

A
STATISTICAL, HISTORICAL, AND POLITICAL
DESCRIPTION
OF
The Colony
OF
NEW SOUTH WALES,
AND
Its dependent Settlements
IN
VAN DIEMEN'S LAND:
WITH
A PARTICULAR ENUMERATION OF THE ADVANTAGES WHICH THESE
COLONIES OFFER FOR EMIGRATION, AND THEIR SUPERIORITY
IN MANY RESPECTS OVER THOSE POSSESSED BY
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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A NATIVE OF THE COLONY.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. AND W. B. WHITTAKER,
AVE-MARIA LANE.

1819.

W. Shackell, Printer,
Johnson's-court, Fleet-street.

Sydney, have already begun to attract the tide of colonization to it, and will no doubt render it in a few years one of the most populous, productive, and valuable of all the districts. The soil is in general a deep fat vegetable mould. The surface of the country is thinly timbered, with the exception of the mountain which bounds it to the Northward and Westward. This is covered with a thick brush, but is nevertheless extremely fertile up to the very summit, and peculiarly adapted both from its eastern aspect and mild climate for the cultivation of the vine. This large tract of country was only discovered about four years since, and has not yet been accurately surveyed. Its extent, therefore, is not precisely known; but it without doubt contains several hundred thousand acres, including the banks of the Shoal Haven river. These produce a great abundance of fine cedar, and other highly valuable timber, for which there is an extensive and increasing demand at Port Jackson.

COAL RIVER.

The next tract of unappropriated country which I shall describe, is the district of the Coal River. The town of Newcastle is situated at the mouth of this river, and is about sixty miles to the northward of Port Jackson. Its popula-

tion by the last census forwarded to this country, was five hundred and fifty souls. These, with the exception of a few free settlers, established on the upper banks of this river, amounting with their families perhaps to thirty souls, and about fifty troops, are all incorrigible offenders, who have been convicted either before a bench of magistrates, or the Court of Criminal Judicature, and afterwards re-transported to this place, where they are worked in chains from sunrise to sunset, and profitably employed in burning lime and procuring coals and timber, as well for carrying on the public works at Port Jackson, as for the private purposes of individuals, who pay the government stipulated prices for these different articles. This settlement was, in fact, established with the two-fold view of supplying the public works with these necessary articles, and providing a separate place of punishment for all who might be convicted of crimes in the colonial courts.

The coal mines here are considerably elevated above the level of the sea, and are of the richest description. The veins are visible on the abrupt face of the cliff, which borders the harbour, and are worked by adits or openings, which serve both to carry off the water and to wheel away the coals. The quantity procured in this easy manner is very great, and might be increased to

any extent. So much more coals indeed are thus obtained than are required for the purposes of the government, that they are glad to dispose of them to all persons who are willing to purchase, requiring in return a duty of two shillings and six pence per ton, for such as are intended for home consumption, and five shillings for such as are for exportation.

The lime procured at this settlement is made from oyster shells, which are found in prodigious abundance. These shells lie close to the banks of the river, in beds of amazing size and depth. How they came there has long been a matter of surprise and speculation to the colonists. Some are of opinion that they have been gradually deposited by the natives in those periodical feasts of shell fish, for the celebration of which they still assemble at stated seasons in large bodies: others have contended, and I think with more probability, that they were originally large natural beds of oysters, and that the river has on some occasion or other, either changed its course or contracted its limits, and thus deserted them.

These beds are generally five or six feet above high-water mark. The process of making lime from them is extremely simple and expeditious. They are first dug up and sifted, and then piled

over large heaps of dry wood, which are set fire to, and speedily convert the superincumbent mass into excellent lime. When thus made it is shipped for Sydney, and sold at one shilling per bushel.

The timber procured on the banks of this river is chiefly cedar and rose wood. The cedar, however, is becoming scarce in consequence of the immense quantities that have been already cut down, and cannot be any longer obtained without going at least a hundred and fifty miles up the river. At this distance, however, it is still to be had in considerable abundance, and is easily floated down to the town in rafts. The government dispose of this wood in the same manner as the coals, at the price of £3 for each thousand square feet, intended for home consumption, and £6 for the same quantity if exported.

This settlement is placed under the direction of a commandant, who is selected out of the officers of the regiment stationed in the colony, and is allowed, as has been noticed, about fifty fire-locks to maintain his authority. He is always appointed to the magistracy previously to his obtaining this command, and is entrusted with the entire controul of the prisoners, whom

he punishes or rewards as their conduct may appear to him to merit.

The harbour at the mouth of this river is tolerably secure and spacious, and contains sufficient depth of water for vessels of three hundred tons burden. The river itself, however, is only navigable for small craft of thirty or forty tons burden, and this only for about fifty miles above the town. Just beyond this distance there are numerous flats and shallows, which only admit of the passage of boats over them. This river has three branches; they are called the upper, the lower, and the middle branch: the two former are navigable for boats for about a hundred and twenty miles, the latter for upwards of two hundred miles. The banks of all these branches are liable to inundations equally terrific with those at the Hawkesbury, and from the same causes; because they are receptacles for the rain that is collected by the Blue Mountains, which form the western boundary of this district, and divide it as well as the districts of Port Jackson, from the great western wilderness. The low lands within the reach of these inundations is if possible of still greater exuberancy than the banks of the Hawkesbury and Nepean, and of four times the extent. The high-land, or to give it the

colonial appellation, the forest land, is very thinly studded with timber, and equal for all the purposes of agriculture and grazing to the best districts of Port Jackson. The climate too is equally salubrious, and on the upper banks of the middle branch, it is generally believed, that the summer heats are sufficient for the production of cotton; the cultivation of which would become an inexhaustible source of wealth to the growers, and would afford a valuable article of export to the colony.

In fact, under every point of view this district contains the strongest inducements to colonization. It possesses a navigable river, by which its produce may be conveyed to market at a trifling expence, and the inhabitants of its most remote parts may receive such articles of foreign or domestic growth and manufacture as they may need, at a moderate advance: it surpasses Port Jackson in the general fertility of its soil, and at least rivals it in the salubrity of its climate: it contains in the greatest abundance coal, lime, and many varieties of valuable timber which are not found elsewhere, and promise to become articles of considerable export: it has already established in an eligible position, a small nucleus of settlers to which others may adhere, and thus both communicate and receive the advantages of society and pro-

tection; and it has a town which affords a considerable market for agricultural produce, and of which the commanding localities must rapidly increase the extent and population.

COUNTRY WEST OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.

The country to the westward of the Blue Mountains ranks next in contiguity to Sydney, and claims pre-eminence not so much from any superiority of soil in those parts of it which have been explored, as from its amazing extent, and great diversity of climate. These mountains, where the road has been made over them, are fifty-eight miles in breadth; and as the distance from Sydney to Emu Ford, at which place this road may be said to commence, is about forty miles, the beginning of the vast tract of country to the westward of them; it will be seen, is ninety-eight miles distant from the capital.

The road which thus traverses these mountains is by no means difficult for waggons, until you arrive at the pass which forms the descent into the low country. There it is excessively steep and dangerous; yet carts and waggons go up and down it continually: nor do I believe that any serious accident has yet occurred

in performing this very formidable undertaking.

Still the discovery of a safer and more practicable pass would certainly be attended with a very beneficial influence on the future progress of colonization in this great western wilderness. Every attempt, however, to find such a one has hitherto proved abortive; and should the future efforts which may be made with this view prove equally so, there can be little doubt, that the communication between the eastern and western country will be principally maintained by means of horses and mules with packs and panniers.

The elevation of these mountains above the level of the sea, has not yet been determined; but I should imagine that it cannot exceed four thousand feet. For the first ten or twelve miles they are tolerably well clothed with timber, and produce occasionally some middling pasture; but beyond this they are excessively barren, and are covered generally with a thick brush, interspersed here and there with a few miserable stunted gums. They bear, in fact, a striking similarity, both in respect to their soil and productions, to the barren wastes on the coast of Port Jackson. They are very rocky, but they want granite, the distinguishing cha-

standard by which to judge of the reformatory tendency of the system. During Governor Bligh's administration, all offenders except those who were charged with the most trifling misdemeanors, were tried by the criminal court. He was a second Draco, who considered the smallest offence deserving of death: and woe to the wretch whom the criminal court doomed to this punishment, for he invariably carried its sentences into execution. His successor, however, has acted on more merciful principles; and, besides, crimes have so rapidly multiplied of late years, that the judge advocate would not have sufficient time for presiding in the two civil courts of which he is the head, were he obliged to dispose of all the culprits that might be arraigned in the criminal court. But it is well known to those who are at all conversant with the state of the colony, that but a very small portion of the offences which are committed there, are now brought under the jurisdiction of this court. The majority of the criminals who are now tried by it are either free persons, or such as have obtained emancipations; i. e. those whom the various governors have made free in the colony, but who are not at liberty to quit it. The benches of magistrates, and the superintendent of police, are delicate of deciding on charges in which the members of these two free classes are im-

plicated; but they dispose of offenders already under the sentence of the law in a summary manner, either by transporting them to the Coal River, by putting them in the gaol gangs, by sending them (if they happen to be females) to the factory, or by simply ordering them corporal punishment, unless they are charged with murder, or some capital felony; and even in this latter case they frequently inflict some summary punishment. With respect to the first of these summary modes of punishment, transportation to the Coal River, it has already been stated that the population of this settlement amounted in the year 1817, to five hundred and fifty souls: of these not more than one hundred, including the civil and military establishments, and the settlers and their families on the upper banks of the river, were free. The remaining four hundred and fifty, therefore, were persons who had been convicted of crimes either by the criminal court or by the magistracy, and retransported thither for various periods. Those few, it has been seen, who are condemned to this punishment by the criminal court, are for the most part sentenced to long terms of transportation; but as nine-tenths of the criminals at this settlement are sent thither either by the benches of magistrates, or by the superintendent of police, who seldom transport for a longer period than two years, and more frequently for one year, or six

months, the population may at a very moderate calculation be considered as undergoing a complete change every two years, or in other words, it may be concluded that two hundred and twenty-five persons are annually transported thither by way of punishment. We must therefore add this number to the culprits convicted before the court of criminal judicature, and we shall then have a total of three hundred and eighteen persons annually convicted of crimes in the colony. This is of itself an alarming sum of criminality; but we must not stop here, since it only conducts us to the second of the summary modes of punishment which I have enumerated; viz. the gaol gangs. There are upon an average about fifty persons in the gaol gang at Sydney, and about the same number in the gaol gangs belonging to the other towns and districts in the colony. These are criminals convicted of smaller offences than those who are transported to the Coal River; they are worked from sunrise to sun-set, and are locked up in the prisons during the night. This mode of punishment is seldom inflicted for a longer term than four months. It may therefore be safely computed that these gaol gangs are changed once in this period, or in other words, that three hundred persons annually pass through this ordeal. This further addition to the formidable catalogue of crimes already made out, in-

creases the total to six hundred and eighteen persons, yet only leads us to the third mode of summary punishment, viz. labour at the factory at Paramatta. The number of women sentenced to this mode of punishment may be averaged at one hundred and fifty, and as the average term of their sentences does not exceed six months, we have a farther number of three hundred to add to the above estimate. This increases it to nine hundred and eighteen persons; but we have still one other mode of punishment in petto, corporal punishment simply; and I have no doubt that the numbers on whom it is annually inflicted will at least swell the grand total of persons convicted of various criminal offences during the year 1817, either by the criminal courts, by the benches of magistrates, by the superintendent of police, or by the district magistrates to one thousand. We may now draw some sort of a comparison between the amount of crime in the years 1806 and 1817. I should imagine, on the highest calculation, that not more than one hundred persons in addition to those tried by the criminal court during that year, could, from the system then in practice, have been summarily dealt with by the magistracy; but allowing even that there were two hundred, and that the whole number of persons stated by Governor Bligh to have been tried by that court were found guilty, a most improbable suppo-

sition, the year 1806 will only then give a total of three hundred and sixteen offenders, i.e. not onethird the amount of those who were convicted in the year 1817. Crime therefore has been trebled, while the population has only been doubled, or in other words, the increase of the former has been to the increase of the latter as three to two.

What else, indeed, could be expected from a system which is every day enlarging the circle of poverty and distress? Is it within the possibility of belief that people should become more honest as they become more necessitous? That they should scrupulously refrain from making inroads on the possessions of their richer neighbours, while they themselves are suffering under the influence of progressive penury? Under such circumstances it would be the very height of absurdity to expect an increase of virtue and honesty. Wherever it is not within the compass of industry to provide for its wants, a recourse to crime in order to make up the deficiency is inevitable to a certain extent even in a moral country. What then must be the result of this inability in a felon population, long habituated to theft, and naturally predisposed to criminality? In such a community as this, the government are doubly bound to neglect no measures which may be calculated to repress this vicious pro-