

Thomas Kendall to Rev.^d Joshua Mann

Bay of Islands July 14 1817

Rev^d and Dear Sir

Your letter bearing date Dec^r 28th reached me on the 22nd of May last, and it gives me great pleasure to learn that you have been called to the Church of St. Catherine Cree where you have an opportunity of enlarging your sphere of usefulness. I pray that the presence and blessing of our common Lord may attend you in all your labours, that you may be the honored instrument of dealing out the Bread of Life to the hungry, that the poor also of your flock may have reason to bless you, and that you may be long spared for the spiritual and eternal benefit of many souls.

I have now been two years and nine months amongst the New Zealanders, who, I am happy to say, generally approve of the Church Missionary settlement being established upon their island. Their behaviour to the Missionary Settlers has been upon the whole much better than we could reasonably have expected considering their deplorable state, and our prospects of usefulness bid fairer every succeeding year. It will, as you justly observe, be a subject for rejoicing to us all if it pleased God to enable us to "break up a little of the fallow ground." This I expect, is all that will be done for some years to come. Yet it is pleasing to observe the least improvement. When I [f] first saw the New Zealanders, dressed as they were in their native raiment, their appearance was by no means any recommendation to me. Their wild, forlorn looks and demeanour were distressing to my feelings. I

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conceived they must indeed be sunk to the lowest pitch of human degradation, and greatly doubted the possibility that a person or family would be permitted to live among them for any reasonable time in safety. After a few days intercourse with them I was led altho' contrary to my wish and expectation to spend on shore with them one night. The very kind manner in which they treated me, and conveyed me back to the Active, added to the many gracious promises contained in the Word of God in our favor encouraged me to repose in them still greater confidence, and to return with my family. I desire to bless God for the many merciful interpositions of His Providence in my favor, especially for that which conducted me from my native village to London and eventually here. In London, with respect to the enjoyment of Gospel priviledges [sic] I was as it were in a perihelion state. On my first attendance on a place of public worship there and for some time afterwards I was amongst other things so struck with the beauty and solemnity of the service, that I felt something of what the Ethiopian Eunuch might probably feel on his return from Jerusalem after witnessing the Holy and transporting services of the Temple. Here, altho' I may [f] be said to be in my aphelion, yet it is a blessing that the same Sun still continues to shine upon me, and often cheers my drooping spirits. The Lord has in His condescension given tol me a work to do. He makes the path of duty plainer day by day. The most cordial attachment exists between me and the natives where I sojourn, and by His continued faithfulness, loving kindness and tender mercy to me, a sinful ????? He

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inclines me to cherish the desire “ to give thanks to Him among the Heathen, and to sing praises unto His name.” When I reflect upon the critical situation of our brethren in Africa and how much they have suffered from natives who have been stirred up to oppose them, I cannot complain. I have it is true, not been without my share of trials in common with the rest of my colleagues, since the period of my arrival. My new situation has exposed me to various temptations and troubles, and the remains of a stubborn perverse nature from which I groan to be delivered, have tended to thwart my course, but I can place very little to the account of the natives. Their visits and importunities have occasionally been tedious and disagreeable but they have never done to me or mine the least personal harm. They have indeed been very kind, and my partiality towards many of them gain strength as I acquire a knowledge of the Language; and I and mine & I may now say all my [f] Colleagues live as quietly and comfortably as we can expect to do in an heathen land.

I commenced teaching School in August 1816. My little wild pupils were all noise and play during the first four months. We could scarcely hear them read for their incessant shouting, singing and dancing. The first month they attempted to repeat their lessons in the School house very well, but we soon had to follow them to a short distance into the bushes. I had no command over them, having at that time neither provisions nor rewards to give them. Since I received these, my authority and influence have been greatly augmented amongst them. I can now

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command their attention. They will learn to read and write, work at their raiment, make fences and fetch water and firewood very chearfully [sic]. They rise at daylight according to the custom of the natives in general, and repeat their lessons to me. After breakfast several of the boys write a copy. The girls are employed in making their raiment the whole of the Day. After Dinner the Native children repeat their lessons to my colleague M^r Carlisle. The Boys learn to write on every day of the week except Sundays. The children of the settlers arfe also instructed by myself and M^r Carlisle. The Settlers join in Public Worship twice on every Lords Day, the Prayers of the Church of England are read [f] alternately by myself & Messrs Hall and King. We also meet on the Wednesday evening for the purpose of reading the Holy Scriptures and Prayer. Many Natives attend on the Sunday. The Service is performed in the School House.

From the above statement you will perceive how we are going on, and I doubt not, Will rejoice at the most distant prospect of this dark region, so long unknown, being favored with the light of the Glorious Gospel. I need not caution you against being too sanguine in your expectations. Means must be used, as you know, and the Divine Blessing must accompany those means which ensure success. Circumstanced as the New Zealanders have been, and still are I need not attempt to lay before you any consideration as a ground to expect sudden important changes, it becomes me rather in any communications to state such facts as may be calculated to excite you in your appeals on behalf of the Heathen to

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move the compassion of the christian World. But here I am prevented, civilized christian assembly could not bear to hear a variety of cases which might be recited to shew in what a sad state of captivity the great deceiver of mankind holds these poor people. In general it may be said of them as of all the heathens [f] that they are perishing for lack of knowledge and that gross darkness covers the mind. In the time of sickness and at the near prospect of death their situation is truly distressing. They will pray, and that sincerely, but alas how awful are their petitions! The most respectable characters amongst them, for there is a great difference, will with the utmost fervor of soul say words of nearly the same import in the English Tongue, as in general, the most hardened sinner in a christian land would shudder at in the time of severe illness or at his dying hour. A few days ago one of the scholars was taken very ill. I heard the prayers of his father over him, and saw his motions. The poor blind parent instead of importuning the Supreme being as one would have imagined for the recovery of his son, was uttering the most dreadful curses and imprecations against him. When I asked him his reason for the use of such language, he replied, it was a good thing at New Zealand. He did it to frighten the Atua away who would otherwise, very probably have destroyed his Son. The boy had been out in the rain a whole day, and had caught a severe cold; but the natives will not allow that excessive heat or cold, or being long out in the wet can hurt a man. They ascribe every pain [f] they feel to the Atua who they say is preying upon them.

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Such a case is a common cold the cause and effect would, one would conceive, be easily understood by an heathen. But here "Satan reigns with destructive sway." When the natives are sick they are impatient and angry. They will sometimes bathe themselves in cold water or drink it when in the height of a raging fever; their superstition has a tendency to hasten their death. How similar is the language they use on this most solemn occasion to that recommended to Job to "curse God and die." My dear Sir, there is no necessity for me to multiply cases of this nature to excite you to pray and to encourage your pious hearers to pray for the wretched heathen.

Pride and ignorance, cruelty and licentiousness are some of the principal ingredients in a New Zealanders religion. He does not, as far as I can learn, bow to a stork or a stone but he magnifies himself into a god. The chiefs and elders of the people are called Atuas even whilst they are living. An aged friend Terra, says that the God of thunder is in his forehead. Shunghee and Okeda tell me that they are possessed with gods of the Sea. When the clouds are beautifully checkered the Atua above. It is supposed, is planting sweet potatoes. At the Season when these are planted in the ground [f] the planters dress themselves in their best raiment and say that as Atuas on earth they are imitating the Atua in heaven. The land is considered sacred from hence until the sweet potatoes are taken up. No person presumed to go upon them except such as are consecrated for the purpose of weeding & inspecting them. The head of a New Zealander being the seat of the

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Atua is sacred, and is held in such estimation as though the head could do without any other part of the body. To the carved or graven head of a friend or enemy after death the same ode is sung. The latter it is true, is separated from the body, but it is held in honor as well as the former, altho it does not command an equal effusion of tears. The language is "what a fine God is this." Those customs the description of which would be the most painful; to the tender feelings, are consistent with the native's idea of the properties of the Supreme Being. They describe Him as an invisible anthropophagous, and regard Him with a mixture of fear and hatred. They vex themselves, as I have before told you, when He thinks good to afflict or call any of them away, for having lost sight of Him so long how can they think of Him as a God of Love and Mercy.

The territorial possessions of the natives are hereditary, [f] descending from the father or mother to the eldest son or daughter. It is very remarkable but a proof of the above fact, no natives from different parts of the island or even the Bay itself have come to settle near us. The natives have all of them as far as we can learn a fixed place of abode. The districts, fisheries, woods, villages, houses &c have each their distinct proprietors. It is against the custom of the country for one native to trespass upon another native's possessions, and, I believe, it is seldom done except as a punishment for the breach of some public law, or custom, in inflicting which a whole party or perhaps a whole district will unite. The Burying Places belonging to a Village or family are also kept distinct. Natives who die a natural death (slaves

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excepted) at a distance from home, are conveyed by their friends to their family cave at a convenient time.

The six pairs of stockings from M^{rs} Mann were received safe, and M^{rs} Kendall unites in thankful acknowledgments to her for them. Our two daughters whom we left under the care of a pious friend at port Jackson until we were properly settled here are now with us. We have six children, & I bless God my family & all the settlers and children are in a good state of health. This is a very healthful and agreeable climate. We suffer nothing from excessive heat or cold. [f] I send by this conveyance a few curiosities with a description of their use. I have sent you some Letters and intend to continue my communications so long as they may be acceptable to you.

M^{rs} Kendall unites with me in christian regards to M^{rs} Mann, yourself and your children. And am, Rev^d and Dear Sir

Your faithful and affectionate

Tho. Kendall

The Rev^d Joshua Mann

&c^a

I heard your Brother W^m preach twice or thrice but had never the pleasure of speaking to him, I would nevertheless present through you my Christian regards to him.

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P.S. It will be very gratifying to all our friends to hear that we have hitherto had no trials in consequence of wars amongst the natives. Not one native has been killed near the Bay, to my knowledge, since the period of my arrival. [f]

Articles for the Rev^d Mr Mann— in a case directed to the Society 1 Wedge of Green talc used by the Natives as an Axe—

1 Green talc image (a man in miniature) worn by the natives at the bosom in memory of a departed friend. It is worn as an ornament, and not esteemed as a deity as has been reported.