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MY WIFE AND I IN
QUEENSLAND :

AN EIGHT YEARS' EXPERIENCE IN THE ABOVE COLONY,

WITH

SOME ACCOUNT OF POLYNESIAN LABOUR.

BY

CHARLES H. EDEN.

LONDON :
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CHAPTER IV,

STATION LIFE.

THE growth of wool being the object of primary importance to the squatter, it may not be here amiss to give some brief account of the origin and rise of this great source of wealth, which will show how singularly adapted to its culture the country has proved, and the enormous export arising from the foresight and energy of Mr. M^cArthur.

The convict ships arriving in New South Wales in 1788, brought one bull and calf, four cows, one stallion, three mares and three foals; and in the same year the first sheep were imported from Bengal, twenty-nine in number. They were small and unsightly, having large heads, Roman noses, drooping ears, narrow chests and shoulders, with high curved backs and very long legs, and moreover having coarse and frequently black wool mixed with hair, the latter preponderating. These thrived in a marvellous way, the hair gradually disappearing and being succeeded by a fleece—a metamorphosis which, though greatly to be attributed to the climate, was undoubtedly

CHAPTER IX.

A TURN AT THE DIGGINGS.

SOME friends of mine had a cattle-station on Curtis Island, which, with Facing Island, forms the harbour of Port Curtis, or, as it is usually called, 'Gladstone,' the name being derived from the township, which is beautifully situated at the mouth of a creek, the depth of water in which is sufficient to permit steamers to come alongside the wharves. At one time there seemed every prospect of its becoming an important place, the country all round it giving every indication of mineral wealth. Copper was found on Sir Maurice O'Connell's station, 'Iveragh,' though not in sufficient abundance to pay the cost of working; and, very shortly afterwards, gold was discovered on Calliope Creek, distant twenty miles from Gladstone, whither an immediate rush took place, and things looked lively enough. This must not be confounded with the great Port Curtis or Canoona rush, which was forty miles to the westward of Rockhampton, and to which people flocking from all corners of Australia found it was a 'shicer,' and were brought away, disappointed and

famishing, in steamers sent by their several governments. The Calliope diggings were steady and remunerative to any man who worked hard, but no monster nuggets were found or immense 'piles' made; and, being only alluvial, they were worked out in a few years, and are now deserted but for a few plodding Chinamen, who make washing the dirt out a second time pay. The diggings to which I thought of wending my way had been lately brought to light, and were thirty or forty miles from Rockhampton; the principal workings were called the Crocodile diggings, but the whole country was auriferous, and you found parties of 'prospectors' fossicking in every gully. This, I have no doubt, conveys but little meaning to anyone but a digger, so I must explain that 'prospecting' is searching for gold, and is chiefly done by old diggers. One man, or perhaps a party of two or three, pack their picks, shovels, and rations on an old horse, and dive into the bush. They are all practical geologists, and can tell by a thousand little signs whether there is any use in sinking a hole. Should the indications seem favourable, down goes a hole; when bottomed, they wash the dirt in a dish, and the result is a 'prospect' for the gold, should there be any remains in the dish. They may go on for months, until all their money is spent, sinking fruitlessly, but your true prospector is never disheartened. He will hire himself as a shepherd, or to a surveying party if he can, for with the latter he traverses a good deal of ground, and quietly jots

CHAPTER X.

SUGAR PLANTING.

BEFORE taking the reader to the far north, I will endeavour to give some description of the produce raised by small farmers on the agricultural reserves and on the banks of the rivers, where the scrub land, if once cleared, has been found most excellent for the growth of garden stuffs, fruits, &c., not inclusive of cotton and sugar, which will be briefly treated of by themselves. Agricultural reserves are large blocks of several thousands acres, which have been selected by Mr. Walter Hill, who is director of the Botanical Gardens and also bears the title of Selector of Reserves. Of these there are many in the colony, so an intending farmer will find no difficulty in getting a homestead, more particularly since the passing of the new Land Act, which throws open to the agriculturist a vast area of country which was before sealed to him. As this Act is most liberal, and is expected to induce a number of small capitalists to settle down under their own vine and fig-tree, I will explain its leading features, premising that its greatest advantage over the old Acts

CHAPTER XI.

POLYNESIAN LABOUR ACT.

THE question of labour is one that so deeply concerns the success of cotton-planting and other undertakings of a similar nature in Australia, and the difficulty of obtaining hands to work the plantations, without recourse to immigration of South Sea Islanders, is so great that I have thought it worth while to devote a chapter to some account of the labour thus imported and to the Act (of the Colonial Parliament) 31 Vic. 47, which, whilst it sanctions the immigration and employment of the islanders, affords them proper protection and the advantages due to their work. I am the more anxious that my readers should be made acquainted with the provisions of this Act, because recent events have served to create much prejudice against the whole system of the importation of Polynesian labourers from their own islands, instead of directing it against the flagrant abuses which have crept in, and which the Act itself has been framed to meet. No doubt it is impossible that these abuses can be too gravely censured, and I am far from saying that the working of

CHAPTER XII.

OUR SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS.

OUT of our twenty boys imported from the South Sea Islands, six were from the Island of Tanna, eight from Larva, and the remainder from various others. The Tanna men were splendid-looking fellows, tall, muscular, and wonderfully strong. They looked cut out by nature for warriors, and the other boys held them in great awe, though they never took advantage of their superior strength to ill-treat their fellow-workmen. They had a hut to themselves, with bunks rigged up like a ship to sleep in, and their pillows astonished me beyond measure. These were branches of trees a foot in length, with three or four spikes growing out of them, which formed the legs, and constituted one of the most uncomfortable resting-places for the head I ever saw; I don't even except a shot-rack, on which as a midshipman I have enjoyed many a sweet, though stolen, snooze. In the evening, when work was over, they used generally to congregate round their fires, and sing and smoke for a time, soon, however, turning in. As labourers they were

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