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A Narrative of a visit to the Australian colonies.

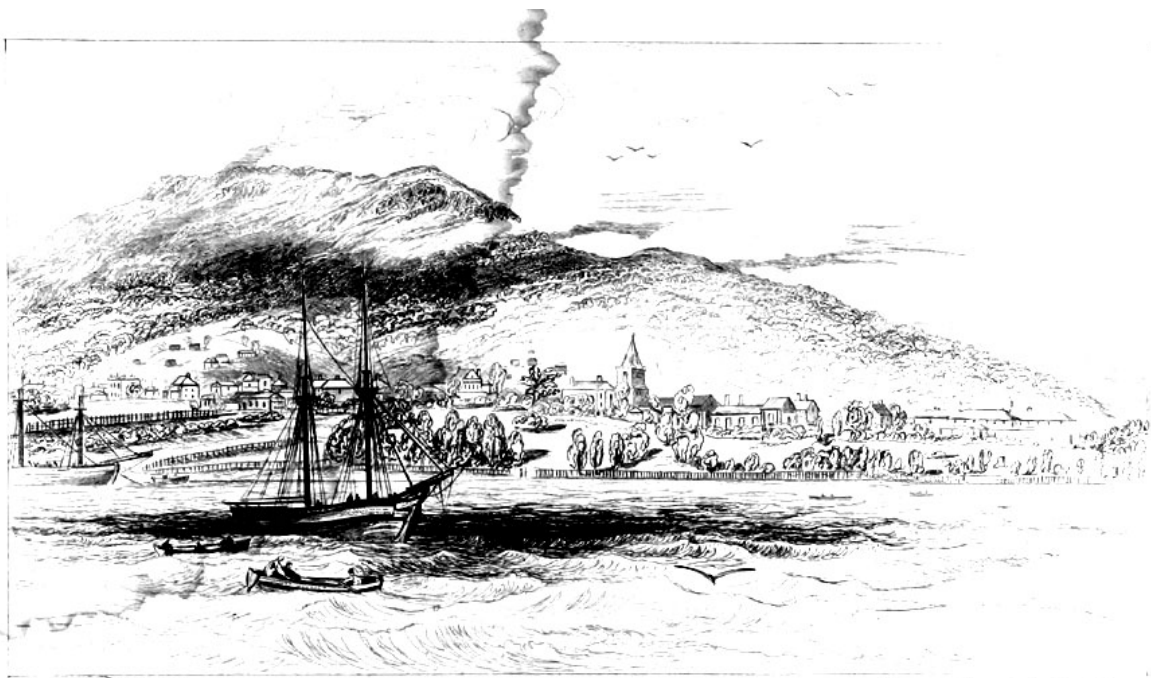
James Backhouse

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Paul W. Newhall



Engraved by Wm. Chapman

from a sketch by G. Wheeler

Hobart Town 1834.

1929 G 305

A NARRATIVE
OF
A VISIT
TO THE
AUSTRALIAN COLONIES,
BY
JAMES BACKHOUSE.

ILLUSTRATED BY THREE MAPS, FIFTEEN ETCHINGS,
AND SEVERAL WOOD-CUTS.

LONDON:
HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO. PATERNOSTER ROW,
YORK: JOHN L. LINNEY, LOW OUSEGATE.
—
MDCCCXLIII.



YORK: PRINTED BY JOHN L. LINNEY.

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distances, within nine miles. Several of them are in stations in life, similar to those of the more opulent of the middle class, in England. Among them, there is a pleasing attention to spiritual things: they generally assemble their whole families, including prisoner-servants, daily: for reading the Scriptures, and other devotional exercises. At the suggestion of the zealous, Episcopal Minister, they have established a Bank, in which they take small deposits, with the view of encouraging the labouring classes to save their money. This has already succeeded, in an encouraging degree, in regard to this object; it has considerably restrained the spending of money in strong drink, and, in other respects, has proved very useful in the district.

9th. We visited the Jail, Factory, and Hospital. The first of these, generally contains about fifty prisoners, convicts and others, under charges and sentences, all mixed together, and without employment; eating and sleeping in the same room. It has also five cells, and two rooms for debtors; all without airing courts. The Factory, which is occupied by female prisoners, and the Hospital, have better accommodations; but the latter is without enclosure, which is a great defect, especially, as many of its inmates are prisoners. These places are regularly visited by the Episcopal Minister, whose care for the prisoner, as well as the free population of the district, is exemplary.

Having concluded our labours at Bathurst, we accompanied a respectable settler, residing at Woodlands, at the junction of the Campbell and Fish Rivers, to his comfortable residence.

10th. The country about Woodlands is fine: the soil is a mixture of decomposed basaltic and granitic rocks, with pieces of rolled Jasper scattered on the surface. In a well, of seventy feet deep, in which water has not yet been obtained, a substance resembling soap-stone occurs, under the decomposed granite.—Several of the neighbouring settlers dined with us. Considering the shortness of the time since the Blue Mountains were first crossed by Europeans, the respectability of the population in this district is remarkable. They are placed under inconvenience at present,

by the difficulties of obtaining necessaries, from the long drought, which has weakened the cattle, and has caused the expense of carriage over the mountains, to be very great.

11th. We had a meeting at O'Connell Plains, in a chapel, built by a private individual. The perceptible influence of our Heavenly Father's love was with us, both in time of silence, and when we were engaged in vocal labour. Ability was afforded us, to show clearly, the difference between formal and spiritual worship, and to illustrate the delusion and unprofitableness of the former, and the validity and profitableness of the latter; proving, that it extended, not only to the right ordering of the mind and conduct, in public and private devotion, but, having its root in the fear of God, to a consequent regard to his law, in all our public and private actions, as well as to our words and thoughts; so as to render the whole life of the spiritually-minded Christian, a continued act of worship.

12th. We took leave of our hospitable friends, at Woodlands, who kindly lent us their gig for the day, and proceeding by O'Connell Plains, we traversed several miles of grassy and herby, open forest hills, affording pasturage for sheep and cattle, till we came to the dwelling of a settler, on the Fish River. This person rented a section of land, probably six hundred and forty acres, of the Government, for £2 per annum.

13th. Our route lay along the Fish River, which here has a granite bed, and except in rainy weather, is a slender stream. It takes its name from a fish, about the size of a Cod, that inhabits its waters. We passed over a ridge of granite and compact sandstone, the highest point of which is called, Evans's Crown. *Exarrhena suaveolens*, a plant resembling Forget-me-not, but having large, white, fragrant flowers, and some others, common also in V. D. Land, but rare in N. S. Wales, were growing here. The mid-day sun was very hot, and Snakes, basking in its rays, were numerous. Two young dogs belonging one of our friends from Helvellyn, who accompanied us from O'Connell Plains, killed four. One of the dogs barked in front of the snake, while the other seized it in its mouth, gave it a violent shake, and dropped

it. The other then barked, while his fellow attacked the reptile. This they continued, at the risk of their lives, till one of our party finished the destruction of the snakes with a stick. At Antonios Creek, we were refreshed with milk and damper, by a man formerly a prisoner. Milk is now so plentiful at many stations, that where they have not pigs to consume it, much of it is thrown away, after the cream is taken off.

14th. One of the prisoners, at the house where we lodged, having been flogged by order of a magistrate, for allowing the sheep to ramble over a piece of marshy ground, the whole of those at the establishment refused to come to the reading of the Scriptures, last evening. I went to them this morning, and gave them some counsel, which was well received.

We pursued our way to Black Heath. The advance of spring has decorated the Vale of Clywd, as well as the Blue Mountains, with many pretty blossoms. Among these, may be enumerated several species of *Grevillea*, a genus, including shrubs, with handsome flowers, but of very various foliage, aspect, and altitude; some of them are creepers on the ground, others are lofty trees.

Arriving at Black Heath, early, and not thinking it prudent to proceed further to day, we turned aside, to visit Govetts Leap; where, at an interval of a few hundred yards, two small streams fall over a precipice, at the opposite sides of a cove, in a sandstone cliff. The cove is half a mile, or more, in width, extending beyond the falls; and having ledges, upon which shrubs are growing; notwithstanding that to the eye it appears perpendicular. The perpendicular fall of one of the streams, is calculated, at 600 feet. The water is diffused into a shower of drops, before it reaches a mound of moss, that has grown up from below, to meet it. The other fall, is somewhat less in height. The course of the water, from the foot of the cliff, is traceable, in the dense forest of "the inaccessible valley," where it joins the Grose River, by the darker verdure, and the tree-ferns, on the margins of the streams. The cliffs, on the opposite side of this dark glen, are of similar character, forming a

long series of coves. Above them, rise some considerable woody eminences, on which the snow lies in winter. Among these, are King Georges Mount, Mount Hay, and Mount Tomah; some of which, are visible from Sydney. The access to the point, from whence the waterfalls were seen, was difficult, but the magnificence of the scene, amply repaid for the trouble, in reaching it. The lofty, sinuous, sandstone cliffs, of this neighbourhood, have given it the name, of Hassans Walls.

15th. We set out in a smart snow-storm, dined at the Weatherboard-hut, and reached the Valley in the evening. Several showers of hail and rain fell, in the course of the day. In the lower altitudes of the mountains, the advance of spring was more striking. *Telopea speciosissima*, forming low bushes, with heads of flowers as large as small Peonies, was in full blossom. The Blue Mountain Parrot, partly blue, and with a breast of crimson, as brilliant as the flowers, was drinking nectar out of the blossoms of this splendid shrub; and a brown Honey-eater was darting its tongue, like a slender pencil of hair, into the elegant pink flowers of *Grevillea linearis*. *Gompholobium, grandiflorum*, a large, yellow, pea-flowered shrub, of great beauty, and several species of *Platylobium*, *Daviesia*, *Boronia*, and *Eriostemon*, enlivened the solitude, and beguiled the walk, of thirty-one miles, through this dreary forest, which we accomplished in ten hours. This kind of exercise, in such a climate, gives vigour to the digestive powers, and cheerfulness to the spirits. The number of dead bullocks had increased considerably, since we last crossed the mountains. We fell in with several parties of men with drays, conveying supplies for the settlers to the westward. Some of them were resting, others pursuing their way with cattle, so weak, that many of them appeared likely to die before reaching the other side. Notwithstanding the late rains have caused the grass again to grow, it is still very scarce in the little mountain glens, where it is not of a nutritious quality; and the cattle, in the low countries, have not yet had time, since the rain fell, to get into such condition, as is necessary to enable them to endure such a journey.

16th. Toward the close of the day, we overtook a magistrate, returning from an inquest, on the remains of a woman, who had hung herself, in a state of excitement from drinking. Her husband had been committed to prison, on the charge of wilful murder, for having assisted his wife, in the accomplishment of this rash and wicked act!—The man was afterwards tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death; but was respited till the opinion of the English Judges could be had, upon the before unheard of case; and this opinion had not been received, when I left N. S. Wales.

Our walk to Penrith was pleasant. As we descended from the mountains, the grass, on Emu Plains, looked beautifully green. It is of the kind, called here, Couch-grass, *Cynodon dactylon*, which creeps deep in the ground, and spreads over the cultivated lands, of this part of N. S. Wales. It is a widely diffused species, occurring also on the south coast of England, and in India, &c.

On visiting the Police-office at Penrith, to apply for leave to hold a meeting in it, we witnessed the infliction of the degrading punishment of flagellation, on two prisoners, to the amount of one hundred lashes each. One of them bore his punishment without complaint; the other writhed much under it, complained piteously, and was so faint, as to require to be frequently supplied with water. Yet I saw this man, a few minutes after, putting on his clothes, behind the jail, and jeering with a woman, in a way that proved that his mind was not beneficially operated upon, though in body, he must have suffered severely, unless the torpor of the mutilated flesh, rendered him temporarily insensible. I believe the disposition of mind, of those who think to keep mankind in subjection by severity, is much the same as it was in Rehoboam, when he took the counsel of the young men; and that it will, in one way or other, lead to similar results.—See 2 Chron. x.

At Penrith, a Jew, professing Christianity, the father-in-law of the landlord of the inn, told us, that as we had come among them to preach the gospel, we should be free of all charges. We acknowledged his kindness, and explained

how our expenses were paid, to which he replied, he hoped we would not debar him of this privilege.

18th. At ten o'clock, a small congregation met us at the Police-office, at Penrith, where religion and morality are at a low ebb. In the afternoon, we had a meeting at Nepean, which was well attended. The Wesleyans preach here occasionally, but the tone of religious feeling is low. The message we have generally to proclaim is, that all unrighteousness is sin, and all sin the service of the devil; that none can be saved in the service of the devil, for he is the enemy of God, and so are all his servants. We find it also our place, to state the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, and to urge the importance of attention to the convictions of the Holy Spirit upon the mind, discovering sin, condemning it, and leading to repentance, as being the only way by which we can come to a true faith in Christ, and a holy walk with God. These doctrines we are engaged to press, with a variety of Scripture illustrations, and with appeals to the convictions of their truth, in the minds of our hearers, and with exhortations to seek after an experimental knowledge of them.—After meeting, we called to see an aged man, who had been confined to bed with palsy, for several years, and was in a state of great suffering. He was formerly a prisoner, became thoughtful without instrumental means, got a little forward in his circumstances, gave the land where the school-house is built, and reared a large family, by some of whom, he has been in danger of being again led away from righteousness, by their joining a medical man, in recommending him to take spirits as a medicine.

19th. We breakfasted at Regentville, the hospitable owner of which, has a large vineyard on his fine property, but the promise for fruit this season is not great, in consequence of the late drought, during many weeks of which, the sky was clear, and there was "neither rain nor dew," a circumstance not uncommon in these regions. During the drought, the proprietor of Regentville, had a herd of sixteen horses, which strayed to a peninsula, on the mountains, where they could hear the fall of water, but could

not reach it. As if enchanted by the sound, they had continued to pace round the spot, till they all perished by thirst.

20th. We called upon some of the neighbouring settlers, and visited Glen Brook, a romantic valley, through which a branch of the Nepean River flows, between high, woody cliffs, of the same character as those forming the inaccessible vallies of this part of the country. It contained several remarkable trees and shrubs; among which were a wild fig-tree, and *Hibiscus heterophyllus*, the flowers of which resemble the Hollyhock, and are of a delicate white, with a deep, purple eye.

21st. We walked by way of the little village of Castle-reagh, to Windsor, a town of about 1,500 inhabitants, beautifully situated, upon the Hawkesbury, and of very English appearance, where we found pretty good accommodation at an inn.

22nd. We called upon some of the Inhabitants, and made arrangements, for holding some meetings, in which, we were kindly assisted by the Wesleyan Minister.

23rd. We went to Richmond, another little town on the Hawkesbury, four miles distant from Windsor. The country here is very fine, and productive, with extensive grassy flats, along the sides of the river. On these, people continue to build and reside, notwithstanding there have been floods, at intervals of a few years, that have risen far above the tops of their houses.

A respectable Wesleyan, at Richmond, told us, that he had heard of our visit to Wellington Valley, several days ago, from a Native, who had had the particulars detailed to him, by a Black from that country. Our persons, costume, and many other particulars, including our manner of communicating religious instruction, had been minutely described. And on our Wesleyan friend inquiring what the Black supposed all this meant, he replied, "God Almighty come and sit down at Wellington;" implying, that the Most High would be worshipped there. The scattered natives of Australia, communicate information rapidly; messengers being often sent from tribe to tribe, for great distances. In the evening we returned to Windsor.

24th. Accompanied by a thoughtful, military officer, we walked to the villages of Pitt Town, and Wilberforce. At Pitt Town, we were helped, in obtaining a place to hold a meeting in, by the Episcopal Minister.

25th. We had meetings at Richmond, in the forenoon, and at Windsor, in the afternoon. There was a painful feeling in both meetings, on behalf of such as profess to be awakened, but do not maintain an inward exercise of soul before the Lord; and who try to feed upon external excitements, instead of upon "the true Bread," "which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."

26th. We had some conversation with an unfaithful professor of religion; with whom we expostulated, on his inconsistency, in endeavouring to add to his income, by distilling spirits, both to his own injury, and to that of those who consumed them. This man tried to vindicate his practice, but himself became gradually ensnared by the insidious poison; he ultimately died of delirium tremens, declaring that the pains of hell were already his portion. We also visited some thoughtful people, not professing with any associated body of Christians; one of whom left the army on half-pay, when he became religiously awakened, finding military associations inimical to his religious progress.—In the evening, a Temperance Meeting was held in the government school-room, when we gave the company some information, on the progress of Temperance Societies. There are about ninety members here, many of whom are soldiers: one of their officers is a diligent labourer in this good cause.

27th. After breakfast, we went to see the jail; and were scarcely in the yard, before the prisoners, of their own accord, arranged themselves, to afford us the opportunity of addressing them, standing in the scorching sunshine, and leaving us the shade. We inquired, if we could not have an interview with them, in one of the rooms of the prison, and being answered in the affirmative, they were soon assembled and seated, and we had a memorable time with them. The sense of divine overshadowing prevailed in a remarkable degree, the message of mercy

was freely proclaimed among them, and they were invited to turn to the Lord, against whom they had deeply revolted; with the assurance, that if they would submit to the government of his good Spirit, he would be their God, and pardon their past transgressions for Jesus' sake.—We afterwards walked again to Wilberforce, where we had a meeting in the school-house, with a congregation consisting chiefly of Australians, of European extraction, with whom I had an open time, in preaching the Gospel; to which, as regards its power, the auditors seemed much of strangers.—It is to be regretted, that in public preaching, a theoretical knowledge of the blessed doctrine of the atonement, should so much take the place, as it generally does, of the practical application of the Gospel, spiritually. There is ground to believe, that this is one great cause, why so few come to true repentance, such as is wrought by attention to the convictions of the Spirit of Truth, and leads to the practical and saving application of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

28th. At six o'clock this morning, we had a religious interview with a road-party, of twenty-four prisoners, employed in replacing a wooden bridge, over the South Creek, close to Windsor. In the afternoon, we visited the hospital, and had a meeting with about forty patients, who were assembled in one of the four wards, of which this building consists. In the evening, we met about one hundred and twenty persons, in the school-room, at Pitt Town, to whom much Christian counsel, and warning were extended. The district of Pitt Town, contains about seven hundred inhabitants; many of whom have been prisoners, and are notorious for their drunkenness, profligacy, and neglect of public worship.

29th. We returned to Richmond, and made calls upon several persons, for the purpose of furnishing them with tracts. In the afternoon we held a meeting at Currajong, a scattered settlement, on the ascent of the mountains, near the confluence of the Nepean and Grose Rivers; which, uniting, form the Hawkesbury. The land here has been cleared, and numerous cottages have been erected; but the inhabitants, who are chiefly Anglo-Australians, seem very uncultivated.

In the evening we returned again to Windsor. The country in this neighbourhood, was settled at an early period of the Colony. Some of the alluvial flats on the Hawkesbury, which is navigable to this point, for small craft, are very rich; and the people are now busy planting Maize or Indian Corn. Crops of this useful grain are often obtained, after Wheat has failed from frost, drought, or hot winds.

30th. At six o'clock in the morning, we mounted a four-horse coach, which stopped for breakfast, at Parramatta, and arrived at Sydney, in four hours and a half, the distance being thirty-eight miles.—Between Windsor and Parramatta, there are a few large Orange-orchards, which are said to yield a very profitable produce to their owners.