

complaint whatever against the Board ; others express no dissatisfaction against the General Inspector ; and, even as to the manager, the discontent is not unqualified. Take, for instance, the evidence of Wm. Barak : The suggestive question is put to him, "Is Mr. Strickland kind to you?" He is compelled to answer, "Sometimes," though, he adds, "not always," and, being pressed for a proof of unkindness, he gives, as an instance, that Mr. Strickland refused to let him have to draw wood a horse that had been working all day. (Questions 378 *et seq.*) When taking the evidence of the Blacks, when serious charges were being made, the Board regrets that the manager was not allowed to be present. The gross untruthfulness of many of the witnesses is patent to anyone who reads the evidence ; but, behind the manager's back, they made statements reflecting most seriously on his hitherto unspersed character.

Par. 3. In so far that Coranderrk yields a larger income than the other stations, it may be said to be the most important. So far as the Aborigines are concerned, all the six stations are under the direct charge of the Board, and it takes as much interest and performs the same duties to the one as to the other.

Par. 7. With reference to par. 7, the Board would point out that in no case have the sick been sent down to Melbourne to find their way as they could to the hospital ; neither is there any evidence to prove such a statement. If any sick person was authorized by the manager to go to the hospital, he has been taken down either by the manager himself, by one of his family, or by a friend, and proper instructions given to the latter. In the particular case mentioned of "William Barak," who brought his child to Melbourne, it is surprising that it was not mentioned at the Court of Enquiry, as it could then have been shown that the man (a most intelligent Black) had neglected to carry out the instructions he had received, viz., to go to the office of the Board on arrival in town.

Dr. Armstrong states in his evidence that the Aborigines, "so far as he saw, were well provided with clothing, and he never had occasion to tell the nurses to provide them with extra clothing."

Par. 9. The Board would remark, with reference to this paragraph, that no rebuttal was possible at the time to the statement that they were "inadequately supplied with clothing," for the reason that the evidence on the subject was given when, as Mr. Strickland states, he was not allowed to be present. But the evidence given, that they always appeared well clothed and well fed, is overwhelming. With reference to there being no system of check or proof to whom the stores were given, the Board would draw attention to questions 1437 and 1446, in reply to which Mrs. Strickland states she keeps an account of what goes out, "who gets it, and for what purpose;" and again, in the evidence of the General Inspector, it is shown that the manager "keeps a book in which he puts down everything served out, and the name of the person;" also that a monthly return was sent into the office of everything issued. The Board regrets that the manager himself was not examined on this subject.

Par. 15. The Board would be pleased to see ministers of religion visit the station, as recommended in par. 15, but it must be on the understanding that they have no pecuniary claim on the Board for their services, unless specially engaged. Experience has taught the Board the necessity for making this proviso, two years ago, the Rev. Robert Hamilton having made a claim on the Board for £200 for services rendered between the years 1865-1875.

Par. 16, comparing the expenditure by the Board during the first five years of its existence and during the last five years: The Board thinks very little need be said on this subject. It is out of the question to compare the wants of the Aborigines of to-day and of twenty years ago. Out of the 2,400 natives that, it is asserted, were in Victoria during those years, but few could have derived benefit from the money voted for them. A blanket and a tomahawk went a long way in satisfying the Aborigines in those days. The Board would point out that during the last five years it has supplied about 850 Blacks at an average annual expenditure of about £11 (eleven pounds) per head. This includes the clothing and feeding of about 550 people on the six stations, medical attendance, buildings, &c.; salaries to managers, schoolmasters, &c.; and wages to Blacks. For some years the Blacks of Coranderrk have received more than their proportionate share of the funds; but that they should be enabled to live in the style some persons seem to think desirable, would probably take a moiety of the vote.

Par. 17. The Board can see nothing in the evidence to justify the statement that difficulty was encountered in obtaining an explanation of the accounts from the Secretary. According to the statement made to this Board by that officer, it seems he was, at the close of one day's sitting, asked to explain an item or two in a statement of account printed as an Appendix to the Annual Report of 1876-1877. The explanation could only be given by referring to books and accounts, some of them previous to his appointment as Secretary. The Board of Enquiry therefore decided to receive the explanation on a future occasion. At another meeting of the Board of Enquiry the Secretary read out the explanation, which was considered quite satisfactory by the Chairman and others. It is also stated in par. 17 that all the accounts of the various stations "were mixed together." This is neither according to evidence or fact. Since the present Secretary has had charge of the books, the accounts of every station have been kept perfectly distinct. Attached is a certificate, marked C, from the Hon. E. Langton on the subject.

Par. 18. With reference to no evidence being tendered of any inspection of Coranderrk by the General Inspector, the Board begs to state that no such evidence was enquired for. The Inspector visits the station at least six times a year.

Par. 23. The Board desires to state that the post of "General Inspector," or rather "General Inspector and Secretary," the offices having been amalgamated, is no "sinecure," as stated in par. 23 of the Addendum A; but, on the contrary, the duties of the office, particularly the clerical, are very onerous. Of late years the General Inspector and Secretary has also had to keep the accounts of the Board, as the two officers in the Mining Department who had charge of them resigned, finding it impossible to carry on that work in connection with their other duties.

Small quantities of wine and spirits are only kept on the station as medical comforts, for the infirm and sick, at the recommendation of the doctor.

ADDENDUM B.

With reference to Addendum B, the Board desires to state that, if the Government decide on keeping up the Coranderrk Station, the Board cordially agrees with the suggestion as to the appointment of a local committee of three gentlemen to occasionally visit the station and report to the Board.

The Board, while still of opinion that it would be for the welfare of the natives to break up the station at once, is, however, willing to carry out the improvements suggested, and to give them a fair trial.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

WILLIAM ANDERSON,

Vice-Chairman,

Board for the Protection of the Aborigines.

The Honorable the Chief Secretary.

CERTIFICATE REFERRED TO.—C.

Having annually examined the books of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, from 1878 to the present time, I certify that in each year the accounts of the several stations have been kept separate. The account published as an appendix to the annual Report of the Board, is in the form directed by the regulations of the Governor in Council under the Act.

EDWARD LANGTON.

68 Temple Court, 4th April 1882.

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