

Gold! Free to All Men

Romance of N.S.W. Rushes

STORIES OF LEGISLATORS, JOURNALISTS, AND OTHERS.

(By G.C.J. in the "Daily Telegraph.")

Seventy-two years ago, Messrs Tom and Lister found gold at the Ophir,—or, say, at the junction of Summerhill and Lewis Ponds Creeks—and Edward Hammond Hargreaves came along with his cradle and knowledge acquired in California, and showed them how to wash the golden drift. Since then millions of ounces of gold have been won in Australia—all the States contributing, more or less; and to-day, probably, there are still millions of ounces hidden from the eye of man, but to be unearthed in the future.

"Gold in Australia! free to all men." A repetition of the rush to California in 1848-49 set in, and all sorts and conditions of men assembled on the several favored spots to try their luck in the new enterprise of gold-digging. Such is the lure of gold!

These adventurers from other lands met on common ground; sank their differences in race, creed, and social status, and became—for the time being, at any rate—cosmopolitan. Thus, it can be understood that the population of the gold-fields was distinctively superior to working populations elsewhere. Of course, they were not all saints; nor were they all sinners; while, in point of intelligence, they ranked higher than the general run of hand-workers. One met college men clad in moleskins, working with pick and shovel alongside navvies, coal-miners, sailormen, and others—all intent upon raking in the "root of all evil" in the quickest time possible.

GOLD EASILY GOT.

Many were content with a few hundred pounds' worth—just enough to set them up in a small business or purchase of a house to live in—and as gold was easily got, either on the surface or by digging a few feet,

surface or by digging a few feet, their wants were easily satisfied; they cleared out, and thus left a clear field for those who had more stamina and some knowledge of geology and minerals. Hence, the better-developed fields of the 'sixties, when men sank to greater depths, and with better appliances, worked river-beds and quartz reefs. Curious that the most prolific years of gold-mining were 1851, 1861, 1871, and in these years were worked the Ophir, Turon, Louisa Creek, Tambaroora, Meroo, Burrandong, and Tuena; then the Snowy River, Tumut, Adelong, the Lachlan, Lambing Flat, Native-Dog Creek, Emu Creek (Weddin Mountains, now Grenfell), Trunkey, Mitchell's Creek, and smaller fields. Then came Gulgong and Hill End—both famous as gold producers, one alluvial, the other quartz—and Curragong (Parkes). Many smaller fields were worked during these years—and others later, as Temora and Wyalong; but of these I had no personal knowledge or experience. Neither had I of the early fifties, though I have re-worked much of the ground abandoned by the first prospectors, and have met and conversed with many "Fifty-oners." I first handled pick and shovel and dug for gold in 1858, and my alma mater, I may say, was Sofala, Turon River. To many of us who followed the rushes old Sofala was home, and to her we returned, richer or poorer (generally the latter), either to pick up a bit, here and there, or, having the means, to take up leases of river bed or on point or flat.

RUSH TO QUEENSLAND.

In 1858 occurred the big rush to Canoona, on the Fitzroy River, and my mate and I, having "made a bit" (quite unexpectedly, too) on Golden Point, must needs shoulder our swags and "pad the hoof" along the Great Western Road to Sydney, there to take ship for the new Eldorado. We were too late, as were hundreds—I might even say thousands—of others, who went north, full of hope and well equipped, returned empty-handed, and disgusted with digging life. Yet the gold was there—lots of it! Did we not see it exposed in jewellers' shop

windows—lumps of black-looking stuff, which often drew forth the remark from onlookers, "Why, that ain't gold, it's only bronze!" True, it was black, lying (as it had done) on the surface for ages, and only partially covered with black soil and grass. A few shrewd, long-headed men who had had some mining experience, stayed behind, and did well. It was these men who traced the gold to the Mary River (which later on led to Gympie), and thus laid the foundation of Queensland's prosperity.

But it was a heart-rending sight to see the crowds of returned men meeting their wives and children at Circular Quay, or on the wharves. They went away full—having sold their farms, their little businesses, their

homes—everything they had, to provide tools, tents, rations—for they were going, as they believed, to a wild, inhospitable country, whence nothing but gold could be obtained. Lucky was he who had a pound or two in his pocket to help him along the road to some old diggings! They who had nothing were assisted by the Government in the shape of ration tickets negotiable at stated stores along the Great Southern Road, which could enable them to reach Araluen, then in its heyday. But the valley was overruled, and the only chance these poor fellows had was wages in the big claims—and only three days a week, just enough to pay for their board at the public-house, whose proprietors were almost invariably shareholders in the claims.

ON THE SNOWY RIVER.

Those who had a little money tried the old, partially-worked-out diggings around Braidwood, at the Little River, Major's Creek, Jemacumbene, and the Shoalhaven. Others, again being better provided, tried Adelong and the Tumut, and some even crossed the border and tramped to the Owens

the Tumut, and some even crossed the border and tramped to the Ovens, where they were almost sure of wages. Not a few, however, returned to their old mother field, the Turon, and there fossicked in old ground or sank on new. Then, again, came the cry, "Rush oh!" "Where away!" "The Snowy River!" was the reply. And away they went—stories of frost and snows, and flooded creeks, where the nuggets were found, affecting them nothing. The lure of gold was the same, as when the locality was in the tropics—and sluicing in the icy-cold waters of the Snowy River was no joke! But the nuggets were there!

Among the prominent men at the newly-formed township (Kiandra) were a banker and a newspaper man. The former, a little man, with a refined face, signed his name "T. A. Dibbs"; the other was Charles Coper, son of the then Premier, and he set up his paper, "The Alpine Courier," next door—though I think the building was one of stringy bark. The banker, known to us of late years as Sir Thomas Dibbs, died the other day, full of honor and years. "Young Charlie"—as the newspaper man was called by the diggers—was elected in 1860 as member for Tumut; and in later years became sheriff of the colony, which office he held for many years.

Following closely upon the Snowy, came the big rush to the Lachlan. The new field was very different from the Snowy.

"What! Gold in a place like this? Black soil flats are good for squatters, but not for diggers."

The old-fashioned digger believed in mountain ridges, deep, rocky gullies, and shallow flats and points; but to sink for gold in such country as the Lachlan seemed outrageous. But the gold was there all right—tons of it; though one had to sink deep through sand and drift and water before the precious stuff could be handled. Then a new feature was presented to the old-style digger—the ground being over one hundred feet in depth, the leads were declared on the "frontage system," and, coming from Victoria, the old Turon men did not like it. But it proved good; it saved unnecessary labor; and in 1870 Gulgong leads were worked on the

Gulgong leads were worked on the same principle.

GOLD FIELDS ELECTORATES.

In 1860 the goldfields north, west, and south were proclaimed separate electorates, one member each, and diggers taking an interest in politics got busy, and different to now, there was no dictation from political associations in Sydney or elsewhere, as to the candidates to be chosen. The diggers were quite competent to make their own selection. Thus, the man selected by the Turon miners was Robert Wisdom, who was then sub-commissioner at Burrandong. Only a few knew him, however. One man who never did said:—

"There's a man out at Burrandong that will suit us to a T. I knew him in Sydney; he's a Hunter River man, six feet three or four inches high, and a real good fellow. Let's ride out, some of us, and ask him."

Accordingly, three diggers rode out to Burrandong (where the big nugget was found in '58), and asked "Bob" Wisdom to stand for the Goldfields West. He laughed and said, "I am willing enough, but I am a poor man. This job is only temporary, and I have nothing but my son to depend upon (he was writing occasionally for the 'Empire'). So, if you can run me in without cost to myself, I's your man."

That settled. The next thing was to select a good man for East Mac-

quarie, in which electorate the Turon, and other western fields were situate. William Henry Suttor sr., who had represented Bathurst and East Macquarie since 1856, had resigned only the year before—he being very much opposed to John Robertson's "Free Selection" Bill; and now W. Cummings (generally designated "Billy") was in the field for

nated "Billy") was in the field for re-election; also on the free selection ticket—though he had voted against it in the previous Parliament; and the diggers had decided to vote against him. Charles Whalan and M'Phillamy were also in the field, but the Turon diggers, at any rate, did not want either of them. What, then, was to be done? There being no opposition to Wisdom, miners who were on the East Macquarie roll, were thus at liberty to vote for the country; while those who were not on the roll could vote only for the goldfields—and that by virtue of their miner's right—which, practically, was also their elector's right. The upshot was that a big deputation of miners rode out to Brucedale and asked Mr. Suttor to stand for East Macquarie. He received them courteously, but seemed surprised at their request.

"MAN TO BE TRUSTED."

"Why do you ask me? You know I am opposed to free selection, and resigned my seat on that account. Yet you diggers—who, I understand, are in favor of the new idea—ask me, an old conservative, to represent you in Parliament. Why do you do it?"

"Because, sir, we know you to be a gentleman—a man to be trusted," someone said.

It was explained to him about Mr. Wisdom being selected, and was not opposed; consequently their votes would go to him (Mr. Suttor).

"Well, well! I'll see my wife, and abide by her decision. Meanwhile, be seated, and I will send in refreshments."

He returned, after consulting Mrs. Suttor, smilingly thanked the deputation for their good opinion of him, and added, "My wife thinks it my duty to represent such an intelligent body of men."

William Henry Suttor was elected at the top of the poll, Cummings being second (there were two to be elected). In later years W. H. Suttor jr. represented East Macquarie, and his brother, Francis Bathurst, the electorate of that name. Mr. Wisdom, later on, represented the Lower Hunter, Morpeth and the Goldfields, north; was also Attorney-General

from 1879 to 1883, and Chairman of Committees from 1862 to 1864. He was also knighted.

The first member for the Goldfields North was James Hoskins ("Jimmy" we called him). The others were James Buchanan, G. F. Pickering ("Rowley"), R. H. M. Foster, James Rodd, and Henry Copeland, and I knew them all—Hoskins and

Copeland intimately—the latter having also sat for New England, Armidale, Newtown, East Sydney and Sydney-Phillip. He was an old Grenfell miner. Hoskins also sat for Patrick's Plains and The Tumut; but there was an interlude when he was superintendent of southern roads with a residence at Picton, and there I spent many an evening with him (we lodged at the same place), talking about our digging days. Mr. Hoskins was a Londoner, and was educated at the Merchant Taylors' School. For the south, Fred. A. Cooper sat as member for Braidwood in 1869. I worked with his elder brother (Alick) in a reef on Wattle Flat. For the southern goldfields James Rodd, John Bowie Wilson, and Ezekiel Baker sat, one after the other, and for the west, following Wisdom, there were S. A. Donnelly, George Thornton, Walter Church, David Buchanan, and Louis Hugo Beyers (Holterman's mate at Hill End).

FOUR MINISTERS.

Of these goldfields members four held portfolios in various Ministries. Wilson, Wisdom, Hoskins, Baker, the first with Martin and Parke, 1863, 1868, 1872; Wisdom, Attorney-General, 1879 to 1883 (Parke's Ministry); Hoskins in two Parke's, and Parke-Robertson's; Bowie Wilson, Secretary for Lands, 1863, 1866, 1870; and Baker, Secretary for Mines, 1878, 1881. Copeland was not a goldfields member, but held office in 1882-8 as Secretary for Works, and in 1886-1887 again as Secretary for Works, and for Lands, 1891-1894. My old friend, Frank Wright (Francis Augustus), member for Redfern, was Postmaster-General in 1889, Secretary for Works same year, and Minister for Mines in 1885. Frank was a busy man in those days, during the

a busy man in those days, during the despatch of the Soudan contingent, G. R. Dibbs being Premier.

I first met Frank Wight in Sydney in 1858, during the Fitzroy rush, and later on the Turon, where we became fast friends, and again in Sydney, when he set up as a carrier's agent—all alone, too—with very little money and no office. To tell the story of the beginning of Wright, Heaton and Co. would interest many, but I do

not intend to tell it here, except to say that Frank's brother-in-law, Dave M'Neil, was his first partner, and that Valentine Heaton (who was really the business head of the firm) came in later on. Frank entered Parliament as member for Redfern, of which he was Mayor for some time. He was also a major in the Second Regiment of N.S.W. Infantry, and in whatever capacity or station of life Francis Augustus Wright was a real good fellow, and white to the core. Other digging friends who entered Parliament were James Torpy and Henry Newman, and both represented Orange. I knew Torpy on the Turon, when he was working a river claim above Sofala—along by Erskine Flat—his mates being Fred. Wild, John Hyde, Edward Harding (of the Globe Hotel), and some others. When the rush to Lambing Flat took place, Torpy went there and secured a claim, returning to the Turon later on, when the river claim was sold for some thousands of pounds to the Chinese. Torpy was the head and front of the Miners' Protective League, and was considered one of the leaders in the much magnified "riot," though really he was not a leader, albeit in sympathy with the movement. Anyway, he and his friend, Greff, the storekeeper, being in Sydney on business, were arrested and held in confinement for three days, when they were released by order of the Premier (Mr. Cowper).

A PLUCKY LONDONER.

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When the police (mounted and foot) fled helter-skelter from Lambing Flat, leaving the rising town defenceless, Torpy practically became the head of a vigilance company to preserve order. One Government man, however, stuck to his post—a little Londoner named Scarlett. He was a detective in the police force, and trusted the miners. Torpy addressed the miners, advising them to refrain from violence of any kind. Standing alongside Scarlett, he said: "This man is the sole representative of the Government, and we are bound to protect him in the performance of his duties. There must be no rioting or window-smashing (the storekeepers had put up their shutters and closed the doors). Now go to your tents quietly, and behave like men." The miners gave both him and Scarlett a cheer, and dispersed.

The actual leaders in the alleged "riot" were Spicer, Cameron and Stewart. Spicer was arrested and convicted and served six months' of his two years at Berrima, when he was released by order of the Governor, Sir John Young. Rewards of £100 were offered for the arrest of Cameron and Stewart, and both surrendered—the latter while on the Turon. There was some funny business transacted in connection with Stewart's surrender, which, however, need not be mentioned here. Others besides Spicer were convicted and served their time. I knew one, Clemene Owen, and met him later on at Mitchell's Creek. After leaving Lambing Flat (Young) Torpy went to Orange, and there started a newspaper, the "Western Advocate," which is still published by sons of its founder.