

WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are warned that this record contains graphic content and may cause distress.

It may include descriptions of violence, racist and offensive language, sexual assault and references to people who have died.

If you would like to provide feedback on this record, please contact
Queensland State Archives

1305 3005

Comments on the Police Force

Queensland Patriot.

SATURDAY, JUNE 29, 1878.

A report has been tabled which gives some particulars of the work done by the philanthropic people who have interested themselves in the wretched remnant of aboriginals in the more settled parts of Queensland. We do not offer to our readers any abstract of this document. It is not that we feel, or that we suppose they feel no interest in the subject. But we turn with a sort of repulsion, from the report of such merely trifling work when we know what the condition and treatment of aboriginals in Queensland really is. No man cares to turn aside to watch a benevolent minded individual endeavor to relieve a case of toothache when he knows a massacre is going on, unchecked, in the next street.

We speak advisedly, and we are using studiously, moderate language, when we say that the very worst outrages committed by ruffianly Circassians in Bulgaria, have been for many years past, and are now being outdone in atrocity by men in the pay and service of this colony.

Mr. THOMPSON, the member for the Bremer, said on one occasion when referring to the aboriginals, that they were "God's image stamped in ebony." It is simply impossible to describe in these pages the exact manner in which that image is mutilated, defaced, and destroyed, by forces which we arm and equip, and which are officered by white men and gentlemen. But we will make the attempt, and trust that our readers will forgive us if we are compelled to shock them; because we do so in the hope that with a humane man as COLONIAL SECRETARY and PREMIER, an effort will be made, a step taken towards reforming that disgrace to the colony, the Native Police system.

The system may be shortly described as one of striking terror by massacre. The aboriginal tribes in a newly settled part of the colony are subjected to a series of "dispersals," as they are called, in the expectation that they will ultimately be so thinned in numbers, and cowed in spirit, that they will not only cease to molest the whites, but submit, without retaliation, to any outrages they may be pleased to inflict on them. Do our readers know what "dispersal" means? We will try to explain.

When the black troopers propose to disperse a mob of blacks, the motive which induces their officer to set them to work varies. Either he is told that a crowd of blacks are in a certain locality, and the neighboring squatter fears that his cattle may be disturbed; that the aboriginals have committed certain depredations; or he may simply come across them in the ordinary course of patrol. Whatever may be the cause that sets him in motion, the process is the same. The aboriginals are attacked, generally by surprise, in the early morning; but otherwise, if circumstances are favorable. Occasionally, the blacks, if they are very savage, take to trees, when it is good fun for the troopers to pick them off, themselves being in perfect safety on the ground. Occasionally the blacks are sur-

prised in the early morning in their scrub camps, and, half awake and dazed, shot down where they lie. Sometimes they take to the water, and while there, trying to conceal themselves by diving, the troopers get admirable practice at snap shooting, hitting each frizzly head as it rises to the surface so long as one man remains alive. This is what is done to the men. Blacks have to be shot, of course; we pay ~~off~~ ^{to do it}, and it does not much matter whether they are shot on land or in the water, awake or asleep. Only it must be remembered that nearly in every case it is massacre of unresisting human beings, paralysed by terror. Sometimes some little fancy murdering is done. The troopers, savages themselves, are, when drunk with blood, beings with whom we would be sorry to insult a respectable fiend by comparing him. When the first flush of massacre is over they occasionally find much amusement in finishing off wounded wretches in a style we dare not describe; or they may have the rare treat of finding some trembling wretch who had escaped at first, hiding and scatheless, able to furnish prime sport before he is finally done to death. For mercy—sparing a victim—is a piece of weakness, to which our black cavalry never condescend.

But if men only suffered on these occasions, we would have comparatively little to say. We believe that there are some native police officers now who absolutely insist that women and children shall be spared. But these are exceptional instances. It is not easy to restrain troopers in the ardour of a "dispersal," and the trouble is seldom taken. Women, female children, are ravished and murdered. Wee toddlers are shot, brained, ripped up, and left to bleed to death with their entrails protruding. Occasionally it happens that one or two children are protected. We remember one instance, not a very old one either, when a native police officer brought in a little toddling boy about three years old. The little fellow, with the courage of utter despair, got the chance of clinging to that gentleman's leg, as he stood watching the hellish scene around him. He picked the little fellow up and brought him in as a present for a lady friend in a neighboring town. But not many of the children got a similar chance. We repeat again that maddened Bashi-Bazouks let loose in a defenceless village may hope to equal, they cannot possibly exceed, the horrors of a Queensland "dispersal," and it must be remembered that all this is connived at, if not directed, by white men and Christians in the public service of this colony.

And it should never be forgotten that this system which we pursue—a system so utterly disgraceful that no native police officer dare report exactly what work he does, and that no Queensland Assembly dare discuss it—is simply due to our laziness as a community. We allow this thing to go on because it is the easiest, when all the time it can be shown that it is not necessary. So long as it can be kept quiet, and the public ear not shocked by the recital of unpleasant facts, we pay the yearly salaries of the native police and say nothing. It will be our endeavor, however, before those items in the Estimates are voted this year, to let Parliament and the public know how the money will be spent.

Queensland Patriot

MONDAY, JULY 1, 1878.

CONTINUE the subject of our last article—the system pursued in our dealing with the aborigines—we may safely assert that the majority of native police officers are dissatisfied and disgusted with their work. This is no wonder. Men get brutalised, but in their sober moments they feel that the work they are compelled to do is degrading; and they must do it. Their business is to “disperse.” If they are slack in the performance of it, an outcry is raised, and their position is in danger. But let our readers imagine how thoroughly the savage must be awakened in a man before he can act in the manner we are about to describe. One native police officer, no longer in the service, had a mob of blacks driven into a waterhole. His troopers had the water surrounded, and there was no escape for the miserable blacks. One by one the despairing wretches were shot as they rose to the surface of the water to breathe, each marksman knowing that his shot was successful by the dull thud of the bullet as it buried itself in a human brain. The officer stood by, and at last felt that he would like to take a personal share in the work. Stripped to his shirt, and with a tomahawk in his belt, he entered the water, and with demonstrations of peace induced one of the surviving wretches to approach closely. When the black was near enough, the white savage whipped out his tomahawk, and buried it in his victim's brain.

We do not of course imply that many native police officers would act in this manner. On the contrary, a considerable number of them are naturally humane and intelligent men who would be glad to be spared some of the disgusting details of their horrible work. But it is not fair to them that they should be placed in the position they occupy, in charge of black demons who would gulk if deprived of their full meal of blood, and only too often hounded on to it by the settlers. The general sentiment among the pioneers on the treatment of blacks is thoroughly cruel. It is hardly too much to say that there has not been a single place in this colony where hostility between blacks and whites has not been begun by some utterly unprovoked outrage committed by the former. It was so on the Palmer; it has been so in almost every outside

district. The state of affairs that prevails almost indicates as great foolishness on the part of the whites as it does cruelty. There is often no inducement to the blacks to leave the whites alone, for whenever and wherever they are seen by a European, or a detachment of native police, their greeting is a Snider bullet. Even a dog that is always beaten becomes demoralised, and an aboriginal in some of our northern districts, knowing that he is shot at on every occasion, comes to the conclusion that he may as well earn his punishment at the expense of the whites.

Now there is nothing to prevent a more rational system being pursued. Let the native police be reorganised. Blacks must be shot when they injure or attack the whites, there is no other way of dealing with them. When a tribe commits a depredation, let the guilty party be hunted down, and let no trouble be spared to find the right mob of savages. At present, it happens only too often that innocent and guilty suffer alike. When the right party have been tracked down let them be “dispersed,” but, if possible, let there be some of the humane restraints of civilised warfare be enforced. Women and children should be held sacred—all the men should not be butchered, and the troopers should be especially restrained from hacking the wounded. An attempt might be made at teaching blacks that there is such a thing as humanity; prisoners might be taken, and treated with a certain degree of kindness. We do not preach sentimentalism. Warfare cannot be waged without bloodshed, and it is a savage warfare that the police must wage in a disturbed district. We only plead that it may be war, not indiscriminate massacre.

Why should not the police also have some restraining power over the whites? Surely there must be some machinery by which a brute who, in mere wantonness and brutality, murders these wretched savages, disgracing his color and entailing danger, perhaps death, on some unoffending successor. We can see clearly enough that a beneficial change could be made, and a force organised of good white bushmen, assisted by black trackers who could protect the lives and property of white settlers far more effectively than is done at present, and who could also exercise a restraining influence on the settlers themselves. But no reform can possibly be effected while our Parliament absolutely refuses to discuss the Native Police system, votes the money for the pay of the men, and asks no questions as to the manner in which it is earned.

QUEENSLAND NATIVE POLICE.

(To the Editor of the Queensland Patriot.)
SIR,—Your editorial in this day's issue of the Patriot, on the “Native Police Force of this Colony,” should be very seriously considered by the Assembly when the estimate for its maintenance comes before the House.

In no other country in the civilized world would such a force be allowed, and how the Imperial authorities permit its existence, can only be accounted for by assuming that they are ignorant that such a force exists, and most assuredly they are quite ignorant of the horrors perpetrated by these savages. Queenslanders, in asking these aborigines to fight for them, are putting off on a subject race a duty which, if it is obligatory, they ought to perform themselves, no matter what cost may be—and I doubt if it would be so much extra.

We all have heard the abuse hurled at the head of Stanley, by the Christians of England, for shooting a few natives in self-defence. What would these good people say if they heard of the atrocities committed by the Queensland native police, over whom floats the British flag?

In Stanley's country (the United States), although the Government has to deal with a far more formidable and skilful, and a thousand times more numerous body of aborigines, it has never adopted the cowardly and mean device of arming, and employing them to exterminate each other, which it very easily and cheaply could do. If fighting is ever required it gets its own race to fight for it. Even distracted and unhappy Mexico would be ashamed to employ such a force as the Christian legislators of Queensland will be asked to provide for to-morrow or after. Let them stamp out this disgrace to their colony.

True, the natives of New Zealand and Africa have been employed for this purpose, but it has been always under the eye of the Imperial officers, and in company with the Imperial troops, who would not permit such atrocities to take place in their presence, as those almost weekly enacted in the colony, mysterious recesses of the Queensland Bush by the Native Police force.

Yours, &c.,

A. U. S. DR. MCN.

June 29, 1878.

Queensland Patriot.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3, 1878.

NATIVE POLICE FORCE.

(To the Editor of the Queensland Patriot.)

SIR,—An U.S. Dragon might have also stated that so careful is the United States Government of its reputation as a Christian and civilised government in connection with the treatment of the aboriginals, which the law of conquest has made subject to it; that when the exigencies of the service require other troops to aid the U.S. soldiers, those troops, white though they be, are not allowed to act, except in company with the Federal troops, or under the supervision of an U.S. officer.

If a company of Sioux Indians were formed, and sent to Texas to fight the Apaches or Comanches, even under the command of a fighting Southern Bishop, a howl of outraged manhood would be raised, that no Administration at Washington would dare to try and hush.

And yet Queensland is a Christian and civilised colony, and I read; and not only read, but know from other sources, that its Native Police commit atrocities, the Indians themselves, bad as they are, would look upon as cowardly and brutal.

You have wisely stated that a force is necessary to keep the aboriginals of this colony in order; and you have clearly explained the composition of this force. I may state that, for some years, I was in such a force in Texas; that the only Indians ever employed were as guides (similar to the black-tracker mentioned in your editorial); and, though we had many a fray, I never saw a woman or a child or a wounded Indian touched; but the Federal officers, who represent the Native Police officers, were educated military gentlemen, who would not allow themselves to be imposed on by the specious tales of the frontier settlers, who represent the squatters of Queensland in that country. These people were always amply protected, but they were never rimpeted into the belief that the people to whom God gave the first possession of the soil, should be wiped off the face of the earth, because they merely would not tamely submit to injury, insult, despoliation, and oftentimes wanton death. If the Government of Queensland continue this force any longer, it will have to do so in the face of a howl from England.

I have sent to Mr. Gladstone, *The Times*, and the Secretary of State for the Colonies copies of the *Patriot* of the 29th June, and 1st July, and I intend, if the Assembly pass the Estimates for the longer existence of its Native Police Force, to lay before the English public in the columns of *The Times* the "Queensland Atrocities," committed by those fiends in human form, the Native Police.

I have still the value of a Mexican dollar, and it only remains for the Assembly to show that they are Christians before I expend it in the way I design to do, and those who know me are well aware that my word in a question like this one is always faithfully fulfilled, though I am not a European knight.

Yours, &c.

—A TEXAN RIFLE RANGER.

July 2, 1871.

*written by G. Buckmaster. an ex comtable
dismissed for drunkenness.*

Queensland Patriot.

THURSDAY, JULY 4, 1878.

SINCE the publication of our article on the Native Police, and the system of dealing with the aboriginals of this country, we have had several letters from gentlemen—some of them ex-officers in the force—offering to furnish additional particulars of this fiendish system which we, as a community, have organised, which we pay for, and which we so carefully refuse to investigate. We never doubted that evidence would be forthcoming if sought for in the proper way. Few men who have passed any time in the outside districts are ignorant of the manner in which this Christian people of Queensland are in the habit of treating the aboriginals of the colony. But the evidence can only be got in one way. A Royal Commission must be appointed, authorised to go from place to place, and permitted to give an indemnity to those who might in their evidence confess to having taken part in deeds which, by every law, human and divine, would consign them to the hangman's halter. The men who must be examined, will be individuals who have sanctioned or connived at the torturing of wretched men, the slow murder of wounded savages, the outraging of helpless women, and the deliberate murder of toddling little children. There is nothing to prevent this being done, if the Parliament chooses to do it. The Commission must not sit in Brisbane, it must be composed of men ready to go from place to place in the interior, and it must be prepared to question not only white men but native troopers, taken separately and out of sight and hearing of their officers. There need be no fear of failure. Plenty of the troopers can talk English well enough. They will lie, of course, but we are supposing that the Commission will contain men capable of sifting evidence, and will include at least one individual acquainted with the blacks and capable of detecting the very transparent falsehoods in which they indulge when they wish to conceal the truth. If such a Commission is appointed we can promise our readers it will bring forward a mass of evidence that will make the colony shudder at the thought of having encouraged such a hellish system. Writing with a knowledge of the facts, and with the deepest sense of responsibility for what we are saying, we assure our fellow citizens most solemnly that from the murder of little children to the burning alive of adult men, there is no crime, no refinement of cruelty which the mind of an incarnate fiend can conceive, which has not and is not being now practiced by men wearing their uniform and eating their bread. We say this deliberately, and we challenge the inquiry for which we have asked. If our assertion is doubted—and we confess that to quiet town readers it must seem almost incredible that such crimes can be perpetrated—we ask them to appoint a preliminary enquiry in Brisbane: collect the men who can give hearsay evidence only, take that and judge whether there is not ground for

a further investigation. And let them remember that there is a latent devil in human nature, which awakens at the sight of blood, and which is only too often rampant among those who live on the outside, and are in constant conflict with the blacks, making them not only connive at, but approve the awful cruelties perpetrated in the back country. Let them never forget the significant incident of Sub-Inspector WHEELER committed for trial on the charge of murder, by flogging a woman to death—a crime which was probably a mere trifle to what he was in the habit of committing in the execution of his duty. Let them remember how that man was let out on bail—probably the only murderer ever bailed out in this colony: how readily he found bondsmen for the large sums exacted, and how he at this very moment defies justice in a distant land. Let them think how that affair was managed—let them ask what care was exercised to prevent the escape of the fugitive, and what efforts made to recover him, and then let them quietly consider what an indication that bubble, on the black pool of our Native Police system gives of the horrors that lie hidden beneath its surface.

It is indeed a thing to make lost angels laugh to see the way in which we Queenslanders skim over this foul blot on our character as a community, and exclaim about trifles. A goldfields' warden knocked down a Chinaman and our Assembly was almost frantic with pleasure when the Minister of the Day assured the leader of the Opposition that he would enquire into the circumstances and dismiss the official if the report was found to be correct. Did that Minister and that leader of the Opposition know nothing about the black police system? Did they walk about with eyes and ears shut all the years they lived in the bush? How much longer are we to play the diabolical farce, of voting money for this force, and then refusing to know that it is spent in the murder of women and children, in the indiscriminate massacre and torture of human beings? Is there not one man in our Assembly who, for the sake of all that has been held most sacred by Englishmen, will take this matter up and not lay it down till he has got the inquiry we have asked for and shown the people of Queensland, in plain terms, the devil's work they have been doing.

The statements made are so astounding that I am unable to reply to them. It is incredible that any person, no matter what position might be given them by Royal Commission or otherwise, would "confess to have taken part in deeds which by every law human and divine, would consign them to the hangman's halter."

If there is any evidence or information in support of the crimes mentioned, it should have been supplied to the Colonial Secretary or to the Commission for investigating the condition of the colony.

*Men who
have been
dismissed for
inefficiency
or misconduct.*

Queensland Patriot.

THURSDAY, JULY 4, 1879.

SINCE the publication of our article on the Native Police, and the system of dealing with the aboriginals of this country, we have had several letters from gentlemen—some of them ex-officers in the force—offering to furnish additional particulars of this fiendish system which we, as a community, have organised, which we pay for, and which we so carefully refuse to investigate. We never doubted that evidence would be forthcoming if sought for in the proper way. Few men who have passed any time in the outside districts are ignorant of the manner in which this Christian people of Queensland are in the habit of treating the aboriginals of the colony. But the evidence can only be got in one way. A Royal Commission must be appointed, authorised to go from place to place, and permitted to give an indemnity to those who might in their evidence confess to having taken part in deeds which, by every law human and divine, would consign them to the hangman's halter. The men who must be examined, will be individuals who have sanctioned or connived at the torturing of wretched men, the slow murder of wounded savages, the outraging of helpless women, and the deliberate murder of toddling little children. There is nothing to prevent this being done, if the Parliament chooses to do it. The Commission must not sit in Brisbane, it must be composed of men ready to go from place to place in the interior, and it must be prepared to question not only white men but native troopers, taken separately and out of sight and hearing of their officers. There need be no fear of failure. Plenty of the troopers can talk English well enough. They will lie, of course, but we are supposing that the Commission will contain men capable of sifting evidence, and will include at least one individual acquainted with the blacks and capable of detecting the very transparent falsehoods in which they indulge when they wish to conceal the truth. If such a Commission is appointed we can promise our readers it will bring forward a mass of evidence that will make the colony shudder at the thought of having encouraged such a hellish system. Writing with a knowledge of the facts, and with the deepest sense of responsibility for what we are saying, we assure our fellow citizens most solemnly that from the murder of little children to the burning alive of adult men, there is no crime, no refinement of cruelty which the mind of an incarnate fiend can conceive, which has not and is not being now practiced by men wearing their uniform and eating their bread. We say this deliberately, and we challenge the inquiry for which we have asked. If our assertion is doubted—and we confess that to quiet town readers it must seem almost incredible that such crimes can be perpetrated—we ask them to appoint a preliminary enquiry in Brisbane: collect the men who can give hearsay evidence only, take that and judge whether there is not ground for

a further investigation. And let them remember that there is a latent devil in human nature which awakens at the sight of blood, and which is only too often rampant among those who live on the outside, and are in constant conflict with the blacks, making them not only connive at, but approve the awful cruelties perpetrated in the back country. Let them never forget the significant incident of Sub-Inspector WHEELER committed for trial on the charge of murder, by flogging a woman to death—a crime which was probably a mere trifle to what he was in the habit of committing in the execution of his duty. Let them remember how that man was let out on bail—probably the only murder ever bailed out in this colony: how readily he found bondsmen for the large sums exacted, and how he at this very moment defies justice in a distant land. Let them think how that affair was managed, and then ask what care was taken to prevent the escape of the fugitive, and what efforts made to recover him, and then let them quietly consider what an indication that bubble on the black pool (our Native Police system) gives of the horrors that lie hidden beneath its surface.

It is indeed a thing to make lost angels hush to see the way in which we Queenslanders skim over this foul blot on our character as a community, and exclaim about trifles. A goldfields' warden knickered down a Chinaman and our Assembly was almost frantic with pleasure when the Minister of the day assured the leader of the Opposition that he would enquire into the circumstances and dismiss the official if the report was found to be correct. Did that Minister and that leader of the Opposition know nothing about the black police system? Did they walk about with eyes and ears shut all the years they lived in the bush? How much longer are we to play the diabolical farce, of voting money for this force, and then refusing to know that it is spent in the murder of women and children, in the indiscriminate massacre and torture of human beings? Is there not one man in our Assembly who, for the sake of all that has been held most sacred by Englishmen, will take this matter up and not lay it down till he has got the inquiry we have asked for and shown the people of Queensland, in plain terms, the devil's work they have been doing.

The statements made are so astounding that I am unable to reply to them. It is incredible that any person, no matter what protection might be given them by Royal Commission or otherwise, would "confess to have taken part in deeds which by every law human and divine, would consign them to the hangman's halter."

If there is any evidence or information in support of the crimes mentioned, it should have been supplied to the Colonial Secretary or to the Commission for ameliorating the condition of the natives.

*Men who
have been
dismissed for
inefficiency
or mis-conduct*