

## ***An article on Marysville featuring the entries in Keppel's Visitors' Book***

### **A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY.**

#### **GLEANED FROM THE BUSH.**

BY BENJ HOARE.

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In a little, dim room, in the little wayside Village of Marysville, away in the mountains, there lies a book of autographs, scraps, sentiment and verse, stretching back to the year 1866. It is more than a generation old, and that means quite ancient history in this new country. The book belongs to Mrs. Keppel, one of the dearest old ladies you will ever meet in a mountain house of entertainment. I found her, as well as her book, to be a mine of reminiscence. She has met and entertained in her thirty-five years of residence most of the vice-royalties of Victoria, as well as many of our Premiers and judges, who have left with her testimonies of their appreciation.

Marysville strikes a visitor with quite a different sense from that which he receives at, say, Healesville or the Blacks' Spur. In these latter places there is a consciousness of newness, of progress, of improvement. Even amidst the glories of a gorgeous Nature in her undress uniform, one finds himself speculating on what they will be like some years hence, when man has made the beauty spots more accessible.

That sort of feeling never arises at Marysville, which seems to be rather a place -with a past than one that looks forward to a future. The forest is thick around us on every side. The hamlet consists of a few acres, which the pioneers hewed out of it with a world of pains and an infinity of energy. The wonder is how men ever came to take the trouble, seeing how little use the land has been put to when cleared. There is one little square of something over half an acre pretty well stocked with fruit trees, and I was told that it cost nearly £100 to clear it of the jungle. It would take a hundred years, I fancy, to yield a return on the outlay. Next to it is another allotment of about the same size, quite unused, and it is curious to note how the forest is gradually creeping back to it, and covering it with the primeval scrub, with saplings that indicate the steady advance of the invader. There stand the monarchs of the forest all around, like grim sentinels keeping watch and ward over their territory, and seemingly resentful of the

intrusion which a handful of settlers have made on their domain. The question is, is man to conquer the forest or. the forest to conquer man? When one hears old Mrs. Keppel talk about her 35<sup>2</sup> years of residence there, and observes what a mere speck has been reclaimed in that time from the wilderness of scrub and trees, there almost arises a disposition to back Nature as the eventual conqueror.

Marysville has its beauties and its grandeurs, and not a few of them. But I am not going to attempt any description of them, because that would be something worse than a twice-told tale. It may be quite true that tens of thousands of Victorians who feel impelled to travel to the Blue Mountains in search of the picturesque have never heard of the Steavenson's Falls, or of Mount Bismarck and "Tommy's Bend," which are nothing inferior in beauty and very little in magnificence. But then, just as a prophet never finds honour in his own country, so the tourist always sets more store on that which is distant than on that which is close at his elbow. I know that it is so with myself. I have come back from Hobart with rapturous descriptions of the beauties of that coastline, and its mountains; but truth compels me to say that there is not one of them but can be overmatched in the Healesville country, within a couple of hours of Melbourne.

In Marysville even the very names of the places have a far-off sound with them. Mount Bismarck<sup>3</sup> gets its name from a certain rising young Prussian statesman before he ever dreamt of being an "Iron Chancellor". Certainly to get to its crest is as puzzling a trip to the casual traveller to-day as it used to be to the statesmen of Europe to get on the blind side of them and of "blood and iron." Steavenson's Falls are named after a former secretary of the Victorian railways<sup>4</sup>; but why such a name should be permanently engraved on our maps in connection with, that exquisite cataract is not easily explained. It shows how extremes meet in human prose and Nature's poetry. This induces me to make an extract from Mr. Keppel's book of records. Julian Thomas, "The Vagabond," was there in 1885, and he made some stir in the place in more particularly because of his admirable descriptions of the scenery there, published in "The Age" of that day. -I found an interesting entry of his in the book. First there was his signature, "The Vagabond, 23rd March, 1885."

Underneath this some caustic critic has made this comment, "A man stuffed up with self-conceit." Certainly my old friend had his share of the egotistic quality, but very likely not more than many who exhibit it less. Here, however, he rose to the height of his self-appreciation in the following record, written in his own hand, and signed by himself and others:— "We, the undersigned, having visited the Falls, are unanimously of opinion that it is an outrage on nature to perpetuate the name of a no-account Government official in connection with such beauties. We therefore give to these 'Laughing Waters' the name of Minnehaha Falls, and so they shall be known hereafter by us, our friends and the world. In witness whereof we have hereunto placed our hands the day and year just above written." Poor Julian! His proclamation, like those of many a greater potentate, fell flat, and the maps in spite of it go on immortalising the "no-account Government official."

Only a month later J. Pickersgill, another of Melbourne's early journalistic bon-vivants, visited the same place, and entered his mot in the same book. He said— "Saw the falls, and couldn't think of any plan to prevent the water running down as it does."

How these little scraps of humour carry us back into the past! I remark that as early as 1870, when Sir Bryan O'Loughlen was a Crown Prosecutor, he too left his mark there, with a note of his appreciation of the beauties and hospitalities of the place. In like manner, in the same year, so did the present Mr. Justice Holroyd, and a party of wags who tried to "do" Mount Bismark made the frank confession that after an attempt to scale the heights, the mountain was not done, but they were.

Fitly enough we find a very diffuse entry by the evergreen E. G. Fitz Gibbon, who fills two foolscap folios with his experiences of the falls and the mountains. This was 33 years ago, and it is interesting to note his comments made on another visit 30 years later— always bright and semi-poetical.

Then in 1875 I drop across an entry by the late Judge Fellows, and others by Mr. J. G. Duffy, W. H. Archer, and a notable one by that star of science and literature, the late Rev. Julian T. Woods. One of the wits records that "Every prospect pleases, and only flies are vile." I can endorse this latter judgment as a characteristic of the present day. There, too, I find the name of my old Geelong friends, James Hendy and Geo. M. Hitchcock,

entered 29 years ago, and a little later I come across the signature of Sir George Ferguson Bowen, the sometime Governor of Victoria of troubles memory, and that of Sir William Gregory, the Governor of Ceylon. In the same year two other old identities left their trace— Captain Standish and Dr. Moorhouse. One is dead and the other gone to an old age rest in England. We disentomb these records with curious feelings.

One humorous fellow writes at this time: "We made our way back from the Falls, and as usual found there was nothing to eat, except a roast fowl, some pickled pork, hot scones, chops, steaks, ham and eggs and such like, with hot coffee, hot milk, hot tea and fresh butter, &c., &c., and Keppel expects people to be satisfied with that sort of thing." Another, referring to the Steavenson cascade, breaks in with a punning quotation: "Oh, what a Fall was there, my countryman!"

Later on, in 1879, I find the testimonies of other notabilities having assisted to make the ground classic. Professor M<sup>c</sup>Coy carried his scientific eyes there; Charles Pridham rested from his legal subtleties, Alfred Deakin dreamed perhaps of being a Federal Prime Minister, and after waiting a quarter of a century found his dream true. I look further, and find the late James Grotty making the boast that he had walked to Marysville from Melbourne in three days, along with his chum, Mr. R. J. Moore. Then we have the interesting announcement in their own hand writing that Sir James M<sup>c</sup>Culloch was there in a happy party with Professor Rentoul. In 1881, Henry Gyles Turner put in his claim, with the late Alexander Sutherland, and the entries show the rollicking spirit of enjoyment among them. The first of these blossomed into verse of an atrocious description, of which one stanza may stand for the rest—

Then up spoke Alec. Sutherland,  
That well-known classic don,  
And said, "There is no other land  
I've so longed to look upon."

This is followed by Sutherland giving an "Ode to His Boots," whose soles had departed, to which he added the following summary of his enjoyments:

Good spirits, good air,  
Good beds, all good fare—  
What more can want for a trip?  
A Falls and a "Bend,"  
And a mount to ascend.

And a bath at your door for a dip.

The description answers to-day as well as it did 24 years ago, when it was written. You were a jovial spirit, Alec! Request in pace.

Of course the late H. H. Hayter, having gone there to escape from his statistics, burst into poetry along with the rest. This was in 1884. Needless to say, his fancy for figures did not assist his figures of fancy. Poor Hingston was there the same year, and he declares the falls to be the finest he had seen in a world-wide travel. It is singular to note the numbers of people who fancied they could write poetry after having seen the Marysville lions. Here are a couple of perhaps not the most criminal attempts to scandalise the Muses: —

Go to all places where you will,

There's none so nice as Marysville.

And

Attune my voice and brace my nerves,

Whilst I break forth in rhythmic verse.

I won't prolong it. Human nature couldn't stand more. But if you have ever gone to what you considered an out of the way place and suddenly dropped upon a record such as I did, where the names of old friends and acquaintances came back afar from the grave and seemed to speak to you in the solitude, you will know what I felt as I conned Mr. Keppel's Book of Early Records.

#### Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Keppel Died 1902 and Mrs Mary Keppel was 72 in 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs Keppel had been in Marysville for 39 years.

<sup>3</sup> Renamed Mt Kitchener during WWI

<sup>4</sup> John Steavenson was Ass Com of Roads & Bridges at the time the Falls were named.