

SHARP RETORT TO DR. WALKER

Colleague Condemns Native Treachery

RED PLAGUE CAUSE

(To the Editor.)

SIR—Dr. Walker, in his communication to the Minister for Home and Territories, says:—"A man constantly without the company of white women and always in the company of aborigines, gradually loses in finer feelings and becomes not merely immoral, but unashamedly unmoral."

Buckley, the first stranded white in Australia, is the only man I have read of who filled all these conditions; but he was married according to aboriginal tribal law, the only law then extant in



Australia. Dr. Walker's generalization would apply to those grand pioneers of colonization, education, and refinement—the Jesuits—who were the first of all religious bodies to succour by instruction, labour, and spiritual teachings the wild natives of Nor'-West Australia and the Northern Territory, feeding, clothing, and training them to set about healthy vocations, and how best to fend for themselves. These missionaries undertook, without reward or Government subsidy, as far as I am aware, their self-imposed burdens, and are still carrying on their work.

Air Service

As regards an aerial service for the white population, the country is so sparsely populated, and the expenses so prohibitive, that it may be dismissed for the time being. The only aerial organization that could survive must be a Commonwealth one. Individual religious bodies may attempt it, with a substantial subsidy from the Commonwealth; but this would lead to an endless and unprofitable controversy among varying denominations.

I do not hold with Dr. Walker's contention that no good arises from missionary activities. Perhaps my opinion should carry as much weight as his, seeing that I have seen more than twice as many years as he acknowledges months as medical officer to the aborigines, from the Goolwa to the MacDonnell Ranges, including the greater part of Yorke's Peninsula, in my early days.

"Aboriginal Cunning"

The innate cunning of an aboriginal never deserts him throughout life, and therefore, to achieve his ends, he becomes, when necessary, an incorrigible liar. Stealth is his predominating factor, for he has to practice this as a fine art for subsistence. I have met nearly all the station managers from the top end of the Flinders Range to the Territory, and, in passing, would like to pay the highest tribute to their probity and excellent character and their kindness to the natives. On the other hand, I would cite two instances of the blackfellows' appalling treachery—the attack on Barrow Creek telegraph station and its repetition at Charlotte Waters. The first was a holocaust of tragedy; the latter story would have remained untold save for a lubra's timely warning.

As to diseases among the natives, especially the so-called "red plague," 30 years ago I saw many cases in the MacDonnell Ranges in the late tertiary stage, which would place its incidence back sixty to seventy years ago—long before the advent of a white population. I feel sure the disease was introduced from the West and East by Javanese engaged in the pearling industry in and on the north-west coast of Australia.—Yours, P. F. SHANAHAN, M.B., Ch.B., Port Vincent.

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THE ABORIGINES AND THEIR WANTS.

Dr. W. S. Walker has laid the Commonwealth under a deep obligation by his report (voluntary, though instigated by the Administrator of Central Australia) on the condition of the blacks he saw during a motor journey of more than six thousand miles in the Far North of this State, in Central and North Australia, and in Western Queensland and New South Wales. Dr. Walker is known to many as a former student at the Adelaide University, and his zeal as a medical man had much to do with his spending fifteen months in close observation of the black and half-caste inhabitants of a wide area of the continent, including districts where a white man had probably never before been seen. Research and reflection have prevented him from sharing the conviction of other friends of the aborigines as to the possibility of their permanent preservation in any circumstances. He is not prepared to concede that anything more can be done for these survivors of the Stone Age than to secure for the race conditions that will make inevitable extinction painless.

The epithet "wretched" is often applied to these interesting folk. Happ-

less they may be in their fate, but in their "wild and naked state" they are far from unhappy. It is on the outskirts of civilisation that their deterioration begins. Civilisation has proved as disastrous for the blacks as a bush-fire for white settlers. It has played havoc not only with the kangaroos and emus and other creatures with which the black man has from time immemorial replenished his larder, but also with the wild fruits and herbs which either form an indispensable part of his diet or are used to cure his physical ills. Dr. Walker is with the Aborigines' Friends' Association and other bodies in their desire for the establishment of reserves for the segregation of the pure-bloods, and is specially favorable to Dr. Basedow's suggestion of three or four sites, including one in Arnheim Land. He recognises their value in the case of the "wild and naked blacks," but for the detribalised nothing, he fears, can be done but to provide the elderly with blankets and rations for the rest of their lives and allow the stations to absorb the younger and the half-castes.

But the problem of the ultimate destiny of natives in the Far North has so long awaited solution that it may wait a little longer. What cannot be deferred is a drastic treatment of the medical question. For Dr. Walker holds that it is nothing less than a scandal, having no parallel in any other part of the world, for a stretch of territory so large as that lying north and south between Oodnadatta and Port Darwin, a distance of 1,300 miles, and east and west between Roeburne and Cloncurry, a distance of 1,500 miles, to be without regular medical superintendence. Not only would Dr. Walker appoint a medical man as Government resident and protector of aborigines at Alice Springs, but he would equip this official with an areoplane (a motor car being worthless where speed is wanted in the almost trackless interior), and a pilot-mechanic to work it. The blacks must be a hardy race to be able to survive, as one did, such a piece of "fifteenth century surgery" as the amputation of an arm by a station cook with a carving knife. Dr. Walker subscribes ardently to the proposal elaborated by Sir Joseph Verco and the Rev. John Flynn, inland superintendent of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, of an aerial medical service at Alice Springs, and the fatalities and physical agonies among the scattered black and white population for want of skilled treatment bear shocking witness to the neglect of a national duty. The air has added to the terrors of humanity, and the least it can be made to do is to minister to its sufferings.