

## THE RICHMOND RIVER.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE EMPIRE.

Sir,—In accordance with a conversation which I had with you, before I left Sydney, in a clerical capacity, for the Richmond River, in August last, I now send you a brief account of what I consider to be a true state of things on this large river, the different localities of which are said to be inhabited by upwards of two thousand persons, males and females, children and adults. Since my arrival here I made as much inquiry about things in general, and paid as much observation as circumstances allowed me to do. My impressions are the following, as to the religious, educational, moral, and legal condition of the place. As to religion, there is not, at present, a minister of religion stationed on the river, and, consequently, there are no ordinances of religion regularly performed here. The Rev. Mr. Dove, the highly respected minister of the Church of England, who appeared to be an amiable and gentlemanly young man, left this river for some other district in the interior about a fortnight ago. As to the probability of any other minister being settled in any part of this river, I am of opinion that it is impossible for such an event to take place, unless the funds to support him are provided by some other parties (say a Missionary Society), than the inhabitants of the place. At present they are not, generally speaking, inclined to attend the ordinances of the Gospel, much less are they prepared to support a minister of the Gospel, properly and respectably, nor, indeed, in any way at all. If a Church of England clergyman is sent here, no doubt the Bishop will be responsible for a sufficient income for him to provide himself with a house or some house of his own, and with a horse, or a boat to enable him to go about the districts to discharge his duty respectably and consistently. A Presbyterian Synod will be very wrong to send a minister to labour on this river, without providing him with some funds or income, at all events, for one year, to enable him to try the place properly, and to establish a course here in a respectable manner. This suggestion may be also applicable to the case of ministers of any other denomination. I know of no persons who are in a more humiliating position, than these ministers who go about the country in consequence of the advice of some erroneous friend, without income, without home, and without the necessary conveniences for travelling; who are entirely dependant upon persons who are under no obligation to accommodate them, and who are often at the mercy of persons of different characters and dispositions. As to the Richmond River, there is no want of hospitality here, so far as I am aware of; but, at the same time, that hospitality is often shown by the hosts, and received by the guests, at great inconvenience and sacrifice of feelings to both parties. The boat is generally engaged in some business or other, and it is necessary to accommodate himself to those with whom he deals, and is fully occupied with his own business, by reason of which he is not able to spare his boat, his boats nor his horses, continually, at all events, for the accommodation of the clergy, who are generally supposed, though erroneously, to be in the receipt of an ample income from some quarter or other.

But there is a field of usefulness on the Richmond River for a minister who may be sent here under favourable circumstances, patronised by respectable parties, and properly supported out of some other funds, until the people of the district have learned to appreciate his services, so as to be induced to raise sufficient amount of local funds to support him.

Now, as to education, it is a melancholy fact that there is not a school in any township on any part of this river. There are several townships here, such as Ballina, Blackwall, Lismore, Casino, and some other localities, in each of which there is a large number of children rising up without any secular or religious instruction, on the Sabbath, nor on the week day. As to the morality of the people on this river, it is such as is generally found to be the case, where there are neither religious nor educational means of instruction

as is generally found to be the case, where there are neither religious nor educational means of instruction provided. I have no pleasure in entering into the particulars of the ungodliness which prevails in these localities, and which are likely to extend, unless they are speedily checked by the preaching of the Gospel, education, and magisterial interference.

As to the legal condition of the place, there is no police magistrate here. Surely the Attorney-General, or the present Ministry, are not aware of the magisterial wants of this district, or else they would locate a police magistrate on the River, to hold weekly courts at the different townships. At present there are only honorary magistrates, men of business, fully occupied, without much time to study the law, and to attend to cases, to be found on or near this river.

In cases of the most aggravated assault, there is no redress to be had without going perhaps a hundred miles for it, through the bush, or by water, which is to many persons too expensive, both as to time and money, even if they know the bush track; and the result is, the injured parties endure injustice, or take the law in their own hands, rather than go on a journey of a hundred miles, which will occupy them several days, to appeal to a Court of honorary magistrates, where they are not certain there will be a sufficient attendance of magistrates to form a Court. I have heard of cases where parties were too seriously injured by assaults to go so far. I have heard of other cases in which persons had neither horses nor boats to go to Casino, the only place where a magistrate sits. I have also heard of persons foregoing their claims to just debts, because they could not command the time and money to go so far to claim their right. Some time ago, a petition was sent to the Government, signed by the cedar-cutters and settlers on the River, and by the masters and owners of the ships trading to the Richmond, praying his Excellency to appoint a police magistrate to the Richmond River District. Perhaps this letter may suggest some ideas to the advocates and the opponents of State-aid to religion, and also to those gentlemen who advocate different systems of education. Let them ask themselves seriously, by what means can religion and education be propagated in such districts as the Richmond River, where there is no prospect of local funds being raised for the support of ministers and schoolmasters, at all events, at first, for a year or two, until the people are made to value Religion and Education. There are a few gentlemen up and down the river, who feel an interest in the establishment of Christian ordinances and schools, and who will, no doubt contribute towards their support. Among these I may mention Mr. Clark Irving, the Parliamentary member for this district, and several gentlemen near Lismore and Casino. I may also mention Mr. Heugh, who residing in Maitland, but who has mercantile premises at Ballina, under the superintendency of Mr. McEachern, who makes arrangements for the convenient accommodation of a clergyman when he visits this township. Since my arrival here I have been accommodated with a residence and place to officiate in on those premises; and if the encouragement on the part of the population generally had been greater, I have no doubt but the accommodation would have been extended accordingly. For my own part I am entirely indebted to Mr. Heugh and his superintendant, for every accommodation. I was told that the Church of England clergyman, when he visited Ballina, was similarly accommodated. But that gentleman was very differently situated from me. He was in the receipt of an income, while I have not received a shilling since I undertook to visit the Richmond River as a clergyman. My object in making these statements is to suggest to Synods and Missionary Committees, the necessity of serious consideration, before they persuade ministers to run the risk, and come to such places as these with their luggage, &c., without some certain guarantee of an income for a time, or some funds in their hands to meet the expenses unavoidably connected with the establishment of an efficient and successful Christian mission in the district.

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I conclude by stating the conveniences that are absolutely necessary for the benefit of a mission on this river. The missionary, or the clergyman, ought to be provided with a house of his own, where he can retire according to the requirements of his position. He ought to have a horse to enable him to visit the small settlements in the bush; and it would be beneficial to the mission if he were able to support a boat to go up and down the river, and visit a township situated on its banks. Of course, such an arrangement as this involves an expense, which committees ought to consider. I do not mean that he should have a number of servants at his command, but I do say that he ought to have some means to enable him to recompense some of the blacks, for assisting him with his boat, or otherwise in going up and down the river. A clergyman, any more than anybody else, cannot expect persons to do anything for nothing for any long time, although he is a welcome guest on different premises. Labour of any sort is more difficult to be had for nothing than a night's lodging, or a month's accommodation. Sometimes there are a great many ships at the heads of the Richmond River. They come here chiefly for cedar. The people of the Richmond River can be classed as squatters, settlers, merchants, and cedar cutters.

I am, Sir, &c,  
 JOHN ROBERTS, Presbyterian Minister,  
 October 8, 1859.

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