

SCRAPS FROM THE FORTIES.

II.

JOHN BATMAN'S WIDOW AND CHILDREN.

Here is a scrap of pathos, which will come with a shock of surprise to many young Victorians. It is headed "The petition of John Batman's widow and children to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty," and it humbly sheweth how the late John Batman did at his sole cost and expense in the year 1835, "charter a vessel to proceed from Van Diemen's Land to the southern portion of New Holland," how on arriving he was inexpressibly gratified to find a great tract of country admirably adapted for agricultural and grazing purposes. How, having established friendly and confidential intercourse with the natives, he returned to report to Sir George Arthur, then Governor of Tasmania. How Sir George reported to the Colonial Office, and the settlement of Port Phillip was begun. How Sir Richard Bourke coming over from Port Jackson to take formal possession of this province expressed himself as highly pleased with the exertions of Mr. Batman, and recommended that he should prefer a claim to some portion of the waste lands. All this, however, is duly chronicled in the histories of the colony. We only touch the pathos when we come to the close of the petition which is in these words:—

"That the said John Batman, in consequence of the exposure of his person under all changes of weather and from sleeping for many months in the open air, while engaged in traversing and exploring this country, contracted a disease which, having confined him to his house and bed for two years, terminated his existence in May 1839, at the age of 39 years, leaving behind him a family of eight children, seven of whom are females of from eight to sixteen years of age, and one boy seven years old.

"That the property which the said John Batman possessed had at the period of his death decreased considerably, in consequence of his long illness, and owing to a number of unfortunate events which have occurred since his family have been entirely deprived from any benefit existing therefrom, and have been for more than one year past without any means of support.

"Your petitioners most humbly pray that, in consideration of the various and important services of the late John Batman on behalf of his country, and in furtherance of which he ultimately lost his life, together with the pitiable condition of your memorialists, may induce Your Most Gracious Majesty to order that a grant of some portion of the waste lands of this district may be given to them.

"And as in duty, &c.

"Melbourne, Port Phillip, July 25, 1843."

Then follow the signatures:—

Eliza Willoughby late	Elizabeth Batman
widow of John Bat-	Ellen Batman
man	Adelaide Batman
Maria Batman	Pelonomena Batman
Lucy Batman	John (his mark) Bat-
Eliza Batman	man, aged seven years.

And these sufficient guarantees of the good faith of the petition:—

"We knoweth statement made in the within to be true, and would humbly beg leave to recommend to Her Most Gracious Majesty's consideration the prayer of the petitioners.

"H. CONDELL,

Mayor of Melbourne, and Member for Melbourne of the Legislative Council of New

South Wales.

"A. THOMSON,
Member for Port Phillip of the new Legislative Council of New South Wales."

The reply must have been very disheartening. It is curt as cruel. "Her Majesty has no power to accede to the prayer of the petition. U.O., Jan. 30, 1844."

And this was the end of the famous negotiations with the blacks for the purchase of the 800,000 acres of land, which, if held, might have become the most valuable estate ever acquired or held by private hands in the world. Poor Batman coughed his lungs away in his cottage near the old Flagstaff Hill, in 1839, and four years later his widow and children were appealing for aid to the Colonial Office. We have not always enriched or honoured our pioneers in Victoria.

A HEIDELBERG LAND TROUBLE.

There were very early troubles about land, and one of the first is introduced to us in a letter from Mr. Samuel Bolden to Mr. Superintendent Latrobe, dated "Heidelberg, near Melbourne, March 15, 1841."

Mr. Bolden writes as under:—

"Having been given to understand that there is some doubt whether the new land regulations will affect the formation of a village at Warringal, parish of Keelbundora, on the Yarra Yarra, distant from Melbourne six miles, I take the liberty of addressing your Honour upon the subject.

"When my brother and myself entered into an agreement for the purchase of this property, 400 acres, at the enormous (!!) price of £17 10s. per acre, it was upon the faith of the adjoining land being made a village, as agreed upon in the Government plan. We have since laid out a very large sum upon the property; we have set out and fenced a road through the middle of the property, direct from Melbourne to the contemplated village. We have subscribed £50 towards building a church upon the village, and various sums for the roads. We are now told there is to be no village, and that some person may get the village reserve, 320 acres, at £1 per acre, whereas we are willing to take a large portion of it at £20 per acre, and believe that if submitted to public auction, as before, it would realise a much larger sum. Indeed, within a very short time of this date sections of land round the village were readily sold at from £20 to £30 per acre.

"I am also informed that a gentleman has tendered for a section of 850 acres, on the Yarra, immediately opposite this farm, at £1 per acre, under the new regulations.

"My brother and I always intended to purchase the land immediately opposite this farm at any price when put up by auction in the usual manner, and I would now gladly give £3,000 for the section; therefore, independently of my own loss, the emigration funds are deprived of so much money.

"I hope your Honour will see the justice of the land reserved and laid out for a village being sold by auction in half-acre lots for a village as originally intended.

"Land on the opposite side of the Yarra Yarra being now worth so much more than £1 per acre, it is unfair to the colony that the same should be sold and sacrificed at that small price."

The subsequent history of this transaction may be gathered from a despatch by Sir Geo. Gipps to Lord John Russell, March 27, 1841, and a reply from Lord Stanley who succeeded Lord John Russell at the Colonial Office. The Governor quotes the case as another argument against the £1 an acre regulation of the Land and Emigration Commissioners. Governor Gipps did not like the regulation,

OF THE EARLY NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENTS.
Governor Gipps did not like the regulation, and quoted Mr. Bolden's letter in support of his familiar arguments. But the regulation had already been repealed, and despatches were on the water conveying that information. Lord Stanley had therefore but to write:—

"I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your despatch of the 27th of March last, No. 81, enclosing copy of a letter addressed to the Superintendent of Port Phillip by Mr. Bolden, a settler in that district, on the subject of the new land regulations.

"The recent arrangements with regard to the future sale of land in New South Wales, which were communicated to you in my predecessor's despatch of the 1st ultimo, render any answer to your despatch unnecessary."

And the village reserve was not selected, but the township of Heidelberg grew, and the church, to which Mr. Bolden and his brother contributed £50, was pushed on to completion.

"OVERLANDING IN THE FORTIES."

To appreciate aright the information contained in this paper, it should be read by travellers journeying Adelaide or Melbourne-wards while comfortably digesting that excellent breakfast provided at the Murray Bridge. The despatch is from Governor Gipps to Lord Stanley, August 11, 1842, and is in reply to a communication from his lordship, wherein mention is made of the troubles which beset overlanders, and also of the trouble they cause by aggressions on the blacks. The Governor of South Australia had been troubled by the hostile attitude of the blacks in the neighbourhood of the Murray River, and desired the Colonial Office to issue orders—

"That in order to guard against a recurrence of acts of outrage and murder on the line of communication between Adelaide and Sydney, measures should be taken by the respective Governors of New South Wales and South Australia to prevent the passage of any parties from one colony to the other, except under a competent escort, to be provided by the Government, but paid for by the parties escorted."

The New South Wales Governor, however, was somewhat better informed as to the general conditions and exigencies of the colonies at that time, and his reply will be

almost as instructive to us now as it was to his lordship in Downing-street then.

"It certainly happened," he says, "that in the course of the year 1841 the collisions near the Murray River were more serious than in any other part of either this colony or South Australia; but their sanguinary nature was, I believe, to be attributed to accidental rather than to permanent causes."

"A reference to my despatches of the year 1838, and especially to the one marked in the margin (July 21, 1838), will show that the Port Phillip road was for the first two years after it was opened extremely unsafe, and that some sanguinary collisions took place on it; but posts with mounted policemen having been established at intervals along the road, travelling thenceforth became perfectly safe, and during the last three years no aggressions of a serious nature have been committed."

And farther:—

"Any general regulation forbidding persons to move sheep or cattle from one part of this colony to another without being provided with an escort from Government would be felt, I have no hesitation in saying, as a

with an escort from Government would be felt, I have no hesitation in saying, as a grievous hardship; and it would have, I fear, a very bad effect in leading people habitually to disregard the regulations of Government, or even the law itself.

"The necessity of moving sheep or cattle (on account of drought or want of pasturage) is often most urgent; and even within the last twelve months very extensive losses have been sustained in the district of Liverpool Plains (north-west of Sydney) from the inability of parties to remove their stock in sufficient time from a country suffering under drought. Not less than 10,000 head of horned cattle and 20,000 sheep are supposed to have perished in this district; yet so great is the abundance of stock in the colony, that these losses have only been felt as individual calamities."

It is rather difficult for us to realise now that conditions such as these existed a little less than 50 years ago; but, indeed, it is quite possible that more than one or two old pioneers who kept armed watch in their Murray cattle camp in the forties may have enjoyed all the comforts of the overland express and the Murray-bridge refreshment-rooms journeying to and from the Adelaide or the Melbourne Exhibitions in the eighties. Indeed, the very Governor whose despatch was referred by Lord Stanley to Sir George Gipps is still living and in robust health. The Captain George Grey who in 1841 desired to have overlanders in Australia placed under armed escort, being identical with the venerable Sir George Grey whose words have still some weight in New Zealand, and who struck Mr. Froude, in his New Zealand travels, as the only man in that island with whom he could hope to hold profitable and companionable intercourse.

NEW CALEDONIA—ANOTHER VICTORIA.

To justify this title Mr. Bonwick has unearthed some very valuable documents of the year 1842. In that year New Caledonia lay open to the world. Captain Cook had discovered it in 1774; but until 1853, the date of the French appropriation, there had been no formal occupation by any civilised power. England might have had it. Why did she not? Because she did not take Major Sullivan's advice?

New Caledonia had come under the notice of the gallant soldier, Major Sullivan, "formerly of the Portuguese service, but for some years past a settler in this colony." At Major Sullivan's earnest request, Sir George Gipps forwards to the Colonial Office two sealed papers, one addressed to Lord Stanley, the other to Sir Robert Peel, each containing a printed prospectus for the forming of a settlement on the Island of New Caledonia. Major Sullivan writes to Lord Stanley, September 7, 1842:—

"With all due diffidence I beg permission to hand to your Lordship a copy of a prospectus for colonising New Caledonia and its adjacent isles, under the appellation of 'The Colony of Victoria,' in honour of our Most Gracious Sovereign.

"Your Lordship will see that it has been drawn up on the ancient Greek principle of completeness, and that it differs from any plan hitherto adopted by modern Europe.

"Should the effort I have therein made to promote the honour and the prosperity of the British Empire, meet with your Lordship's approbation, I humbly hope that the project proposed will be sanctioned and patronised by Her Majesty's Government.

"I feel that I ought to present it in person to your Lordship, but the great expense that would attend the removal of myself and

to your Lordship, but the great expense that would attend the removal of myself and family from hence to England precludes me from having that honour. I therefore trust that you condescend to admit that circumstance as my apology for not doing it.

"In folio 20 of the preface I have stated that I shall be most happy to give my services in any capacity towards prosecuting the project in the event of its being carried into effect, provided that Her Majesty should be graciously pleased to consider me worthy of being employed in such a great and important undertaking.

"Mr. George Pleydell Wilton, solicitor, No. 1 Raymond's-buildings, Gray's Inn, London, will receive any commands you may deem expedient to honour him with upon the subject of this letter."

There was, however, no satisfactory reply; the Colonial Office regarded the project as visionary, and so informed the promoter's solicitor at Gray's Inn. Yet Sir George Gipps, always clear-sighted where Imperial interests were concerned, wrote home—

"The position of New Caledonia is such as to render it, I think, very worthy the attention of the British Government; but I feel it necessary, nevertheless, distinctly to disclaim any participation whatever in the projects of Major Sullivan."

And, indeed, the gallant Major had planned on large, and, as it appears, good business lines, his project in detail being—

"The formation of an English company, under Her Majesty's sanction, with a capital of three millions sterling, to form on New Caledonia a British colony, pursuing therein trading, commercial, and agricultural transactions, with a steam communication, via Guatemala, between England and Australasia, Polynesia, &c. The Crown to be asked to grant the company that island and the New Hebrides, to constitute 'the colony of Victoria.'"

Truly the current in which Australian history has flowed came near an important change of course just then, and few Australians of to-day will doubt that much foreign relationship and awkward complication might have been avoided had Major Sullivan's scheme been regarded as practicable. The New Caledonia we know to-day is, perhaps, the greatest menace to the welfare and true morality of Australasia and of the southern world. Peopled with the scum and dregs of Paris and of France, it is a radiating centre of the most pernicious influences. For it must be understood that the modern French convict of New Caledonia is a very different being from the average British convict of Australia's early days. There are no machine-breakers, poachers, turnip stealers amongst the wretches who are drafted from the galleys to the transports, and finally deposited in New Caledonia. Murderers, burglars, assassins, and, scarcely less detestable, the ir reclaimable tried and proved vagrants, the recidivists, the wretches who return to crime as a dog to his vomit, make up that dreadful population. Why, alas! was Major Sullivan set aside? But how near we came to losing our name through that incident, and how curious is the speculation—What should we have been to-day had the colonists of those islands been known in the world as Victorians?

THE FIRST ELECTION IN MELBOURNE.

All old colonists will be interested in a record of the first municipal election in Melbourne. Governor Gipps's despatch to Lord Stanley, December 20, 1842, makes that record, and gives also the numbers of burgeses in the various wards who claimed to vote, whose claims were allowed, and who actually did vote, as under:—

"Number returned by the collectors as burgeses entitled to vote, handed to the town clerk October 5—Gipps Ward, 149; Bourke Ward, 146; Latrobe Ward, 234; Lonsdale

Ward, 246. Total, 774.

"Number of persons claiming to be inserted in said list—Gipps Ward, 18; Bourke Ward, 16; Latrobe Ward, 12; Lonsdale Ward, 20. Total, 66.

"Number objected to—Gipps Ward, 50; Bourke Ward, 32; Latrobe Ward, 61; Lonsdale Ward, 36. Total, 179.

"Number in the revised list—Gipps Ward, 121; Bourke Ward, 151; Latrobe Ward, 208; Lonsdale Ward, 226. Total, 706.

"Number of burgeses voting at election of councillors December 1—Gipps Ward, 104; Bourke Ward, 117; Latrobe Ward, 172; Lonsdale Ward, 180. Total, 573.

"Councillors elected December 1—Gipps Ward—Henry Condell, John Dixon, and George Beavor; Bourke Ward—J. T. Smith, John Patterson, and William Kerr; Latrobe Ward—Andrew Russell, George James, and D. S. Campbell; Lonsdale Ward—John Orr, Wm. H. Mortimer, and J. P. Fawcner. Total, 12.

"Aldermen elected December 9—Gipps Ward, Henry Condell; Bourke Ward, William Kerr; Latrobe Ward, Andw. Russell; Lonsdale Ward, W. G. Mortimer. Total, 4."

And on the 9th of December of the same year Henry Condell, Esquire, was duly elected first Mayor, and took the necessary oaths as a magistrate before his Honour the resident judge on the 12th day of the same month.