

Bound for Australia

Excursions in New South Wales, Western Australia, and Van Diemen's Land ...

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Observations on The Voyage from England—Mode of preserving Plants and Seeds—St. Jago—Description of Porto Praya—Appearance of The Country—Drought—Arrival at Swan River—Gage's Roads—Cockburn Sound—Freemantle—Perth—Anecdote of The Doctor of The L—Opinions respecting The Soil—Excursion up The Swan, and Canning—Darling range of Mountains—Aborigines—Their addiction to Mimicry—Garden Island—Climate—Conflicting statements concerning the Colony—Apprentices—Recent accounts of the progress of the Settlement.

SHIPS bound to the Australian colonies sail at all times of the year ; but it is by no means an easy matter to ascertain the precise period fixed for their departure ; for such is the anxiety of the agents to secure passengers, that they will not hesitate to state a positive time, although well aware that the vessel may not sail for many weeks afterwards.

It is therefore advisable to withhold the passage money until the vessel is in a state of forwardness for sea, which can only be ascertained by a person going himself on board, and finding out what portion of the cargo is shipped : if he cannot do so personally, he should employ a friend to act for him. Without taking this precaution, the emigrant may be detained in London, at very great expense, and during a considerable time : indeed I know of one instance in which a family were induced, through the misrepresentations of an agent, to go from Aberdeen to London, where, after having made their arrangements and paid their passage-money, they were detained *three months*.

The amount of the passage-money varies greatly, but the following may be taken as the average :

Cabin, from 80*l.* to 90*l.*

Stern Cabin 40*l.* to 50*l.* extra.

Steerage 20*l.* to 30*l.*

The freight for baggage, &c. taken in the hold, is from 2*l.* 15*s.* to 3*l.* per ton.

The average passage to Sydney and Hobart Town is about four months, and to Swan River about three weeks less.

Previous to securing his passage, the emigrant will do well to ascertain that the ship is commanded by a person of known credit and responsibility ; he will thus be secure against those disputes respecting fare, etc. etc., which add so much to the inevitably numerous inconveniences of such a long voyage.

Some persons consider the passage-money to be extravagant, but they do not reflect that the style of living will most probably be greatly superior to that to which they have been accustomed on shore ; many also imagine, that on board ship, the time must of necessity pass very heavily, which is altogether a mistake ; for it is really inconceivable with what rapidity weeks, nay months, seem to disappear during a voyage, especially if a person be moderately

partial to literary pursuits. The very regularity, or, as it is termed, monotony, of the life one leads, tends to make the days appear short ; and when it is considered how many sources of recreation are supplied by reading, chess, etc., it is but seldom that any one, save the mere idler, will find the day too long. If there should be any person, who, instead of employing his time rationally, thinks of nothing but eating and drinking, no uncommon circumstance, he may expect to feel enough of the *tædium vitæ* to make him wish himself on shore again.

Not a few are alarmed at the supposed dangers of the voyage : it might possibly instil some degree of courage into the most timid, if they would but take into consideration the small size and badly found condition of the vessels in which the early navigators encountered the storms of which they speak [1].

I have been twice to New Holland (and a friend of mine four times) without having experienced aught resembling a gale of wind ! Even off Cape Horn, when returning to England, at the commencement of the winter, the weather was truly delightful [2].

Previous to our reaching the Cape the weather had been thick and gloomy, so that for thirteen days we never saw the moon, and very little of the sun ; but old ocean, during that period, was so uncommonly smooth, that we were almost led to believe ourselves close under the lee of the land, instead of being at some distance from it, with sometimes a fresh breeze blowing right on shore. We were quite unable to account for this ; there was just such a ripple as is frequently observed on the surface of a lake, but not the slightest perceptible swell. This was fortunate, as we sailed nearly five hundred miles amongst ice islands, the first of which was seen in latitude 55° 13' south, longitude 115° 45' west. They were mostly at a distance of several miles from each other, with small broken fragments between them : the greatest number seen at one time exceeded twenty, and the most considerable may have been half a mile in length, and two hundred feet, or upwards, in height. The principal danger, when amongst ice, arises from the small pieces, which, during a dense fog, are not perceived until the vessel is nearly upon them : the larger masses or islands, may generally be distinguished by the “ blink.”

Those who wish to touch at Rio Janeiro, on their way to the Colonies, will do well to sail early in April : but if they prefer the Cape of Good Hope, about the middle or end of August, as there will then be a greater probability of their making a good passage ; besides which, they will arrive at the Cape in the fine season, a point of great consequence in such a boisterous region.

Ships appear, however, to touch more commonly at the Cape Verd Islands : on my first voyage, we passed a couple of days at the Island of Mayo, and on my second we put into Porto Praya ; at the former we procured nothing but water and salt, and at the latter various fruits, and some poultry.

If the emigrant has any articles of value at all liable to become damaged, they should be in cases lined with tin ; and in order to keep his trunks, etc. free from damp, he had better place them on stands, so as to raise them a few inches from the deck ; they can afterwards be secured in the usual manner.

Seeds are put up in several ways ; some persons enclose, them in cannisters, or boxes of coarse sugar ; others in tin soldered up. From experience, I consider it a good plan to pack them in brown paper, and then to suspend them in the cabin. I had heard that it was necessary to exclude the air entirely, and therefore tried the experiment ; yet most of the seeds failed. Cuttings can be carried in boxes in the following manner : first put in a layer of mould, then

one of cuttings, and so on alternately, until the box is filled ; nail it down tight, and keep it from wet.

Bulbous roots may be hung up in paper bags ; and all the care that they require, is to be occasionally cleared of any insects that may be on them.

Plants are often packed in moss, as cuttings are in mould ; and I have seen them brought out in this manner, and succeed perfectly well. But the more usual mode is to have boxes fitted on purpose, in which case the glass should be protected by a wire grating. In spite, however, of all the trouble that may have been expended upon the plants, many of them will perish before the expiration of the voyage ; but many will also reach their destination in excellent condition. They frequently die in consequence of the box not being closed in stormy weather, so that the plants are destroyed by the spray. They must not be watered too often.

There is not a tree or plant that will grow in Europe that will not also thrive well in one or other of the three colonies ; and such, likewise, is the case with a great number of exotics. The emigrant ought certainly to take out both cuttings and seeds of every description. In a country like New Holland, every deciduous tree, in particular, is valuable. He will perhaps say he has already enough to attend to, without hampering himself with so many packages ; but he may rest assured, that the trouble and expense are so trifling, as not to be worth mentioning.

He will most probably, on his arrival, have no place in which to put his plants, etc., in this case, he can give them to the botanical garden, and the superintendent will at any time supply him with those he may require when on his location.

I have several times, to my no small astonishment, met with persons who were going to Australasia professedly with the view of becoming settlers, and who, nevertheless, had not supplied themselves with a plant or seed of any kind. This must have been through idleness or carelessness, neither of which is very creditable. I tried to introduce the goldfinch and sky lark ; and Dr. F., who, in each of his voyages has exerted himself greatly to introduce both birds and plants, took on board, when he last went out, two dozen linnets, and three dozen goldfinches ; he landed three of the latter, and I saved two larks, but both males. Here we both committed a mistake, in having too many birds in one cage ; for I had fourteen goldfinches in the same cage, and the Doctor thirty-six. In flying about they destroyed each other, and they also fought most desperately.

The proper, and in fact the only way, is to have a large wicker cage divided into compartments, and to keep two birds, male and female, in each, but with one general slide, so as to avoid the necessity of cleaning each cage or compartment separately. Singing birds, provided they are not of the kind which destroy grain or young fruit, (and even if they did, the loss would be trifling) would be a great acquisition to the Colonies, as they would tend to break, during a portion of the year, the horrid silence which so often reigns in the vast forests of New Holland and Van Dieman's Land.

Our voyage to St. Jago, one of the Cape Verd Islands, was tolerably rapid, and we found there two ships which had sailed from England ten days before us, and yet had only arrived one day sooner.

We anchored at Porto Praya, the principal town of the island, and a party of us immediately went on shore. The landing is always indifferent, frequently very bad, and even

dangerous. On my former visit to this place in a frigate, one of our boats was upset, and some of the crew were nearly drowned. On landing we had to walk along a sandy beach, and across a valley which extends to the port, and contains a few wretched looking trees ; then ascending a steep acclivity by a bad road cut out of the rock, we found ourselves in the town. It consists of a large square, one rather wide street, and a few lateral streets of a miserable appearance, and stands upon a bold rocky projection, elevated considerably above the sea, with a valley on each side, and bare hills and barren valleys behind. From it, with the exception of the above mentioned trees on the one side, and a few acres of garden ground and thick wood in the valley on the other, the eye looks over a region as bare and desolate as can possibly be imagined ; in short, no spot I ever saw can, in apparent sterility be compared to it. Most of the inhabitants are blacks.

From the town we walked a mile and a half to inspect some springs, and found there a good garden belonging to one of the merchants, and also a copious supply of excellent water, which flowed from beneath a rock. It is from hence that the government propose laying down pipes, in order to supply the shipping, and also the town, so as not to be under the necessity of depending, as is the case at present, on a well, inconveniently situated in a valley three quarters of a mile from the beach.

Quitting the springs, we continued our walk, over loose lava without a blade of grass, and scarcely a plant of any kind, to a ravine called Trinidad.

Here, however, the vegetation was truly luxuriant, and fruit of various kinds, particularly oranges, lemons, grapes, bananas, and cocoa-nuts, together with sugar canes, coffee, etc., were extremely abundant. We saw also the tree commonly called, in Western Africa, the monkey-fruit, the *adansonia* of botanists ; one which we measured was forty-two feet in girth.

The ravine, for it can hardly be termed a valley, is really a beautiful spot ; but it will bear no comparison with another called St. Domingo, some miles beyond it, which I visited at a former period. The last is nine miles from the town ; and on our way to it we passed occasionally the bed of a mountain stream, but found not one drop of water. The ravine is rendered highly romantic and interesting, as it is of some extent, and enclosed by lofty rocks of a bold and picturesque appearance ; the effect of which (together with the cultivation) is greatly heightened by the contrast with the gloomy and unpromising aspect of the country around. St. Jago is ten miles long and five wide.

From July, 1830, to the time of my visit—that is to say, *twenty-two months*—not more than half an inch of rain had fallen in St. Jago ; and this had also been the case in some of the other islands of this group. The consequences have been highly disastrous, and many of the inhabitants have perished through want.

During our little excursion, we remarked several large herds of cattle, and numerous goats, but were unable to discover upon what they subsisted ; of course their owners must supply them with food and water at night, though as these are scarce articles, it is not improbable that great numbers of the unfortunate animals perish.

Guinea fowl and quail abound in every part of the island, and afford good shooting ; if a person wishes to procure the former, he must set off at daylight. There are also hawks, kingfishers, and one or two other birds : of animals, I met with a few monkeys, but doubt much if any person who had once seen one of these singular creatures asleep, would wantonly kill them ; and certainly a semi-cannibal alone would eat of one.

The island is, at particular seasons, extremely unhealthy, and, taking into consideration the badness of the landing, the great fatigue experienced in walking even a few miles in a place so hot, and so entirely destitute of shade, and also how little there is to compensate any person for the trouble, it is scarcely worth the while of any one, save the sportsman, to go on shore : at all events, I would advise no female to land unless the water be more tranquil than it generally is.

I have said that we touched, on a former voyage, at Mayo. This island is of no great extent, and its sterility is even more apparent than that of St. Jago : the only signs of vegetation which we were enabled to discover, being observed on the sides of two mountains, of considerable elevation. We landed at some steps cut out in the rock, and a worse landing place I have rarely seen ; for the sea beats with no little violence against the precipitous sides of the cliff, so that it requires great care and attention to prevent the boat from being stove or upset. The town, as it is termed, is a collection of miserable huts, inhabited by about 1500 Portuguese blacks ; and not far from it are the salt-pans, where a large quantity of salt is annually made, forming the sole produce of this delectable spot. During the rains, the island is said to be covered with grass, but when a drought occurs, the condition of the natives, as also of the cattle and asses, must be dreadful. We procured water by digging holes in the sand, and then placing casks, into which the water was allowed to drain ; a tedious process. That which we got, however, although soft and vapid, was by no means bad. I would recommend no one to touch at this most wretched island.

The only land made, after leaving St. Jago, until we reached New Holland, was the Island of St. Paul, by all accounts a most singular spot ; but we were not near enough to make any observations concerning it.

After a voyage of sixteen weeks, with no incidents or events of any kind worth relating, we finally arrived at Swan River ; and it may be imagined how much our curiosity was excited to see, with our own eyes, a spot of which such a variety of accounts had been published.

This place was known to the French long before the English thought of colonising it : they seem to have entertained no very high opinion of its beauties or capabilities [3]. The coast, to some distance on each side of the entrance to the river, has a most wretched appearance, nothing being visible save barren rocks, or a sandy beach, with a dreary looking country beyond ; in short, a more inhospitable spot is rarely to be found ; and a vessel driven upon the rocks, formed an object which did not conduce to animate the scene.

The port, or roadstead, called Gage's Roads, is partially sheltered by Garden Island, and two other islands named Rotten Nest and Pulo Carnac, but it is greatly exposed to the north-west winds, which often blow with considerable violence.

The best anchorage is in Cockburn Sound, formed by Garden Island and the main, with the disadvantage, however, of being nine miles from the landing-place at Freemantle ; so that it will always be highly inconvenient for the boats of the merchant-vessels, besides causing a serious delay in discharging the cargoes of the latter.

Gage's Roads are *said to be* perfectly safe from October to April, as land and sea-breezes prevail regularly during that season.

Freemantle, at the time of my arrival—(in October 1829)—was a mere encampment, every person being either in a tent or temporary hut : its site is a level spot, consisting entirely of sand, and the “ bush” or forest, extends to within a very short distance of it. Water was

easily procured by digging holes a few feet in depth, but it was not particularly good ; and that which we took on board, at our departure, was not drinkable ; I understand, however, that a plentiful supply has been found since, and of a good description. The only spring, near the place, was about a mile distant, and it fell into the river only a few yards from its source.

Some accounts state that Freemantle has been almost deserted, the colonists having removed to Perth, or to their grants ; others that it is in a flourishing condition ! Be this as it may, if the site alone be considered, a worse spot for a town could hardly have been selected ! Situated as it is upon a bed of sand, and exposed to a glare that is almost insupportable, it holds out but little inducement for any person to fix his residence there, unless compelled by circumstances. [4]

It was not a little curious to observe the incipient town during the first few months after its commencement. Tents and huts in every variety ; goods of all descriptions scattered about in disorder ; the emigrants employed, some in cooking their provisions, and others in sauntering about, or landing their effects ; many looking very miserable, and not a few equally happy ; different kinds of animals, just landed, and showing evidently how much they must have suffered during so long a voyage ; such was the scene I witnessed on landing at the spot on which the future principal sea-port of Western Australia was to stand.

At the entrance of the Swan, which is close to Freemantle, there is a bar on which the depth of water does not exceed six or seven feet ; and often, even when the wind is moderate, the passage over it is not a little hazardous. From thence to Perth the distance is about nine miles, and the navigation is impeded by shoals, which, in some places, extend nearly across the river.

On approaching the township, one part of the river forms a lake several miles in extent, which would make a fine harbour if a canal could be cut so as to admit large vessels. Its shores are rocky, and generally useless to the agriculturist. Perth, the intended capital, stands on a rising spot covered, when I was there, with trees, in the midst of which the settlers had pitched their tents, or erected their huts ; and the situation is not only well chosen, but affords some highly interesting views. [5] The river, at this part, is about half a mile wide, or rather more, but it is so shallow that it may sometimes be forded. The doctor who came out with us, in attempting to ford it, stuck in a hole and was drowned. He was short and stout, and was found, a day or two after, standing upright, with his head only a few inches below the surface ; his companion got safe across. The former unfortunate young man was a proof how little dependence is sometimes to be placed in the advertisements in the London papers, with respect to vessels bound to New Holland. The agent advertised the L——, conformably to established custom, concluding with—“ This vessel will carry an experienced Surgeon.” This “ experienced Surgeon”—(the doctor of the L——)—was a *shop-boy* in the employment of a chemist and druggist ; and he told me, without hesitation, that so far from being acquainted with medical matters, he did not know even how to bleed ! He was one day about to perform the operation of phlebotomy on one of the crew ; and commenced by fastening a bandage round the man’s *wrist* ! he was, of course, told that he was doing wrong. He tried to bleed a horse, and, after several attempts, failed entirely—the horse died !

The agent also pledged me his word of honour (blessings on his honesty !) that the fare should be good, and the allowance ample. The first was, in every respect, most execrable, even the salt junk and pork being unfit to be eaten ; and the commander took especial care that we should not gorge ourselves at the expense of his larder, such as it was. [6]

Many and very contrary opinions have been given concerning the soil immediately around Perth ; and the reader will easily perceive to what an extent this was carried, when he is informed that one gentleman said it was a rich loam, with a superstratum of sand ; and another asserted that there was nothing but sand to the depth of several feet ! Both of them were residing *upon the spot*, not above thirty or forty yards asunder, and neither of them would have *willfully* misrepresented the matter. As there happened, opportunely, to be a saw-pit at hand, I examined it with great care to the depth of nearly seven feet, and found the latter assertion to be strictly correct. Consequently one of the above gentlemen must have judged entirely from hearsay.

It does not however follow that the colonists will not be enabled to cultivate the land, and make it in some way or other available ; for the soil about Sydney is of a considerably more arid description, yet a variety of fruits and vegetables are produced in abundance.

A mile or two above Perth there are several islands ; and the river, at this spot, was so shallow, that we were obliged to get out of our boat and drag or lift it through the mud for some distance ; after which, we found ourselves again in deep water, and it soon became fresh.

From this part of the river, to a distance, as well as we could judge, of twenty-five or thirty miles above Perth—that is to say, as far as we could proceed in a boat, the scenery was frequently of a beautiful description, and the banks, in many places, were composed of a rich alluvial soil, covered with excellent grass. Unfortunately, the good soil was rarely found to extend more than half a mile from the river, and often not more than fifty or a hundred yards. The land, to a greater distance, may be capable of cultivation, but we lost sight of the black mould, and observed, beyond it, sand and ironstone. In some parts, the country was thickly clothed with forest ; in others it had the appearance of a fine park, in which scarcely a tree was to be seen that one would think it necessary to destroy.

It has been confidently asserted that the land is *generally* so scantily wooded that there are not more than *two trees to the acre* ! Nothing can be more absurd ; for it is only here and there that such is the case, the country being more commonly what is denominated “ open forest,” with spots where the trees are very close together.

We made a point of landing wherever we perceived an indication of good land, and frequently discovered the holes which had been dug by those who had preceded us, in order to ascertain the nature of the soil, and saw at once the cause why some persons had been so greatly deceived. Instead of proceeding in a direct line *from* the river, they had, in consequence of their ignorance of its course, passed partly across an elbow, or bend, formed by it, without being aware that they were all the time not far from its banks ; so that they were led to believe the black mould extended several miles *from* instead of *along* it.

About forty miles from the sea, following the sinuosities of the river, our farther progress was impeded by fallen trees ; but the French are said to have explored it to a distance of eighty miles from the entrance. If this be true, they must have disembarked at the place where we were stopped, and followed it up on shore. We were prevented by want of time from going to the source. The Canning falls into the Swan a little below Perth, on the opposite side, and in most of its features resembles that river ; but it is smaller.

Our party ascended the stream as far as the fallen trees permitted, which was not more, I think, than fifteen or sixteen miles from its confluence with the Swan. Its banks are highly picturesque—often romantic ; and it struck me there was rather a larger proportion of good

soil than on the last named river ; but even on the Canning, it extends not farther than from half to three quarters of a mile, and very seldom so far. I cannot speak with any certainty as to the exact distance that we went up the two rivers, for we could only surmise it by judging, as well as we were able, at what rate we rowed ; though I do not conceive it could have been much farther than I have stated, as we occupied only nine days in making the excursion, employed much of our time in exploring, or shooting, and did not exert ourselves very greatly in rowing. Between Perth and Freemantle the land, in an agricultural point of view, is almost worthless, if we except a few small spots ; the greater portion of it consisting of sands or sandstone covered with trees and underwood.

The base of the Darling range approaches to within a few miles of Perth : the declivities of these hills had not the appearance of being particularly abrupt ; and their elevation is considered to be only about 1,200 feet, which I am inclined to believe is somewhat underrated. Their aspect is triste and displeasing. How far inland the range extends is not known ; some officers had gone up the Canning as far as they could in a boat, and then walked, according to their statement, upwards of forty miles ; when, seeing no apparent termination to the range, and their provisions being well nigh exhausted, they were obliged to retrace their steps.

They said (and there is every reason to believe their information to be correct) that the soil was bad or indifferent, excepting sometimes at the bottom of a valley or ravine, nor did they see much land adapted even for the purposes of grazing ; indeed their account of the interior was far from cheering.

On the Canning we fell in with twenty-one of the *aborigines*, a greater number than had been previously seen in a body. They were of good height, straight limbed, very slightly made, and appeared to be extremely active. As though they were not naturally sufficiently ugly, many of them had thrust a feather, a bone, or a piece of wood through the septum of the nose ; and the same practice was observed on various parts of the east coast by Cook's people, who gave to the ornament the appellation of spritsail yard.

Of their women we were unable to get more than a transitory glimpse, as the natives seemed to be either afraid or jealous of us, and therefore kept them concealed, although not far off, a sable head occasionally shewing itself amidst the bushes whenever that inquisitiveness so natural to the sex was excited. Nevertheless, these men were ever ready to make off with our own women, as was afterwards proved more than once. They repeated all we said, and imitated all our actions ; and an amusing instance of the former propensity occurred to a party while on their way up the same river. At a spot where they had no expectation of meeting with any person, they heard a cry of " Go it, ye cripples, crutches are cheap !" On looking about them, they observed some of the natives emerge from the forest, one of whom must have heard an officer use the expression when exploring the country, and not improbably fancied it was our mode of salutation. This addiction to mimickry has been noticed by several navigators ; and it is not confined to the inhabitants of the west coast. They were extremely afraid of a gun, and almost equally so of a dog : which last, by the way, was rather singular, for they have dogs of their own.

These people excavate large holes in the ground, but for what purpose, does not seem to be precisely known. They are thought to be intended for catching tortoises, but there is more reason to suppose that kangaroos must have been meant ; as they are so deep, that when I tumbled into one, by no means the most profound among them, I was immersed above the shoulders. We found on both rivers various kinds of water fowl and other birds ; these were rapidly decreasing, the constant warfare kept up against them on the part of the colonists being so active, that scarcely one of the feathered race could escape them.

Our lair at night, while on this expedition, was formed by an oil-cloth, drawn partly over a bar supported by two trees, and quite open in front ; at the ends were placed some branches, and before us was a large fire. Rushes, or grass, formed an excellent bed ; and a blanket, or cloak, was a good substitute for bedding. Our fare consisted of “ all the delicacies of the season ” namely black swans, ducks, widgeon, white, and black, cockatoos, parrots, etc. Of kangaroos we met very few, and only two emus were seen.

We found the musquitoes excessively annoying, though far more so at Perth than elsewhere. At Freemantle there appeared to be none ; it was not far from the latter that I had pitched my tent, just within the “ Bush ” and close to a huge rock, where I had the advantage of a natural chimney and fire-place. Here I passed three weeks in searching for the beauties and wonders of this much extolled spot ; though I cannot say with any great degree of success.

Garden Island may be about twelve or fifteen miles in circumference, and the highest part 150 feet above the sea. It is little better than a mere bank of sand, and was so densely covered with trees and underwood as to be in many places quite impervious : nor from the nature of the soil does it present any capabilities of improvement or of alteration for the better.

The water procured there was of such an indifferent quality, that the officers of H. M. S. Sulphur were necessitated to send over to Freemantle for a supply, such as it was : I have since been informed that some of a better kind was afterwards procured from wells.

The sheep and goats, which were left on the island some time before, had perished, and the only animal found upon it at my visit, was the Wallabee kangaroo, with an occasional seal. The island appeared to be quite useless to the husbandman ; but it may possibly prove an eligible spot for the establishment of a fishery, as snappers and other fish were abundant. Sharks also of a large size, are seen both in Cockbourn Sound and Gag’s Roads ; we had one of these monsters alongside the vessel, and its length was certainly not less than twenty or twenty-two feet. I am not positive whether the black whale has been seen near the land : there were great numbers round the ship when we were within sixty or eighty miles of it.

The animals at Swan River are of the same description with those on the East Coast, and the only noxious beast is the native dog, or wolf of this country.

From the colony being so nearly in the same parallel with Sydney, it is taken for granted that the climate of both must necessarily be alike. It does not, however, follow as a matter of course ; for local circumstances may cause an essential difference ; in proof of which, a variety of places might be mentioned, and it is frequently exemplified in New South Wales. I do not mean to say there *is* a difference, for some time must elapse before the climate of Western Australia can be fully known ; but as Perth and Sydney are so widely asunder, and so differently situated, it is probable there must be a distinction.

While I was at Freemantle, the thermometer rose at noon to 87 deg., and once or twice to 91 deg. ; before nine o’clock in the evening it had frequently fallen to 56 deg., making a difference of from 31 to 35 deg. ; this was in a large tent. After my departure, it was sometimes as high as 105 deg. in the shade, and before midnight fell upwards of 40 degs. ! What effect this rapid change of temperature may have on the constitution, remains to be proved ; in so far as I was individually concerned, I found a cool night, after an oppressive day, highly agreeable to the feelings, and not in the least injurious to the health ; but it must be remembered that I was only five weeks at the place.

I have heard that ophthalmic complaints were common, and have abundant reason to believe they were greatly magnified. Throughout the months of May, June, July and August, 1829, the rains were incessant ; and as, sometimes for several days together, there was scarcely an hour's intermission, the sailors were in the habit of saying that it had left off raining, and taken to pouring. Afterwards, when I was at Sydney, there were great complaints of drought at the Swan ; from whence I infer, that both the east and the west coasts are equally liable to suffer from drought and floods. The situation of the settlement with respect to its distance from various parts of the globe, is unquestionably superior to that of Sydney or Hobart Town ; and provided it possessed a safe harbour, and a fair proportion of good soil in the interior, without being too distant from the coast, I should undoubtedly prefer a location there to either of the other two colonies. That the representations of the fertility of this portion of New Holland, which were published in the different periodical works, were amplified, will admit of little doubt ; and hence the reason why so many persons experience a feeling of disappointment on their arrival, as they had naturally been led to expect a much finer country, with a sufficiency of arable land in the vicinity of the capital.

It is easy to conceive, that when those who first explored the rivers, observed the scenery on their banks, (for whatever may be said to the contrary, the scenery is often beautiful,) they may have been greatly struck by the general effect ; and, judging only from the immediate neighbourhood, have taken it for granted, that the alluvial soil extended to a much greater distance. This, to say the least of it, was injudicious, as the examination of a spot intended for colonization, cannot be too minute ; and nothing could be more calculated to deceive, than the publication of a highly coloured picture of its aspect.

When we are told of a country being singularly magnificent, we are naturally inclined to believe it in every respect eligible for a settlement, not taking into consideration that whatever may be the nature of the scenery, the land may be of a very different quality, or, from local circumstances, not adapted to the purposes of tillage.

Admitting that some reproach attaches to those who, by their description of Western Australia, misled the public, still one cannot but blame persons who, finding on their arrival that the reality did not equal their anticipations, became afterwards discontented, and despaired of ever succeeding in their speculations. Some of them had quitted England with the most visionary notions imaginable, and, on the demolition of their airy castles, which vanished within a few hours after they had landed, they left the place in disgust, with heavy complaints of deception, and then strove to assuage their choler by striving to make it appear far worse than is actually the fact. One of them seriously contemplated taking out a pack of fox-hounds ; another was resolved on having a cock-pit ; and we may with justice suppose these trifling projects were not the only Utopian schemes that were concocted in the brains of the multitude of fanciful dreamers, who thought the *terra Austrails incognita* of our forefathers, would prove the *El Dorado* of their posterity. The last accounts (1831,) stated the population of Swan River at 3,000, or more, which is probably not overrated, the arrivals having been very numerous.

It may with truth be asserted, that of no place on earth have there been published such contradictory reports as of Swan River. While I was in New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land, (in 1830,) information came from all quarters, that the whole of the settlers were in a state of utter destitution, not having even the most essential necessaries of life. At this very time, I read a letter from one of them to his friend at Sydney, in which occurred the following remark : " We have every thing in abundance, save fish-sauce, for which we are but badly off ; try if you can persuade any one to send a supply, it would be sure to meet a ready sale !"

Although one would think the emigrant must have enough to occupy his mind, without going to the trouble of procuring such ridiculous luxuries, this man's letter plainly proves the want of veracity on the part of those who said the settlers were suffering from starvation.

A gentleman who afterwards went on to Sydney, affirmed most positively, that there was not a blade of grass throughout the settlement, having absurdly founded his opinion on what he had remarked between Perth and the sea ; so that here we have one of the numberless instances in which emigrants have touched at Swan River, inspected a portion of country not nine miles in extent, and then left the place, marvellously astonished at not having perceived abundance of grass on the sea-coast itself. There are settlers who have succeeded in their exertions, and are now comfortably established ; but it must be confessed, that rather a large proportion of those who embarked the whole of their property in the speculation, have suffered considerably ; and such will always be the case, when persons evince so little foresight as to invest their entire substance in a scheme, of which the success is extremely doubtful, and a failure attended with almost utter ruin.

The interior has been explored, and, as I expected, tracts of country affording fine pasturage, have been discovered. The soil, also, on the banks of several streams to the southward, is represented to be excellent ; but it cannot be expected that I should describe the country from mere hearsay. The only portion of it that I had an opportunity of exploring, was that about the Swan and Canning ; and if I attempted to delineate the interior from the accounts given to the public by those prejudiced against it, or biased in its favour, I should only mislead the reader. It is obvious, from the same cause, that it is out of my power to give any advice on the subject of seeking for land ; the emigrant may rest assured that he will find none unoccupied within sixty or eighty miles of Perth, and in all probability not within a much greater distance. I have no doubt, however, that as the country becomes more known, arable and pasture land will be found when least expected, as was the case in New South Wales, when in one instance, nearly sixty miles of mountains covered with dense forest, were traversed before the open plains were seen, on which the township of Bathurst has been established. Unfortunately a long period must elapse before roads can be made in a colony without compulsive labour ; and when made, nothing save valuable merchandize of small bulk would defray the expense of distant land carriage.

I am not at all convinced, that it is a good plan to take out apprentices ; many of those that went having proved very refractory and of little use. Their wages varied from 10*l.* to 25*l.* or more per annum ; while the mechanics, and others who had gone there at their own expense, and were consequently independent, earned from eight shillings to a pound daily. As soon as the apprentices, whose term of servitude I believe was for seven years, perceived this, they very naturally wished also to be free, and in order to accomplish it, did all that lay in their power to annoy their employers to the utmost so as finally to oblige them to cancel their indentures. This is not so difficult as might be expected, for the quantity of work to be daily performed is not specified ; and although the law authorizes the master to correct an apprentice, the latter may easily manage to keep clear of the law, and at the same time go through his labours in such a careless and negligent manner, that the master often has cause to regret having had anything to do with him.

It will perhaps be asked, what is to be done without them ? I can only reply to the question by repeating my previous assertion, that those taken from England rarely turn out well, and the greater portion of them extremely ill ; for which reason I would rather trust to hiring those who are at liberty to work, where, and for whom they think proper.

It is precisely the same with servants who are taken to the other colonies. Two cases occurred in the ship in which I last went out ; nor were their faults and inutility discovered until it was too late to remedy the evil.

The preceding notes are extracted from my journal ; and I have in addition collected the latest intelligence in my power, touching the progress of the colony, but it is not of a satisfactory nature. Conflicting statements still exist, and to such a degree as almost to render it impossible to give any correct information relative to the present condition of the place. Several of those who formerly spoke and wrote of it in the highest terms of admiration, have, notwithstanding, gone on to New South Wales or Van Dieman's Land. A writer observes, in a recent publication, "As a proof that the accounts of the scarcity are false, I neither heard nor dreamt of any want during my stay there of two months ; for I bought fresh butter at 4s. 6d. per pound ; potatoes at 9d., and vegetables at the same scale of price !" How this can be adduced as a proof of the *abundance* of provisions, (such was the case in the work alluded to), I am at a loss to discover.

I am greatly pleased to find, that not a few of the emigrants who remained are perfectly contented and happy, and hope soon to hear that the colony is in a far more thriving state than is generally supposed. Other settlements have been formed along the coast to the southward, but I know not with what success. It is a prevalent opinion that the seat of government ought to have been at King George's Sound, where there is a plentiful supply of water, and good soil in the interior, with a safe harbour. Some persons have said that it is not even now too late to select a more eligible spot for the capital ; but what would the colonists at Perth say to a change that would so depreciate their property, as to render it, comparatively speaking, of scarcely any value.

Swan River is a proof amongst many, how cautious people in England ought to be in believing all that is written respecting Australia, and particularly where they observe that inclination to hyperbole or exaggeration, which are so often found in the productions of those who attempt to describe that vast island. One writer says he has been in Switzerland, in South America, and in other regions, without having seen any thing *equal* to the tract of country between Swan River and King George's Sound ; and another makes the same remark in New South Wales [7]. I cannot say I was able to discover the most distant resemblance, (if I except the descent into Illawarra,) between any part of New Holland that I have visited, and Switzerland or South America. The aspect of the country is totally different, so is the vegetation ; the mountains are mere mole-hills, compared with those of the other two countries, and the absence of water in the landscape would alone cause a material difference. Besides, how is it possible to form a comparison between the beautiful valleys of Switzerland, strewed as they are with cottages, vineyards, fields and gardens, watered by noble rivers, or innumerable streams that descend in cascades from the rocks, and diversified by magnificent lakes, which reflect every object around them, and the generally cheerless valleys of New Holland ; or between the sublime mountains of the former, the summits, often the craggy and precipitous sides of which, are covered by eternal snow and ice, and the uniformly monotonous hills (the most lofty known is little more than a third of the height of Mont Blanc,) of the latter.

The great plains of New Holland most probably resemble the Savannahs of America ; and any farther comment on this part of the comparison would be superfluous ; nor should I have alluded to the subject except to guard any one in England from placing too implicit a confidence in the absurdities penned in Australia.

If activity, perseverance, and urbanity, on the part of a governor conduce to promote the prosperity of a colony, that at Swan River ought to succeed ; but whether it will or not, time alone can prove. Difficulties and obstacles occur at all newly formed settlements ; but these disappear, as was the case at Sydney, provided the colonists do not remit their exertions ; and that such will not be the course pursued in Western Australia, will, I feel confident, be proved by the result of their labours.

The reader will bear in mind, that this brief sketch of Swan River applies to the Settlement no later than 1831. Many changes have taken place since that time, but I shall leave him to peruse more recent accounts of the Colony ; and if he should chance to meet with an absolutely true, or entirely impartial statement of all that concerns it, he will be very fortunate. For my own part, if determined upon emigrating, I would *personally* inspect the country, however distant, in which I proposed to settle, and not trust to *any* accounts, no matter by whom written.

- [1] When Diaz discovered the Cape of Good Hope, he had only two vessels, 50 tons each ; this was in 1446 ! Those of De Gama, who discovered India, were 120, 100, and 90 tons. In Drake's voyage round the world, he had with him one vessel of 100, one of 80, one of 50, one of 30, and a pinnace of 15 tons ! ! Candish or Cavendish, in his voyage round the world, had three vessels of the respective burdens of 140, 60, and 40 tons ! Columbus' fleet consisted of three carracks, each of 100 tons, and sundry vessels of much smaller size.
- [2] It is not to be inferred from this that we had not, during the voyage an occasional strong breeze, but then it was commonly favourable : at all events we were not prevented from making some progress.
- [3] Swan River was discovered in 1696 by Vlaming, but he gives no account of it.
- [4] Subsequent to writing this I have been informed, by one gentleman, that there were *five hundred* houses at Freemantle : and, by another, that the number was very small : yet both had recently been there !
- [5] There are now at least 120 houses there, if my information is to be relied upon.
- [6] It is very rarely the case now, that the living is bad : indeed, our fare on board the Royal George and Brothers was not only excellent in its kind, but of a description far superior to what I had expected to meet with on board any merchant vessel : the wines especially would have done credit even to those who pride themselves in keeping what is termed a good cellar on shore. Most of the regular ships are equally well provided.
- [7] A third remarks that the environs of New Norfolk, in Van Dieman's, are also superior to any views which he observed in Switzerland ! !

Excursions in New South Wales, Western Australia, and Van Diemen's Land ... (1834)

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