

STORY OF THE CLONMEL.

By TANGIL.

The gallant and successful fight of the Finnish barque Rowena against the forces of wind, wave, and currents off Clonmel Island calls to mind the almost forgotten story of the wreck of the steamer Clonmel, from which the island got its name.

In the early years of the Port Phillip settlement intercolonial traffic was carried on rather precariously and irregularly by vessels plying between Sydney and Port Phillip via Hobart Town or Launceston. With a view to providing a more regular service a new steamer of 600 tons burden was brought out from England in 1840. This was the Clonmel, which was speedily put into commission for the Sydney-Port Phillip trade, and there were great expectations of her. On December 2, 1840, under the command of Captain Tilletoy, who had brought her from England, she commenced her first trip from Port Jackson, and arrived in Port Phillip three days later. On December 7 she visited Launceston, and after touching at Melbourne on the return voyage reached Sydney without adventure, her performance having given general satisfaction.

On December 30, with a valuable cargo and passengers and crew numbering 75 persons, the Clonmel again left Sydney for Port Phillip, and an advertisement in the "Port Phillip Gazette" of January 2, 1841, notified her projected departure from Williamstown for Launceston about the first week in January. But fate willed otherwise. The voyage went well until early in the morning of January 2, when the vessel grounded on a sandspit near Clonmel Point, as it was afterwards named. She was soon in a position from which all the efforts of captain and crew were unable to move her. Some of the cargo was thrown overboard to lighten her, but without improving the situation. The anchors were let go, and the vessel, bedding herself in the sand, became a wreck at a distance of about half a mile from the beach. The passengers and the crew were safely landed, and abundant materials and supplies for forming and provisioning a camp were obtained from the ship. After organising the camp the captain sent Mr. Simpson, a passenger with

seafaring experience and some knowledge of the coast, in command of a boat's crew of five volunteers to endeavour to reach Port Phillip. This party early on January 3 set forth on its voyage of about 200 miles, and after some adventures reached Williamstown 63 hours after leaving the wreck. The cutters, The Sisters and Will Watch, with Captain Lewis on board, were immediately sent to the assistance of the people in the camp at Corner Inlet, who had occupied their time in exploring their surroundings. Finding that they had really landed on an island—the Snake Island of to-day—they had followed the channel on its western side into the inlet until they reached what is now known as Port Albert, where they landed before returning to the camp.

The passengers and crew, as well as the mails recovered from the vessel, were taken by the cutters to Port Phillip. The Clonmel, which was insured for £17,000, became a total wreck, most of the cargo also being destroyed. The wreck was purchased for salvage in Sydney for £110, and some stores and fittings were saved. The site of the disaster can still be determined by the Clonmel's engine boilers, which are embedded in the sand, but are still discernible at low tide.

One result of this wreck was the discovery of a navigable entrance to a good harbour on the Gippsland coast, and no time was lost in despatching a vessel, the Singapore, to test the value of the discovery as a means of affording entrance to the region whose fertility and resources had been referred to in Count Staszlecki's recently published report of his overland journey from Monaro to Westernport.

The direct outcome was the foundation of a settlement by the Gippsland Company at the Old Port, a site afterwards abandoned for that of the present town. For many years Port Albert was the centre from which, as population increased, the administration of law and order was carried on. It was the point of distribution for goods throughout Gippsland, the outlet for products, and the gateway into the interior.

With the passage of years, direct road communication between Melbourne and the heart of Gippsland reduced the trade of the port, which was further depressed by the success-

was further depressed by the successful establishment of the lakes navigation. The opening of the railway from Melbourne to Sale completed the decay and isolation of the little town, leaving it placidly dreaming by the waters of the inlet. Few people now remember that less than three-quarters of a century ago all traffic with Gippsland passed through its busy harbour, and that vessels from Melbourne, Hobart, and Sydney made it a frequent place of call.