

LETTER VIII.

THE settlement of Hunter's River, to the right, or north of Sydney, is divided at present into the counties of Northumberland and Durham, the first lying between the Hawkesbury and Hunter's rivers, (the distance between which is fifty-five miles,) and the second lying to the north, *beyond* Hunter's River, and stretching upwards along its bank; but the limits of neither are yet properly defined.

By land, you proceed either by way of Windsor or Richmond. From Windsor to Patrick's Plains, on Hunter's River, is a distance of seventy miles in a direct line, but nearly of ninety miles when following the convolutions of the road, which is, as yet, but a rugged bridle-path over the mountainous ridge called the Bulgar, quite unfit to take

even an empty cart by. Patrick's Plains, again, are twenty miles from Wallis Plains, the head of loaded-boat navigation, and forty miles from the town of Newcastle, at the outlet of Hunter's River on the sea-coast. By the circuitous route of Windsor, therefore, Patrick's Plains are upwards of one hundred and twenty miles from Sydney; but a practicable route for a road has been surveyed direct from Paramatta thither, which will reduce the distance to Sydney upwards of thirty miles, crossing the Hawkesbury low down by a punt. A fine little cutter packet, named the Lord Liverpool, sails weekly between Sydney and Newcastle, (in distance seventy-three miles,) twelve hours' easy sail, cabin fare, (including provisions, wine, and spirits,) 1*l.* 6*s.*, and the accommodations excellent, the vessel having been formerly a pleasure-yacht in India. Several other craft pass backwards and forwards between the two places, also, as irregular traders, all taking goods on freights, the principal return being coals,—Newcastle supplying the Sydney market with that necessary article. Two passage-boats ply between Newcastle and Wallis Plains, conveying goods

upwards, on freight also, which goods may be there secured in a safe store appertaining to Messrs. Powditch and Boucher, on payment of a small commission. There is only a bridle-road as yet between Newcastle and Wallis Plains; but a cart-road, which is now in progress, will ere long be completed. The distance by land I have already stated at twenty miles, but on account of the convolutions of the river it amounts by water to nearer seventy. Close to these plains, indeed, there is a part of the river so tortuous, that although the distance between the two points (that is, between Lieut. Close's wharf and Powditch and Boucher's wharf) be but three miles by land, it is twenty-five miles by water. In freshes, boats can go no higher than Lieut. Close's, and this being a high-lying dry place, and abounding in fresh water, will doubtless eventually be the situation pitched upon for a town. Carts, therefore, must be sent hither from Newcastle by water until the road be completed; but from Powditch and Boucher's store, loaded drays may pass up the banks of the river for seventy miles farther at least, crossing to the right bank at Mr. Singleton's ford, head of Pa-

trick's Plains, the country beyond this being too rugged on the left bank to admit of carts proceeding much higher on that side. When the made road from Newcastle to Wallis Plains is finished, an excellent cart-road might, by the employment of a gang of twenty men for a fortnight or so, be completed, upwards, to full ninety miles distance from Newcastle; the country being generally so even, so thinly timbered, and clear of brush, that the banks of a few rivulets and gullies only require to be lowered, or bridges thrown across,—nature having done all the rest. But the road, even as it is, cannot be found much fault with, there being only two or three difficult gullies, which require, in crossing, a partial unloading of the drays.

Newcastle is distant about one hundred and twenty miles from that extensive pastoral country, Liverpool Plains; and after the road from Newcastle to Wallis Plains shall be completed, a stage-coach might be driven that distance (by a cart-road of fourteen miles only near Liverpool Plains) without much inconvenience, so easy of communication is this part of the country.

Liverpool Plains lie immediately beyond the mountain range dividing the eastern and western waters, the range here making a sudden interior or westerly bend toward the sources of Hunter's River, and thus enabling the latter to collect its waters in a straight westerly line of one hundred and forty miles. Hunter's River thus takes its origin at the base of the dividing range near Liverpool Plains, to the north-west of Newcastle; and, assuming a north-east course, is joined by several smaller streams, till reaching Twickenham Meadows, its current runs direct south for about fifteen miles, when, joined by the Goulburn from the westward about eighty miles from Newcastle, it bends suddenly due east, and runs onward in this direction, meeting with Williams's and Patterson's Rivers from the north twenty and fifteen miles above Newcastle, at which place it falls into the sea.

The settlements in this district are formed on Patterson's and Williams's Rivers, to the right as you proceed up, and along the main stream of Hunter's River, to one hundred miles distance from the sea. These settlements are among the most

respectable of the colony, the great bulk of the proprietors consisting of military and naval officers, or free emigrants. The alluvial banks of Patterson's and Williams's Rivers are heavily timbered, but the forest land behind is open, grassy, and every way suitable for pasture without cutting down a single tree. An estate of one thousand acres here, in a very trifling degree improved, was lately knocked down at public auction, in Sydney, for 580*l.* or 2680 dollars, ready money.

Newcastle occupies the extremity of a peninsula running into the sea commencing from the main land in a low swampy neck which gradually swells out at the extremity into a rising ground of moderate altitude, over the front of which the town creeps up, the streets running upwards and across its face, and a government windmill occupying the crown, and overlooking the harbour, sea, and the flat land between and the main. Few except the government houses are worthy of much notice, being chiefly small detached cottages of brick or wood, presenting no very imposing appearance; but, from the thriving settlements upon the banks

above, the attention of our merchants has of late been more particularly directed to Newcastle, and wharfs and stores are now in progress, to facilitate and extend its rising commerce. The entrance to the harbour is narrow, but the channel deep enough for large merchant-ships; its crookedness however renders it dangerous for any but cutters or schooners to work in and out through it. A high round precipitous island, called Nobby's Island, is situated at the entrance, toward which a low reef extends from the south shore with a breakwater of loose stones upon it, to protect the anchorage from the seas that break over in the southerly gales. Nobby's Island forming a sure defence against attacks by sea, whilst a battery on the crown of the hill above the town would command all the low isthmus and harbour around, Newcastle might very easily be rendered impregnable, should occasion require. It possesses a great advantage over most of the other colonial ports in the quantity of excellent coal wherewith the surrounding country abounds; inasmuch as vessels are always sure of a return cargo. The coal shaft is sunk upon the summit of the hill, and the coals carted down by

bullocks; but from the defective nature of the working, and the lazy habits of the *incorrigibles* who are sentenced to this labour, the produce does not at all correspond with what may be expected when a more efficient system is introduced.

Newcastle contains two government houses; a jail; military and convict barracks; a hospital; two tolerable inns; and an episcopal church. It is under the jurisdiction of a half-pay military officer, denominated *commandant*, but whose functions merely extend to the superintendence of the government works, and the general police of the town, in his capacity of a colonial magistrate, wherein he is aided by the assistant surgeon of the hospital, who has been recently appointed to the magistracy also, in order that a bench may readily be formed when more heinous offences come on for investigation—the power of a single magistrate being now very limited. Two passage-boats, as I before stated, ply regularly between Newcastle and Wallis Plains; but, from the tediousness of the navigation, it is customary to despatch only your baggage by them, and to proceed to Wallis Plains by land, a plain beaten path leading thereto

through the woods along the left bank of the river, out of which you cannot easily wander—The country is low and swampy for a considerable distance on this route, consisting at first of a poor washed clay or light sandy soil, covered with stunted brush; but as you proceed, spots of great fertility present themselves, generally well watered, but so thickly timbered and brushy, that very few individuals have as yet been induced to settle upon this line. There is a government-house at Wallis Plains, and a guard-house with three soldiers is fixed here too, for receiving and securing prisoners previous to forwarding them to Newcastle jail.

Wallis Plains are of no great extent, and being originally densely wooded, required great labour in clearing; a disadvantage, however, amply compensated by the amazing fertility of the soil, which is all alluvial, and still subject to being covered with water during the high floods. The ready communication by water-carriage to Newcastle likewise, and the regular weekly packet communication again from thence to Sydney, contribute to render land here extremely valuable. The country back from the river consists of rising

hills of inferior soil, with fertile flooded vine brushes, watered by lagoons communicating with the river. These lagoons swarm with the most delicious fish; and during the dry summers, when the water is low, the natives wade in and actually drag out *cart-loads* thereof, including immense eels. A deep rivulet runs through the Plains, over which you cross in a ferry-boat, and proceeding along its banks, toward the main river, past various houses and small farms belonging to poor settlers, you come to Messrs. Powditch and Boucher's store, before mentioned, where a good supply of all sorts of merchandise is kept.

Small settlers (chiefly those who had been transported to Newcastle when a penal settlement) occupy patches of ground along the alluvial banks of Hunter's River, for about a mile onward, when you come to a thick vine brush of the richest soil, through which the road winds, the ground becoming firm, and the country beyond it of the open forest description. No road has been either cut, or measured off, on this line yet, the carts following each other's track:—a few difficult gullies, and a rather steep hill (Iron-bark hill), intervening between

Wallis and Patrick's Plains, to diminish the claims of this route to the designation of an excellent natural road. The country is undulating as you proceed, tolerably watered, and well adapted for cultivation or pasture, various respectable settlers being fixed to your right and left at irregular intervals. From the rising grounds you have occasional fine views of the picturesque scenery on each of the banks, and occasional glimpses of the houses and cleared grounds of the settlers, among which the farms of Messrs. Winder and M'Leod, to your right, are peculiarly worthy of notice. Mr. Mudie's is the first of several excellent farms you reach upon Patrick's Plains, and consists of above two thousand acres of the most fertile soil, the greater portion naturally clear of timber. You pass close to the farm buildings of this gentleman, who is well known in England as the proprietor of the British collection of medals.

The plains contain several thousand acres, clear of timber, and of the richest alluvial soil, producing heavy crops of wheat, maize, or whatever else is sown thereupon; while the natural grasses are of the most luxuriant description. These plains

are the great resort of our wild turkeys, which you will see here stalking majestically about, and which afford an excellent and most delicate repast. Here is an inn too, and a ferry-boat capable of conveying carts and heavy articles across when the river is up, at the stern of which the horses and bullocks are made to swim by a line fastened to their heads. For sixteen miles above this on the left bank, settlers are located; but crossing to the right bank you strike farther into the interior from the river, and find no habitation for twelve miles, although the land here has been granted, stock-runs alone existing through that distance. (The country is all open forest, affording generally good pasture, until you arrive upon the banks of the river again at Twickenham Meadows, forty-six miles from this ford.) Mr. Glennie's, at Dulwich Grove, twelve miles distant from the ford, is the first habitation you meet with, situated upon a fine fresh-water rivulet, with deep limpid pools along its course, affording excellent water and abundance of fish all the year round. A considerable part of this farm is fenced, and under cultivation. Four miles farther on is Mr. Bowman's, situated

between two rivulets, one of fresh and the other of brackish water, for the latter of which the sheep have a great predilection. Extensive buildings for packing and sorting wool are erected here, Mr. Bowman's flocks being numerous, and ranking among the finest cross-breds in the colony.

Twenty-four miles herefrom you enter upon the rich alluvial plains called Twickenham Meadows, which consist of a series of the finest alluvial flats, dotted lightly over with trees, (with good forest land behind,) extending through a distance of twelve miles and upwards along both banks of the river, and averaging from half a mile to one and a half broad. From Wallis Plains upwards to Twickenham Meadows, the country gradually rises in elevation, but so imperceptibly, that you are only made aware of it by the numerous rapids you perceive in the river as you pass along. This rich and beautiful tract of country was but very lately discovered by Mr. H. Dangar, our zealous surveyor on this river, and such was the eagerness to obtain locations here, that it was all granted away in a very few months after that gentleman's first visit.

On disentangling yourself from among the un-

dulating hills and ridges which bound these beautiful meadows, one of the richest natural prospects that can well be witnessed presents itself,—the flat alluvial lands spread out before you being matted with luxuriant herbage; branching evergreens scattered singly or in irregular clumps; the river winding through the midst; whilst dark-foliaged swamp-oaks, bordering with a deep-green fringe its steep and grassy banks, and the gently rising hills beyond, thinly clothed with wide-spreading forest-trees, extend in diversified magnificence as far as eye can reach.

You enter first upon Edinglassie, the property of Mr. George Forbes, brother to our able and amiable chief justice, who possesses many thousand acres here, which he is stocking with fine-woolled sheep. To the right, is Captain Dickson's farm, and to the left in succession, the farms of Messrs. Carter, Mills, and Ogilvie. On the opposite bank there are only two resident proprietors, namely Captain Pike and Mr. Greig, the remainder of the land being all occupied as stock-runs by distant proprietors. Mr. Ogilvie and his family are resident upon their property at Merton,

the scenery whereof exceeds even that of Edin-
glassie, being still more various in its features :
in fact, I may add, that it is the only place which,
having before heard much praised, I was not dis-
appointed in.

In all these luxuriant plains there is scarcely a
superfluous tree to be seen, not often above a dozen
to the acre ; and patches of acres are here and
there met with destitute even of one, and only re-
quiring the instrumentality of the plough to pro-
duce an abundant crop. It is this freedom from
superfluous timber which, among other things,
gives so decided a preference to New South
Wales over America, where your capital is often
exhausted in making the land *fit* for the plough ;
whereas here, you will often meet with enough to
serve your purpose, without a farthing of previous
outlay on account of clearing. Every thing de-
pends, in forming a new establishment, upon econo-
mising your means at the outset ; and in a coun-
try where you have thus abundance of land fit
at once for the plough, and a greater abundance
still affording the finest pasture, all without the
trouble or expense of cutting down a tree, how

manifest must the advantage resulting be to a new
settler !

Mr. Ogilvie possesses here six thousand acres,
consisting of alluvial flats and lightly-timbered forest
land backwards, bounded by a moderately high
ridge. A plain of fifty acres of rich land (*without
a tree upon it*) is situated in the middle of the
grant, overlooked by a beautiful swelling hill,
equally clear, of the finest sort of garden mould,
and covered with luxuriant grasses. The Goul-
burn enters Hunter's River opposite to the bottom
of Mr. Ogilvie's grant, the plains on each side
being hemmed in by woody ridges of moderate
elevation, toward which the back land gradually
rises. Contrary to what is generally found in
other parts of the country, the ridges upon the
upper part of Hunter's River are almost uniformly
flattened at the top, forming little miniature hills
and valleys covered with fine soil of moderate depth,
and abounding in grass, which makes them the
great resort of the kangaroos and cattle in the
winter season. Behind the ridge bounding Mr.
Ogilvie's farm, at four miles distance, is Mr. George
Blaxland's residence, where several flocks of fine-

woolled sheep and a large herd of cattle are kept. Captain Pike brought out to his residence here, a good assortment of Saxon and Spanish Merinos, which promise to be a great benefit to the flocks on this river, besides the advantages he will individually derive from them. Twenty-four miles above this, at Holdsworthy Downs, Lieut. Gibbs, Mr. Carlisle, R. N. and the Messrs. Little, are settled, with Mr. M'Intyre, agent for Potter Macqueen, M. P. Farther on again, several young Scotchmen have taken grants upon some fine clear downs along the banks of a branch of the Goulburn. All these gentlemen possess sheep, and indeed there is no settler of any note upon this extensive river, who is not turning his attention to the production of fine wool. It would be difficult to arrive at a proper computation of the numbers of the sheep, but they cannot at the present moment amount to less, I should think, than twenty thousand; which circumstance, considering the very short time this portion of the colony has been settled, affords no bad criterion of its prosperity; and as above twenty gentlemen have now flocks in their possession, and are devoting themselves to

their improvement, we may hope soon to see fine wool become an article of considerable export from hence, rendering it desirable for a vessel to call purposely at Newcastle to ship it off.

The country between the head of Hunter's River and the Bathurst settlements is now located, in both directions, to within thirty miles of each other; clear pastoral downs and open forest land extending in stripes nearly all the way, so level, that, by the concurrent testimony of all who have travelled this route, a gig might be driven nearly the whole distance. The settlers on this river possess a paramount advantage, in point of locality, in having the very extensive grazing country about Liverpool Plains in their rear, whither they may remove their herds, when too numerous to be supported by the land in their immediate occupation. These plains occupy a space of about sixty miles square, besides branching out among the hills in various directions,—all fine rich grassy soil without a tree, excepting where a small woody hill occasionally rises from the bosom of the plain to vary and beautify the prospect. In looking down upon this extensive tract from the summit of one

of the overhanging ridges, the country appears to be spread out like a green ocean, of unbounded extent, with clusters of woody islands bespangling its surface. These plains are well watered; but as they often consist of rather a wet clayey soil, they appear better adapted for cattle than sheep grazing. No just criterion, however, can be formed if they are visited immediately after the rain, from the appearance then presented: many places in the colony, which in their natural state were so swampy that a horse could not cross them without sticking fast, have become, in consequence of the sheep-treading, firm and hard grounds. Cattle and sheep require two very different kinds of herbage,—moist pasture suiting the former best, and dry pasture the latter; both their health and the superior quality of the meat depending upon this point. Hence the superiority of the breeds of the English Devons and Scotch Galloways and Argyles, in point of symmetry and flavour, over the generality of cattle from other counties,—Devonshire, Galloway, and Argyle, being situate upon the western side of our island, and noted for the quantity of rain falling therein. Hence, too, the

superiority of the Down mutton over that bred in the heavy pastures of Lincoln and similar places:—though the carcasses of the latter are larger, yet the meat is coarser and inferior in taste; and, indeed, bulk seems, either regarding cattle or sheep, incompatible with fine meat. Hence again, in this colony, no cattle or sheep are produced so large as upon the heavy pastures about Bathurst and some portions of Argyle, Mr. Throsby having killed a five-year old bullock, fattened upon the natural grass on his estate of Bon-Bon in the latter county, weighing fourteen hundred pounds, while wethers have been killed at Bathurst from one hundred to one hundred and twenty pounds dead weight.