
**D 7062 Letter written by Francis Murphy, the first Catholic Bishop of Adelaide, to the Rev. Cerret of the Conseil de Propagation de la Foi in Lyon, 26 December 1844
Transcribed by Judy Fander, Volunteer at the State Library of SA, 2007**

Adelaide, South Australia
December : 26th. 1844.

Gentlemen,

I beg to apprise you of my arrival in my diocese of Adelaide, South Australia, & at the same time to communicate to you some interesting facts relating to the aboriginal inhabitants of this country. I arrived in Adelaide about the beginning of last November & upon my arrival I found my mission utterly destitute of church chapel or school! Divine service was performed on \every/ Sunday by the only priest in the colony the Rev^d Mr Making, a native of Scotland. He was obliged to celebrate mass in a large stone house which contains about two hundred persons, & up to the moment, I have no other place to celebrate the divine mysteries or instruct my people. This mission as I have already reported to the Society in my letter of June last receives no pecuniary assistance of any kind from the Government – The Governor is I believe, anxious to place this colony on the same footing as the neighbouring ones of N.S.Wales & Van Diemens & Swan River by introducing the Church act according to the provisions of which act, certain sums are allocated for the building of Churches and the support of ministers of religion, but the present state of the funds of the colony, & the impoverished state of its incomes, is at the present time an insuperable bar to the introduction of this legislative measure. I am now building a large school, depending for the payment of its erection upon the sum voted by the Society at Lyons & upon the voluntary contributions of the non Catholics of this colony.

The Protestants & dissenters of this colony, are extremely well disposed towards Catholics & I have every reason to think that many conversions would be made if we only had a decent place of worship to which they might not be ashamed to resort. As a great many Catholics are now flocking to this diocese from neighbouring colonies & as many are also expected from Great Britain & Ireland it will soon become necessary for me to procure missionaries from home which I shall be unable to do unless assisted by the Society for the Propagation. Should I go home myself to procure missionaries my expenses \going & returning/ would be about two hundredpounds sterling (5000 Francs)

It will be necessary for me to build small places of worship in the country parts, in order to afford to the Catholics residing in these places an opportunity of hearing mass & receiving the holy communion, & as the Catholics are at present very poor they are badly able to assist me in the erection of these edifices. I enclose an account of Baptisms Marriages conversions etc. I am about to establish a branch of the Society for the Propagation of the faith the sum collected will indeed be small for a length of time still however my good flock will be rewarded for their good intentions, & will have a share in the prayers & indulgences of this admirable society.

As to the aboriginal inhabitants of this colony I find them very gentle and well disposed, they are very far from being the stupid beings which person unacquainted with their dispositions have represented them to be. & if I only had a few missionaries, [...] devote themselves entirely to their civilization & instruction I do really think, that much

good might be effected. A short account of some of their manners & customs, may perhaps be interesting for to the [...] as of the Annals of the Propagation.

Children of either sex always take the family name of their mother. A man cannot marry a woman of his own family/ name, hence in virtue of this [...] too close a connection by blood is studiously guarded against – Female children are always betrothed within a few days after their birth, & from the moment that they are betrothed the parents cease to have any control over the future matrimonial settlement of their child. Should the husband to whom the child is thus betrothed die before she reaches the age of puberty she then belongs to his heir – When a native dies, his brother inherits his wives & children The widow goes to her second husbands hut three days after the death of her first. – The natives do not allow that there is such a thing as a death from natural causes, they believe that were it not for murderers or sorcerers, they might live for ever. When a native dies from the effect of an accident, or from some natural cause, they use various superstitions ceremonies, in order to discern where the sorcerer lives to whose evil practices they attribute the death of their relative & as soon as they discern him, they take ample revenge by putting him to death – Stealing a wife is generally punished with death. If the woman is not returned within a certain time, either her seducer or one of his relatives is sure to be slain. Adultery is punished severely – often with death – They hold anything like incest (even by marriage) in the greatest abhorrence – they live to the age of seventy, but the average of deaths amongst them from natural causes is greater than that of Europeans. Suicide is unheard of amongst them, they are very fond of life, & although often risking their lives in war & and to gratify private revenge still they do not wish to die Polygamy is allowed amongst them – They have no homes or cottages of any kind. When a certain number of families [*are is overwritten by is*] is collected together they encamp at a common spot & each family has a separate hut or two. These huts are merely a few pieces of large bark placed in an inclined manner against a tree & this bark serves to protect them from the sun & the rain, each has his fire made of sticks in this hut there is no door of any kind, it is quite open all round, having only this sheet of bark roof – the father of the family, his wives the female children, of & young boys under ten years of age all sleep in this hut, the young/ men & the boys above ten years sleep in their own hut in [*hole in the paper*] distant part of the encampment – Their food is the [*hole in the paper*] the opossum, whales, seals, wild dogs, frogs all kinds of [*hole in the paper*] except oysters, the eggs of every bird, some kinds of grub worms [*missing*] & snakes which they have killed themselves, they are particularly fond of the blubber of the whale – they are armed with spears & tomahawks & hatchets & boomerangs they have learned the use of fire arms & use them very successfully in shooting Kangaroos & \wild/ pigeons. In burying their dead, they sometimes bury the corpse in the hollow of a tree, sometimes in the ground in a sitting posture the arms of the deceased spear etc are buried along with him – It is very difficult to discern what their ideas may be concerning a supreme being, they believe in spirits called boglyas which can transport themselves through the air & render themselves invisible at pleasure They have a great dread of being out in the darkness of the night & always have each his little fire burning during the night wherever they are encamped. I trust that these few facts relating to the manners & customs of the natives of South Australia may prove interesting to yr readers & may enlist their sympathies in behalf of these poor savages of whose salvation I do not as yet despair.

I have the honor Gentlemen to be yr. most devoted ent [symbol for cross]
Francis Murphy Bishop of Adelaide & V. A A South Australia

lire [...]

n° 117/ Adelaide, Australie du Sud, 20 xbre 1844

annonce Mgr. Murphy, Evêque

Son arrivée d'Adelaïde

à Adelaïde Reçu le 11 juin i d

envoie le tableau

de reseignements

parle des [...]

besoins [...]

et donne quelques

détails Sur les moeurs

des aborigènes

N° 4

une partie pour le comité d'induction [*written very small*]

[*Written at ninety degrees to the above*]

Acton Mid x

Cher Monsieur Cerret Vice president

du Conseil pour L'Oeuvre de Propagation

de la foi. Lyons, France

to the care of Rev^d Thomas Heptinstal
Bedford square London