

The Aboriginal History Project

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ABORIGINES PLEAD FOR CHANGE

Deputation To See Prime Minister

A number of educated aborigines are at present organising, in Melbourne, a deputation to the Prime Minister (Mr Bruce).

They will ask Mr Bruce to transfer the control of the native race from the States to the Commonwealth, to establish training farms, to remove restrictions to employment in



Mr Thomas James, of Fitzroy, photographed today.

Government departments, and generally to give the intelligent aborigines opportunities to make good.

Active in this agitation is Mr Thomas James, a retired native teacher of a mission school in New Wales, who is now a resident of Fitzroy.

15,000 EDUCATED

He estimates that of the 60,000 aborigines in Australia 15,000 are educated, and he thinks that 3000 or 4000 of them would justify any attempt to give them a better status in the community.

"All we ask for is a chance to prove ourselves," he says. "If we fail, that is the end of it."

As an instance of the general prejudice against even our own colored people, Mr James relates that his son, who has lectured at universities and preached from many pulpits, was recently refused admission to a Melbourne picture theatre. This man cannot get employment except as a laborer, although his educational attainments are high.

Another case which he quotes is that of a half-caste girl who qualified as an accountant but was refused a position in a Government department, in which there were several vacancies, because of her dark skin.

Mr James thinks that descendants of the original owners of Australia

should be given chances to become farmers by ranking equally with the whites in selection ballots. The present lack of vocational training has kept the race back.

He admits that there are wasters among the aborigines, as there are among the whites, but declares that the tendency to condemn the whole race as a people unworthy of anything, but charity, grudgingly given, is as unfair as it would be to judge Australians by the conduct of a few of them towards the umpire in a hotly contested football match.

ETHNOLOGIST'S VIEW

Mr W. H. Gill, a prominent member of the Ethnological Society, agrees with the view expressed by Dr Gilruth, formerly Administrator of the Northern Territory, at the Constitutional Club lunch yesterday, that the aborigines should be given land and be educated.

"The natives have been called lazy by people who do not understand them," said Mr Gill. "You cannot expect them to work eight hours a day like white men. For many thousands of years they have been a nomad people, and to entirely ignore that instinct would be against the laws of nature."

"I believe that reservations should be established and that the Government should watch over their interests, especially in regard to the education and medical care."