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THE ABORIGINES.

A NORTHERN TERRITORY MISSION. REV. J. C. JENNISON IN ADELAIDE.

The establishment of an up-to-date mission station among Northern Territory natives who have hitherto been noted for their treachery, has been no mean achievement on the part of the Rev. JC Jennison who returned to Adelaide on Sunday night after spending two years in the Territory. During that time Mr. Jennison who will shortly take charge of the Stirling Methodist Church, had many adventures but judging by his conversation with a representative of "The Advertiser" on Wednesday he regarded them as mere incidents in the day's work.

As chairman of the Methodist Aborigines' Mission, Mr. Jennison was delighted with the work already accomplished by the mission in Arnhem Land. The generosity of Mr. JL McBride, who took a deep interest in mission work among the Aborigines, enabled him considerably to extend his work. A special mission boat named after the South Australian philanthropist was built at Thursday Island and later in addition to the Goulburn and Crocodile Islands stations, a mission station was established at Elcho Island.

Mr. Jennison, who has spent many years in missionary work in the South Sea Islands, is convinced that by the establishment of industrial missions, and the help of the Government in protecting the natives from a certain type of white men, it will be possible to preserve many of the Aborigines in the eastern portion of Arnhem Land at any rate. These people have preserved their racial characteristics despite the fact that for hundreds of years the Malays have exploited the coast.

Speaking of conditions in the Northern Territory, Mr. Jennison said Darwin appeared to be quieter and steadier in an industrial sense than for many years past. A new union had control of the wharf work, and the old one retained control of the meat industry employees. The new arrangement appeared to be working well. Wages were high. A wharf lumper received 5.6 per hour as an ordinary rate. Just prior to Mr. Jennison's visit to Thursday Island in 1921 there had been considerable trouble owing to the disorganisation of trade consequent on the fall in the price of pearl shell. More than 300 Japanese were repatriated at this time. The average Japanese in his opinion was satisfactory to deal with in business but he belonged to an extraordinarily proud race, and did not adapt himself to Western citizenship as easily as the Chinese.

Before the J.L. McBride was completed, Mr. Jennison, who was anxious to find a suitable site for the establishment of the new mission station, set out from Darwin in the lugger Amethyst. Between Port Bremer and Raffles Bay the lugger was wrecked and Mr. Jennison and another white man, with his three year old son, and five native boys, had to tramp 135 miles thorough wild and unknown country. The party mustered a gun, a rifle and a revolver between them. As the white men had taken the child ashore for a treat, and had proposed walking about 12 miles in order to meet the lugger on the other side of a small peninsular when the vessel was wrecked, they had no provisions with them and very few cartridges for the gun. Soon afterwards an exploded shell jammed the rifle and resisted all their efforts to dislodge it. A kangaroo was shot, and after that they had to satisfy their hunger on bandicoot and jabaroo. The last named was a black and white crane, the flesh of which Mr. Jennison

declared to be as edible and nutritious as an old motor car tyre. A quantity of shellfish was picked off the rocks but water was scarce, and the journey was one long nightmare. A gallant attempt to swim through the tide-rip of Macquarie Straits was made by three of the natives, but was unsuccessful.

On the twelfth day, however, the party was picked up. Mr. Jennison returned to Darwin, and later set out again in the JL McBride. This vessel is now well known to all the Arnheim Land natives, many of whom asked to be allowed to go down to the cabin and see the photograph of Mr. McBride. Mr. Jennison was the only white man aboard the vessel on this trip, the crew being Torres Straits Islanders. A search was made in the Crocodile Islands group, about 100 miles east of Goulburn Island, but the inadequate water supply here decided Mr. Jennison against the site.

At Murrungah Island, about eight miles from the main Crocodile group, a party of natives was discovered hastily engaged in shifting camp. In their haste to flee to the bush at the sight of the first white man they had seen they left some of their gear behind them. This included several conical mosquito screens made from finely plaited pandanas leaves, with tiny interstices for ventilation. The men were eventually induced to return and several mosquito nets were obtained in exchange for goods. These nets, which have hitherto been unknown to ethnologists, stand about 2ft 6in. from the ground and are used to protect the babies and little children as a rule, although occasionally a grown man will squeeze under one by dint of much exertion and will sleep there curled up like a dog. The women carry them hung round their necks while on the march. Mr. Jennison intends to lend some of the nets to the Adelaide Museum and no doubt they will attract considerable attention.

Elcho Island, one of the old English Company group, was finally selected as a mission site. In connection with this, it may be mentioned that a company to exploit these islands was formed in England over a century ago, but beyond giving the group its name, nothing was done. These islands are only partly charted and the charts used by Mr. Jennison were based on those of Matthew Flinders.

“One of my most important discoveries” said Mr. Jennison “was a beautiful harbour on Wigram Island. This was just like Sydney Harbour on a small scale and would afford safe anchorage for a number of vessels. I forwarded my data on this and other matters of charting to the authorities and it is understood that an attempt at systematic charting has since been made. There is also some talk of establishing a naval base at Arnheim Bay. I went right out to Truant Island where I met the old problem of water shortage. I found the remains of an old wreck but no graves nor any signs of white man’s occupation. Regarding the old time Malay visits to Arnheim Land, I found the remains of an old Malay canoe. On Milingimbi Island I discovered an old Malay well 3.5 (??) ft deep. It was excavated in the typical Malay fashion, the sides sloping at an angle of 45 degrees, so that one could walk down to the waterline. Planted round it were a number of tamarind trees and one of these at a height of 4½ft from the ground had a circumference of 9ft 10in. Taking into account the slow growth of the tamarind, it is computed that this tree must be between 300 and 400 years old. Not far away from the well were huge banks of cockle shells. One bank was 60ft long 12ft wide and 10ft deep. The cockles had been brought from a considerable distance”.

Mr. Jennison considers that Elcho Island is ideally situated for an industrial mission. A convenient and roomy bungalow has already been erected. The abundance of snapper, rainbow and many other varieties of fish assures a good food supply for the natives and it is hoped that a good deal will be done in the way of fish-curing. Northern Territory cured fish, according to Mr. Jennison, is retailed in Sydney at 16½d per lb. and the demand is much in excess of the supply.

“We have had most gratifying results at Elcho Island,” said MR. Jennison “and when I left there were 180 natives at the station. Although every native is served with a pannikin of flour for breakfast, they are free to come to the service or stay away as they choose. This serving out of flour makes breakfast an expensive meal costing anything from 18 shillings to £1. The Chief Warden of Mines in the Northern Territory has openly declared that the establishment of Elcho Mission Station has been productive of much good among the natives. This extends for a radius of quite 60 miles from the island and he stated that he had been able to undertake trips into the interior that would have been impossible before our establishment.”

Mrs Jennison was with her husband during the greater part of his stay in the Northern Territory.