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# EXCURSIONS AND ADVENTURES

IN

## NEW SOUTH WALES ;

WITH

PICTURES OF SQUATTING AND OF LIFE IN THE BUSH ;

AN ACCOUNT OF THE

CLIMATE, PRODUCTIONS, AND NATURAL HISTORY OF THE COLONY,  
AND OF THE MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF THE NATIVES,  
WITH ADVICE TO EMIGRANTS, &c.

BY

JOHN HENDERSON ESQ.,

LIEUTENANT IN HER MAJESTY'S CEYLON RIFLE REGIMENT,

*"Queque ipse miserrima vidi,  
Et quorum pars magna fui."*—VIRGIL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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Broken Bay, is here deep and sluggish. The town is small, dirty, and badly built; and the country, as I have said before, is flat and uninteresting. A good deal of clearing has been effected around the town; and, as it is comparatively an old settlement, the stumps, which in most places form such an eye-sore, have disappeared. Of course, this is no place for the emigrant, unless he wishes to purchase or to rent a farm at a much higher rate than he could do at home.

Having been recommended to visit some of the northern settlements, and happening to meet, about this time, with a gentleman from one of them, I determined on embracing his offer, and on accompanying him to his quarter. I accordingly went on board the steamer for Port Macquarie, at this time the most northern settlement in Australia.

We started at seven in the evening, and next morning, at eight, I found we had put in at Newcastle, for coals. This town is built at the mouth of the river Hunter, and serves in some measure as the port of that river and of Mait-

land, a small town thirty miles further up. Its chief importance, however, is derived from its coal mines, which belong to the Australian Agricultural Company, and which produce coal of very good quality, and that within a couple of hundred paces of the harbour. The town is small, is built on a sand-hill, and has rather a bleak appearance.

The view up the river is better; the wide channel narrowing into some graceful windings, the mangroves lining it to within the water's edge, and the mountains of the Upper Hunter forming a fine background. The entrance to the river is dangerous, the channel being narrow and irregular. In the mouth of it lies an isolated and lofty rock of sandstone, called "Nobby," which by art is now about to be restored to its former junction with the mainland.

For a long time, Government has employed gangs of convicts, in irons, in forming a break-water from this rock to the headland on the south, or Newcastle side of the river. The material used is the sandstone rock from the south

headland and that composing the "Nobby" itself, a considerable part of which has been cut away. This work will probably improve the harbour to some extent, though this is doubted; but it is evident that it will be one of great labour and time, rivalling (if ever completed) the celebrated Plymouth Breakwater.

The following morning, we were off Port Macquarie, lying about two hundred miles north of Sydney. There is little or nothing interesting to be seen in running along the coast. We passed, at some distance, Port Stephens, the inlet on which a portion of the Australian Agricultural Company's settlements lie, and the Manning river, where three or four settlers are established.

Towards night, we discovered fires near the shore, being doubtless caused by the blacks. The coast between Camden Haven and Port Macquarie (a distance of twenty miles) is very pleasing being ornamented near the latter place by several of those detached, conical, and remarkable-looking elevations called "Nobbies."

In order to reach the township, or "Settlement," as it is termed, we were obliged to embark in the pilot's boat, which landed us at the boat harbour, half a mile or more from the village. The steamer could not enter the harbour (so called), on account of the roughness of the bar and its deficiency of water. Indeed the bar at the entrance is so bad that she is detained almost every trip, either out in the open sea, or inside at the wharf.

Port Macquarie is decidedly the best built and most prettily-situated township I have seen in the colony. It stands partly, almost on a level with the "Hastings" (which forms its harbour), and partly on the high land overlooking the sea. Above the settlement, the channel takes a great bend, forming, when the tide is in, a large lake, bounded on one side by a sand spit dividing it from the sea, and on the other by the low flat bank of the river, fringed to the waterside with mangroves. This is a great resort of pelicans, and various kinds of sea-fowl.

the foot of the white man had never trod before, and which now bears my name. I also encountered some blacks, but shall reserve for another chapter my notice of them.

## CHAPTER IV.

The Author's return to Sydney—Blacks murdered by white men—The Squatters and the Natives—Execution at Sydney — The Hunter River — Village of Morpeth — Maitland—Scenery around Darlington—Tremendous hail-storm—Expedition to the Liverpool Plains—Nature of the soil—Bad roads—Teams of bullocks—A settler's annoyances—Muscle Brook—Arrival at a gentleman's house—A droll incident at night.

I HAD not as yet spent six months in the colony, and having neither decided finally on my future proceedings, nor met with any very eligible opportunity or mode of settling, I determined to see yet more of the country which I had for the present adopted. I accordingly returned to Sydney preparatory to making a

tour through the Hunter river district and Liverpool Plains.

While in town, on returning one morning before breakfast from bathing, my attention was attracted by a crowd at the back of the old jail, and walking up, I, at that moment, saw seven men led out to be hanged.

Their crime was the slaughter of a large number of blacks, men and women; and certainly, if the statement I heard was true in its details, it was a most atrocious affair. It appears, that they captured these natives, and, leading them a mile away into the bush, there shot them, burning their remains. They were at first acquitted, but, as it was determined to make an example of them, a new trial was somehow procured, when they were condemned.

A very strong feeling was manifested in their favour by most of the colonists, and subscriptions were raised to defray the expense of counsel. It was argued, that these stockmen had been in danger of their lives from the

blacks, who had also speared their master's cattle; and that, if they were hanged, settlers would not know how to defend their lives and property, nor be able to procure men to go out into the far bush, knowing as they would, that they must protect their master's stock, and that, at the same time, they must refrain from injuring the blacks.

These reasons, however, were no excuse for the deliberate and atrocious manner in which they retaliated, and they were insufficient to save them from the arm of the law. A great outcry was made; and certainly, viewing the law, not with reference to this case in particular, but generally, and in the abstract, it appears to a great extent one-sided.

If a white man injures a black, he is amenable to the law as much as if he wronged his own countryman; and is almost as likely to be detected in the one case as the other. If, on the other hand, the black is the aggressor, he flies to his ravines and brushes, where no horseman can follow him, and where the white

man will never find him, unless, peradventure, he has another black, to track his enemy. If he finds him, he can only shoot him, at the risk of being hanged, for the savage will rarely be captured alive under these circumstances, unless wounded.

If the culprit be taken, it is a thousand to one that he is acquitted. Probably, neither he nor his tribe understand a word of English, and there is the difficulty of procuring witnesses and identifying him, to be contended with. The consequence is that, in most cases, he receives a suit of slops, a blanket, and a tomahawk,—to dash out more men's brains with. If, on the other hand, he is transported, or hanged, his brethren see and know nothing of this; and, though they wonder that he does not return, they soon forget him, and are not deterred from further depredations. The "black fellows," too, will often escape, after they have been taken; and, from their knowledge of the bush, and cunning in secreting themselves, they are not likely to be retaken.

I heard of one instance, where a black had been removed one hundred miles from his own district, and placed in a lock-up, but, from the smallness of his hands, he drew off the hand-cuffs, and got off in the night. Of course, he was soon among his friends, and was never re-taken. Under these circumstances, it is evident that the same law cannot be justly and equally administered to the two races, who are continually thrown into hostile contact on the frontiers of the colony. The gun is the only law the black fears; the only power that deters him from murder and plunder; and the only available administrator of punishment for his offences.

Those who denounce the squatter as a murderer and land-robber, it has been well said in "Kennedy's Account of Texas," "take no thought of the spirit that has impelled him onwards, of the qualities he is constrained to display, and the social ameliorations of which he is the pioneer.

He loves the wilderness for the independence it confers—for the sovereignty which it enables him to wield by dint of his personal energies. The forest is subject to his axe—its inhabitants to his gun.”

By daily toil, and at the risk of his life, he earns his bread, and leads a life of conscious independence where the grand old forests have stood for ages, and where the foot of the white man never trod before. His life is one of continued labour, solitude, and too often warfare. He has an enemy untiring, and often waiting long for his time; cunning, wary, and expert; frequently displaying great courage, and, if he has wrongs to avenge, heedless on whom he wreaks his vengeance, so long as a white man is the victim. Surely, then, the man who is the pioneer of civilization—who, going out into the wilderness, spends his days in toil and danger, and his nights in dreariness and solitude—who must send out his shepherd with

a musket on his shoulder, and sling his rifle at his side when he rides among his herds—who, making a lodgment in the bush, causes “the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose,” and opens the way for the smiling villages, the good old British institutions, and the happy population which follow surely, this man has not laboured in vain; but has deserved at least leniency at our hands.

Far be it from me to advocate the causeless and indiscriminate slaughter which has often taken place. At the same time, one is indignant when one hears those comfortable and luxuriant philanthropists, who, overflowing with sympathy for all races but their own, sit by their own warm fire-sides at home, range not beyond the smoke of their native cities, and there consign to everlasting destruction the hardy and adventurous backwoodsman, whose own right arm is his only defence.

If he were unable, or unwilling, to protect his own life,—to defend his own property—the bush is indeed no place for him. The Bushman, however, is seldom the aggressor. Cool murders have, it is to be regretted, doubtless been occasionally committed. I myself was informed of a case where a young gentleman who had formed a squatting station in the interior, finding a “black fellow” in his neighbourhood, quietly rode up to him and shot him through the head, on the principle that it was safest to permit none to come upon his run; but such cases are rare, and are now unheard of. Warfare there will be wherever a new country is found, and new stations formed. This is to be expected, and cannot be prevented; but, in places that have been long settled, the natives suffer no wrong—are not interfered with; but, on the contrary, protected, even to the extent of prohibiting their being supplied with spirits,

which however they procure, and which tend, along with other causes, to hasten their disappearance from the land of their fathers.

But I am tarrying too long cogitating at the back of the old jail. Before I go, however, I cannot help noticing that mechanic, or labourer dressed in coarse clothing, and standing near me. He is emphatically “one of the unwashed,” but he is a philosopher; and, as the seven unfortunates dropped from the scaffold, he exclaimed (apparently soliloquizing), “Well, they know the grand secret *now*.”

My attention was, however, called away, by being propelled by the crowd against my next neighbour, a woman well dressed, and leaning on the arm of her husband, or beau, who had brought her to see the sight. She held a gay parasol over her head to shield herself from the sun, whose rays had already become very powerful, and, being incommoded by me, she exclaimed against me



with some asperity, for the inconvenience I caused. I, however, took the liberty of reproving her for being there, and admonished her to go home, which advice she received with a very bad grace. The crowd was not so great as I expected, seeing that the Governor had thought it necessary to have a strong military guard in attendance on the occasion; but, sooth to say, executions were an every day affair there, and attracted little attention.

After a short residence in Sydney, I addressed myself to the business in hand, and prepared for my journey to the Hunter. Having embarked on board one of the Maitland steamboats at night, I had the satisfaction to find myself by breakfast time a little beyond Newcastle, and steaming quickly up the placid river. There is little to describe in the scenery I met with here; as usual in the case of these rivers, the banks were low and flat, as far as the tide

flows, at least. The mangroves gave a dark fringe to the land, and behind these arose the tall gum trees, growing thickly together in all cases, and (where brush grew) enveloped below in a mass of underwood and a tangle of vines.

The river itself, containing one or two islands, is everywhere encumbered by flats and shallows, and in many places large masses of tall reeds rear their heads. Here and there an opening is seen, where some settler has established himself; but, on the whole, the river has a sombre and sluggish appearance. About a mile from Greenhills, (called also Morpeth), where there is the head of the navigation, the Hunter is joined by the Paterson, a river running through a flourishing and rather pleasant district.

Morpeth, a small village, is distant about five miles from Maitland, which is divided by a road a mile long, into East and West Maitland. These are good-sized

villages, though very straggling, and containing hotels, churches, &c., with those indispensables in Australian towns, a court-house and jail. The water up to this point is very brackish ; but fresh water is obtained from Wallace Creek, which here joins the Hunter. West Maitland is situate immediately on the banks of the river, and has occasionally been completely flooded and injured in rainy weather. The country around for many miles is level and uninteresting ; but the soil is rich, and is all occupied by excellent farms, which are perhaps the best situated in the colony, having the advantage of steamers almost every day to Sydney, the only emporium and market for colonial produce.

Having taken my horse with me in the steamer, I rode up to Maitland from the place of disembarkation. There are, however, two coaches for the convenience of those who are not provided as I was. Hav-

ing spent a day here, I proceeded to the neighbourhood of Patrick's Plains, to the residence of a gentleman with whom I had become acquainted, and whose property lay in this quarter, and at a distance of about twenty-five miles from Maitland ; Darlington, otherwise called Singleton, which may be styled the township of Patrick's Plains, being four or five miles further on.

The ride to this point is flat and uninteresting, there being little to vary the monotony of the interminable gum-tree. For a few miles, however, around Darlington, the land is level and rich, and to a considerable extent free from timber, consisting, in fact, of some of those plains occasionally found on the banks of rivers.

Darlington is situate on the bank of the Hunter, and in one of those flats, or plains. The weather appears to be in general more than usually warm here ; and, as these plains suffer often and long from drought,

the village and roads around it are commonly very disagreeable from the quantities of finely pulverized dust abounding everywhere. There is a Presbyterian church in Darlington, as also one or two shops (here called stores), and a couple of inns, or public houses. These, as well as a small mill worked by steam, are the only objects of consequence in the township. As in every other settlement, there are a lock-up and court-house, and a police or stipendiary magistrate, to administer justice.

In the course of a residence of three weeks with my friend, I visited most of the country around, but saw nothing worth recording. In fact, the only exception to the unvaried insipidity of the scenery, is the outline of the Wallombi, the mountains over which the road to Windsor and Sydney passes.

During my stay here, I witnessed, and for a few seconds encountered, the most tre-

mendous hail-storm with which I ever met ; and this was rather unlooked for, seeing that it was now January, which, with December, is the hottest season of the year. The hail-stones, which fell prodigiously thick, were of the size and shape of the brass handles, or knobs of doors, and were armed all round with high sharp points of ice. Their force must have been very great, as they broke off the small branches of the trees, chipped, and left visible marks on, the dry, hard, gum paling, and shivered to pieces the thick and lofty stems of some fine aloes, which were at the time in flower.

The windows of the house were of course destroyed ; and a man, who happened to be exposed for a short time during the storm, was severely cut and otherwise hurt. I was fortunate enough to obtain shelter immediately on the commencement of the storm, which, from its violence, was capable of inflicting severe injury, and possibly death,

if the head were exposed. I regretted that I had no opportunity of weighing the hail-stones, but they were fully of the size mentioned, and must consequently have been of considerable weight.

About this time, it happened that my host found it expedient to visit his sheep and cattle-stations in Liverpool Plains. In fact, it was the season in which he always went up the country in order to superintend the sheep-shearing, which by this time (the end of January) was over with most of the settlers.

On this expedition I determined to accompany him; and having rested (or, as it is termed, spelled) our horses for a day or two, and packed our saddle-bags, we started, after breakfast, on a very warm February morning. On the road, we were passed by the coach, an open kind of car, one of which leaves Darlington, and another Maitland, every day, with passengers and the mail.

At Darlington, we crossed the bed of the Hunter, which was perfectly dry as far as the eye could reach, with the exception of one pool of stagnant water, mantled with a coat of green, and emitting the most abominable effluvia, from the decomposition of a few bullocks which lay rotting there. Our route was, as I expected, tedious, from the dull sameness which is so universal here. This being the height of summer, as well as a season of uncommonly long and severe drought, the roads were very dusty and arid; and all water had been so completely dried up, that it was impossible, without calling at a settler's, to obtain the means of quenching one's thirst.

Ever and anon, too, the nose was assailed by the stench arising from the carcasses of working bullocks, which had died on their way for want of water and grass. In some parts of the road, the soil appeared to be a black loam. In others, it was a bright red,

having a considerable admixture of clay ; and where the track rises at all over ranges, or hills, it generally displays a gravelly, or sandy bottom.

The road is a mere track formed by the passing of drays, never having had anything done to it in the way of making or mending beyond Harper's Hill, a stockade about fifteen miles from Maitland, where an iron gang was stationed. On either hand is the interminable forest, thickly timbered, and consisting of the gum-tree and its congeners—the blackbut, stringy-bark, box, blood-wood, and iron-bark.

We passed only one or two locations, or clearances, in the bush ; but we met several drays travelling down the country with wool, and overtook one or two on their return up, with stores for the sheep-stations. I was not surprised to see the teams of bullocks, consisting always of eight or ten, in most wretched order ; indeed, the wonder was

that they survived at all, seeing that of water there was seemingly none, and the supply of grass appeared to be nearly as scanty. The wretched animals, chained to the ponderous drays (each carrying ten bales of wool), choked with dust, and marked from stem to stern by the unfeeling lashes of the bullock-drivers, presented a most pitiable spectacle, as they laboured to “ drag their slow length along.”

In such seasons, many of them perish from sheer thirst and inanition, and then drays are detained for weeks, or even months, beyond their time. I have seen the drivers camped by the road side, waiting till their master could learn their position, and send more bullocks, which he has often to buy at double their value (in those days, £10 a-piece). On other occasions, the bullocks are lost, from their straying far off in search of food and water, and it may be days or weeks before they are heard of ;

while, occasionally, they are never forthcoming at all.

Again, a wheel will come off, or an axle-tree break, and this, too, will cause a long delay. In short, the difficulties of transport and the labour, loss, and anxiety attendant on it are so great, and bear so heavily on settlers in the interior, especially those in Liverpool Plains and New England, (and that even in good seasons,) that they are almost unendurable by men of a sanguine or irritable temperament, who meet with crosses and anxieties, as I have heard said, "enough to break the heart of a stone."

First, the bullocks die or are lost, or the dray breaks down, and is consequently delayed a month or two beyond its proper time. All this while they have been on short commons at the station, and what they had was borrowed from the nearest neighbour who had anything to spare. When the long-looked for dray does at last arrive,

it is found that a great part of the provisions has been stolen by bushrangers, that another large portion has been consumed by the men during their long journey, and that all remaining must be paid back to the neighbour who helped them, and who is now perhaps in want himself. The debt is accordingly paid, and the borrowing system is again recurred to, entailing on the settler a load of arrears, of which he may scarcely ever be able to clear himself.

These unfavourable circumstances are of more frequent occurrence in Liverpool Plains, where nothing but beef and mutton are grown, and to which, consequently, all other necessaries must be carried in drays. These consist chiefly of flour, salt, tea, sugar, tobacco, slops, sheep-medicines, &c. In New England, where wheat and potatoes are cultivated, this evil is not so much felt, especially as roads are now found to Port

Macquarie and the Clarence both infinitely shorter than the old route to Maitland.

At nightfall, we reached Musclebrook, a small village, where was a wretched little inn; and, making our minds up to be victimized by the vermin, we early retired to our "stretchers," after a supper of the usual bush-inn fare—bacon and eggs. Next morning, having seen our nags eat their miserable allowance of maize and withered bush-grass, for which we were charged enormously, we again set forth, and travelled the greater part of the day without seeing or meeting with anything worthy of record,—except, perhaps, a salt-water creek, then only a series of holes of brackish water.

Before sunset, we reached the house of a gentleman with whom my travelling companion and guide was acquainted, and here we remained for the night. At a late dinner, we were treated to a bottle or two

of wine made on the farm, and the production of this settler's own vineyard. It was light in colour, and particularly so in body, being of the tint of pale sherry, and of a thin, acid flavour, indescribable; however, being heated and tired, in default of better, we managed to consume several glasses each, unheeding the woful work which common sense might have told us it would make with us.

My friend and I lay (I cannot say slept) on stretchers in the same room, but our quiescence was soon disturbed by the *bond fide vin ordinaire*, which, in no great space of time, set me walking up and down the room. The heat of the night was excessive; and that, together with his libations, quickly induced my friend to join me in my perambulations. It might be now twelve o'clock; the moon was shining brightly, and the heat being unendurable, despite the mosquitoes, we opened the window, and walked into the

verandah. Judge of our surprise, on getting there, to find our host *en déshabille*, indulging in the same peripatetic restorative as had brought us forth. There he stalked along, six feet nothing, on his bare soles and in his shirt, until arrested by our sudden appearance. It was rather an amusing rencontre, and, for my part, notwithstanding the heat and my suffering otherwise, I could not help bursting into peals of laughter.

My companion very bluntly blamed the wine at once, though our host was much inclined to lay the "onus" on the mosquitoes and the hot weather. So much for Australian wine!\*

\* I should mention that they produce very fair wine now in some parts of Australia.

## CHAPTER VII.

Desolate appearance of the Country—Petri-  
fied Trunks of Trees—A Stone Forest—Creek, called Kingdon  
Ponds—Singular Changes—Burning Mountain of  
Wingan—Stupidity of the Natives—Waldron's  
Ranges—Intense Thirst—A Well Discovered—A  
night at a Farm-house—The Page Inn—Variation of  
Climate—Diseases—Cases of Imposture—An effectual  
Remedy—Salubrity of New South Wales—An Un-  
fortunate Settler—Liverpool Plains—Drays drawn  
by Bullocks—Beautiful View from the top of the  
Range—A Thirsty Plain—Breeza Station—Interior  
of a Hut—The Myall Tree—A Bush Shop—Passage  
of the River Namoi.

AFTER breakfast next morning, we started on our journey, which, for some miles, lay over flats and gently undulating country, here and there divested of timber, and