

MISSIONS TO THE ABORIGINES OF AUSTRALIA.

BY REV. ALLAN W. WEBB, GEELONG, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.

No country on the face of the globe has become the possession of the Anglo-Saxon race with as little loss of life to the colonist as has the island continent of Australia. Tho upon the first appearance of the paleface the warthy children of the bush have been roused to antagonism, and the lonely settler, usually a shepherd, has sometimes paid forfeit of his life in fulfilling his avocations, yet in a very little while the aboriginal has become pacific in his attitude and glad, in return for such small recompenses as flour, meat, and tobacco, to help his new master with the flock or his master's wife in the menial duties of the home. In the aggregate the loss of life which has attended the occupancy of the beautiful and fertile parts of Southern and Eastern Australia has been very small.

On the other hand, the early settlers, in their reprisals for cattle speared or shepherds murdered, frequently treated the blacks with ruthless cruelty and injustice. The guilty and the innocent alike fell before the rifle. Whole tribes were swept away, partly slain in revenge and partly by the adoption of the white man's vices ere any work of evangelization could be effectively done.

When at length the work was initiated, their vocabularies were found to be so destitute of words suited to express Divine thoughts that "pigeon English" had to be used in order to instil the simplest facts of a religious kind. It was inconceivable that Christians could see these children of the wilds pass away from the lands which were naturally their own without an endeavor to give them the Gospel; and some of the earliest settlers sought, not without distinct encouragement, to illuminate with the light of truth their gross darkness.

The notions of the aboriginals of Australia about the supernatural are exceedingly crude, and it is affirmed by some that they have no proper object of worship. Universally the spirit of evil is an object of dread, and consequently they are in a state of constant fear. The shadows of the night are believed to be haunted by demons who, they say, attack all natives who come in their way. After dark they will not move without a fire stick as a protection against their malignity. They are full of superstition, and believe in witchcraft.

Among the earliest efforts made to systematically evangelize them was a mission in New South Wales, on the shores of Lake Macquarie. The Rev. Mr. Threlkeld was for years their missionary, and was succeeded by the Rev. William Ridley, M.A., a scholarly man whose philological labors in connection with the aboriginals of New South Wales must be of permanent value to those who wish to study the tongue of an extinct race.

Twenty-five years ago the writer saw all that remained of that earliest effort to systematically reach these children of the wilds in the shape of a