

Rev. Ernest Gribble to Rev. A. V. Baillie, St George's Chapel, Windsor, 15 April 1940, Australian Board of Missions, Further Records, 1873–1978, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 4503, Add-on 1822, Box 11, Folder 17

Honoured to be a lay-servant of our Lord, I am, as are many others, moved by pity for the Aborigines of this Country. I write to you in full faith that you, and Their Majesties, our Good King and Queen, on knowing the facts, will use your influence on behalf of those wronged people.

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As the white people spread in the land, the Aborigines were driven from their water supplies and hunting grounds. Kangaroos and emus, their principal food, were destroyed by the invaders to increase fodder for their cattle and sheep, and prevent fences being broken. If the natives, short of food, speared a calf, the Aborigines were ruthlessly hunted away from their hunting grounds, many of them, on these occasions being shot. Some of our pioneers wantonly, at night, shot Aboriginal men, women and children. Their young women were immorally interfered with, causing the natives (whose moral code prescribed death for this offence) to sometimes meet out justice according to their law: this was followed by a slaughter of natives.

The Aborigines of Australia, from large numbers, have been reduced to now about 60,000. In Tasmania the race is completely exterminated.

I know many Aborigines. These people, if given a fair chance, would become a useful asset in Australia, as have become natives in other countries. It is a known fact that many of them could be educated far beyond the elementary school stage, if permitted. Many are skilled on pastoral stations; also doing blacksmithing, carpentering and attending motors. Some self-taught, have learned to write and speak perfect English. The Aborigines are persistently denied the right to the privileges that are obtained by those who have taken from them their means of living without compensation.

Churches, and a few individuals, are endeavouring to uplift the natives, and are doing good work; but the Governments pigeon-hole every appeal for justice. The full blooded natives are still rounded up and confined in concentration camps, in defiance of God's law. Can a nation prosper if it does not support the weak?

Old Age & Invalid Pensions, and Maternity bonus[es], are not allowed to Aborigines who have more native blood than half, nor may such exercise Federal Franchise. Australian legislation specially names Aborigines as not entitled. (New Zealand specially names Maoris as entitled.) Children of Chinese, Japanese and Afghans are Australian, while children of the Aborigines, no matter how cultured, are denied any privileges of citizenship, even though he may have paid taxes. In brief, the Aboriginal is kept down and has no opportunity of rising. An Aboriginal whose blood is more native than half, may not be a citizen; yet an Aboriginal child, if given a chance, can do just as well as a white child. This is being proved on Mission Stations. The Abos ask for Christian love, and a fair deal. It should not be forgotten that their land Australia has been taken from them without a farthing of compensation.

The Aboriginal claims the right to education, including secondary; and university education for those able to attain to it; and to be under the control of, and to have a representative in, the Federal Parliament.

It is over nine years that Yelgaborrnya, known as William Cooper, has been writing to Government Officials on behalf of his brother Abos. Answers have invariably been an assurance that their welfare would receive consideration, but nothing has been done. I enclose copies of replies received to a petition to His Majesty our King, sent through the Government in November 1937, which, we have reason believe, has not left this country.

Yelgaborrnya, who has taken the British name, William Cooper, is an elderly Aboriginal, 80 years of age, self educated and an earnest Christian, who, for many years, has struggled for justice for his brother Abos. His noble efforts, time after time, continue to fall on deaf ears; yet he has full faith in God that his cry will one day be answered and justice prevail.

Aboriginals who ask for land, are told that they must buy it. They cannot buy without money. Knowing the land was theirs and that they have received nothing for it, they, naturally, feel that this is unjust. There has been talk recently that justice to the Abos is being planned in the Northern Territory, in the section under Commonwealth control; but is it going to be done? In the meantime the race continues to die out. This ought not to be.

Large sums of money are being sent abroad to aid Spain, Poland, Finland, and other sufferers; but the original owners of this country, dispossessed, receive no help. Mission stations are doing their best, but their means are limited. We are told clearly "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong that he hath done; and there is no respect of persons". The Proclamation to the colonists read: "It is also, at this time especially my duty to apprise the colonists of my resolution to take every lawful means for extending the same protection to the native population, as to the rest of His Majesty's subjects and my firm determination to punish with exemplary severity all acts of violence or injustice, which may in any manner be practised or attempted against the natives who are to be considered as under safeguard of the law as the colonists themselves, and equally entitled to the privileges of British subjects".

When the Abos hear it said that we are fighting for the weaker nations, what must they think? The very life has almost been crushed out of these poor people, who are loyal and kind hearted, with no other excuse than that they are defenceless, of another colour, and primitive. Their love for the Queen is strange, not having seen Her Majesty, yet when they are together they speak of the "beautiful good Queen".

I feel as a Christian that my duty was to place these facts before you, and to enclose a letter from Yelgaborrnya to His Majesty, our King, or rather to both Their Majesties. I am persuaded that an enquiry from either of Their Majesties. I am persuaded that an enquiry from either of Their Majesties as to the welfare of the natives, would benefit these people, who have been cruelly wronged.

Asking your forgiveness for the length of my letter, I have the honour to be, Reverend Sir.