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Chapter 1 : Full text of "Tales of the Colonies, Or, The Adventures of an Emigrant"

*Tales of the Colonies, Or, The Adventures of an Emigrant. In Three Volumes, Vol. II [Charles Rowcroft] on calendrierdelascience.com *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. Leopold is delighted to publish this classic book as part of our extensive Classic Library collection.*

THE increasing difficulty of maintaining a family in England, in which the competition for mere subsistence has become so keen; and the still greater difficulty of providing for children when their maturer years render it imperative on the parent to seek for some profession or calling on which they may rely for their future support, has excited among all classes a strong attention towards the colonies of Great Britain, where fertile and unclaimed lands, almost boundless in extent, await only the labour of man to produce all that man requires. It seems, indeed, that there must be some strange neglect or ignorance on the part of VOL. But it is not only on the class dependent on manual labour for subsistence that the difficulty of providing for a family presses. In this respect, all the grades of the middling classes are alike uneasy. Those with some capital, as well as those with none, are suffering under the constant anxiety of providing for their children with a regard to their condition in life, their education, and their habits, in a country in which every day the difficulty of finding suitable occupation increases. In this search, the parent feels that it would be as painful for his children, who have been brought up in a certain condition, to descend from that rank, and trust to their hands instead of their heads for support, as for the more hardy and less sensitive sons of labour to bear the extreme state of destitution and precarious subsistence to which their condition, in the old country, now subjects them. This drives the educated classes to seek in the more genteel professions the power of maintaining their position in society, and of obtaining, by the higher remuneration of mental over mechanical employments, the means to minister to their more refined pursuits and pleasures. For education and refinement bring with them their own embarrassments. The animal man can no more go back, suddenly, than any other animal, from the civilized to the natural state, without pain and privation. Education refines and improves the body and the mind of man; but in changing him from the natural to the artificial state, it adds to his wants, and renders the satisfying of them more costly and more difficult. Every day, however, renders the attempt to compete in the occupations of intellect more hazardous; all, comparatively, being educated, and all being incited to push themselves forward into the educated professions, it would seem that the time is fast approaching when there will be as many barristers, physicians, solicitors, surgeons, and apothecaries, b 2 as of unprofessional people to practice on. This patient nation is law-ridden enough already; and at every corner of the street stands a surgeon with knife in hand, ready to amputate you if living, or to dissect you if dead; while innumerable apothecaries and druggists, from every new shop-window, thrust forward their obtrusive physic. Even the business of the undertaker is over-done; while the nails of their coffins, attractively resplendent to entice the passer-by to take possession of them, shine uselessly in the window, their owners complain of the want of trade, and eye the living customer suspiciously and complainingly as he passes by, as if he was committing a personal grievance on them by being still alive. What, then, is to become of the masses of educated persons, striving, pushing, and jostling each other on the road of life? They cannot become day-labourers; they cannot go up--the passages are blocked up; they cannot go down--that their pride and their habits forbid. To remain as they are is to starve. What then is to be done? Fortunately, in the colonies there is room for all, of all grades and classes, and opportunities for all. In this country, to labour in the field is to the educated person a degradation, because the field belongs to another man, and that man is his master; and the condition of an agricultural labourer, from its obvious poverty, in a country where the greatest of crimes is to be poor, is a state of flagrant criminality which the union workhouses have specially been erected to coerce and punish. But in the colonies, in a new world, and in a new life, a man may till his own land, and work in his own fields with his own hands, and neither feel it to be a degradation in his own eyes, nor in the eyes of those around him. On the contrary, in resuming the occupations of the patriarchs of old, he may be said to recover the natural dignity of man. The very solitude of

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the wilderness, the boundless space, the unbroken silence, the solemn repose of Nature seem to bring him in nearer contact with the great Creator. In his new state, his mind, so lately bowed down by care and anxiety, recovers its natural independence. He stands on his own land, the source of certain subsistence, and of almost certain wealth, for himself and for his children. He is not driven to obsequious fawning on the rich or great for countenance or patronage. He has to pray to no man "to give him leave to toil. His family, instead of being a burthen, and the subject of unceasing and fearful anxiety, is a comfort, a solace, and a help to him. Each child soon becomes an illustration of the principle, that naturally every human being has the power of creating more than he has a necessity for consuming. It is with the view of describing the process of settling in a new country; of the precautions to be taken; of the foresight to be exercised; of the early difficulties to be overcome; and of the sure reward which awaits the prudent and industrious colonist, that the editor has collected the following tales; and he may add, that he can testify to the accuracy of the descriptions which they contain from his personal experience as a resident magistrate in the colony. He sets out for the Clyde, tries to make a short cut, and misses his way--He is lost in the Bush. Awkward Predicament--The Bushranger declares himself--Unexpected appeal. Crab indulges in some peculiar Observations on the occasion--Red Ribands produce curious emotions in others besides mad Bulls. The effect of the Convict System on the development of the Resources of the Colony--Management of the Convicts--Complaint of a Master, before a Magistrate, against his assigned Servant. Complaint of an assigned Servant against his Master--The Servant has redress against the ill-treatment of his Master in the same way as the Master against the ill-conduct of his Servant. The Working of the Transportation System. Complaint of a Convict against his Fellow-Servant. Who is the Murderer and the Victim? I DO not pretend to be philosopher enough to analyse deeply the reasons which induce me, after a long and active life, passed for the most part in laborious but pleasurable occupations, to lay down the axe for the pen, and to write an account of my life in this country. Perhaps it is that my family being grown up, and gently pushing, as the young do, the aged from their stools, by supplying my place in overseeing my farm, the leisure that has come over me prompts me to employ my mind, which from habit is disinclined to inaction, in recalling past scenes and old recollections. Or it may be that, at sixty-two years, the garrulousness of old age inclines me to indulge on paper in the talk which every one around me seems too busy to attend to orally. I would fain hope that I am actuated by a better reason than any such as these: Whether these accounts may ever appear in print I do not know, although I will confess that it is not without a secret inclination that they may, in some shape, find their way to the perusal of the public, that I now proceed to arrange them. I am glad of it now, as I find that the looking back on what I have gone through is useful to me, and makes me the more thankful for what I have got now, and the reading of it will, I think, be of advantage to those who come after me; so I will first describe how it was that I came to emigrate, and then I shall copy all my bits and scraps of journals fairly out, that those who may think that some profit is to be got from them may easily read them. It was in the beginning of the year that I was first in difficulties in England; that was just after the close of the long war. There was great distress in the country; all seemed to go wrong. So many lost employment from the change of war to peace, that many were starving, and there was great confusion and riots. If I recollect right, it was the year when the "Blanketeers" came from the north to present a petition to the king. I had carried on, for many years, a pretty good business at Croydon, in the corn trade. I did something with coals too, the canal being handy; by the bye, that gave me the idea when I went abroad of the advantage of water-carriage, and I never refused any sort of small trading that seemed likely to turn to profit. I remember, as if it was yesterday, that one morning, when I went to the corn-market, I found a cluster of farmers and others standing round a neighbour of mine, reading a letter; it was from a son of his--a wild sort of chap--who had gone out as mate of a vessel to Sydney, or Botany Bay, as it was called then. By the bye, Botany Bay and Sydney are quite different places; Botany Bay lies round to the east of Sydney, and there is no town at all there; Sir Joseph Banks named it Botany Bay from the number of new plants which he found there, but the town of Sydney was fixed lower down, at a better spot. Well, the reading of this letter caused a good deal of amusement, speaking of the kangaroos, and the natives, and the bushrangers; but what surprised us

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most was to hear how easily the young fellow had turned farmer; for farming was not at all in his line, as he had scarcely looked into a farm in his life when he was in England. The accounts contained in this letter, of the beauty of the country, of the fertility of the soil, and of the largeness of the crops, made a great impression on me, and gave rise to vague ideas and designs, which dwelt in my mind, and set me about making further inquiries. However, I said nothing about it at home at this time, waiting till I had acquired more information, but went on with my business as usual: My wife was sitting alone in the parlour, and I said to her for I ought to have said before that I had been married eleven years, and had five children, "Mary," said I, "things are going on very badly. Shall we try a farm? We must make up our minds to a great effort, and since there are too many struggling with one another in England, we must go where the people are few and the land is plenty. But I have thought of the matter a good deal, and the more I think of it, the more convinced I am that it would be better for us to take care of what we have left, and turn it to account in a new country. If there was only you and me, we could make a shift, perhaps, to rub on; but when I consider our children who are growing up, and how to provide for them comfortably I know no more than the dead, I do feel that to be sure of house and home, and bread to eat, and clothes to wear, would be better for them than to be exposed to all the chances of uncertain trading or farming in this country. My own eyes were not dry; but I felt that in these cases almost all depends on the firmness of the head of the family, and that if he gives way, all gives way soon after. I soothed her with all the kindness of an affection as true and as deep as ever man had for woman; I explained to her exactly our condition and all our circumstances, and after a long consultation, her good sense coming to her aid, and, most of all, her strong affection for her children mastering all other considerations, she fell in with my views, and it was agreed, that as we had made up our minds to this decisive step, the sooner we carried it into effect the better. I have been the more particular in narrating this conversation, because it made, as may easily be supposed, a great impression on me as it related to one of the most important acts of my life; and from the circumstance also, that from that hour my dear wife never made a single complaint, nor uttered a murmur at all the inconveniences and occasional hardships which she was put to, as well during the voyage as during the first years of our settling in the colony. She was a little frightened at first at all there was before her to do; but she found that the labours and difficulties which, viewed in the mass, seemed almost insurmountable, were easily overcome as they were encountered singly; and, as she said at the time, with her cheerful smile, "that if we waited until we had provided against all possible and impossible contingencies, we never should undertake the expedition at all; that what others had done, we, with prudence and care, and energy, might do also; and that, putting to the work all the zeal and industry that we could bring to it, we must leave the rest to that Providence which never deserts the willing heart and the humble mind. I shall not give a long account of our voyage by sea, of the sharks that we saw, and of the flying-fish that we broiled, because all those things have been described over and over again. All sea-voyages are much alike; there must be some discomfort on board of a vessel, where you cannot have much room to yourself, and the passage to New South Wales is, I dare say, often a very tedious affair; but this I will say, that every thing is made better by good temper, and by a cheerful and contented mind. But, before I begin our voyage, it will be well to state what our circumstances were on leaving England and what we took out with us. It ought to be observed, too, that my wife had been well educated, and had always lived in a lady-like way; and although she had always been an industrious housewife, she had never had any practice in the hard work which, for the first year or two, falls on the settler in a new colony. As to the bulk of our furniture, we sold it all, as I was told that it would be several years before we could have a suitable place to put it in, and that I should find the money more useful; that I must rough it for some time, and think of nothing but STOCK: This advice was very good, as I afterwards found, and I was as happy, for many months, sitting on the stump of a tree, with my wife opposite me on another, as if we had reclined on the softest sofas in London. But there was not much time for reclining, as will be seen when I come to my journal. I took care to carry with us all the usual tools imperatively wanted on first settling, such as saws, axes, chisels, augurs, etc. I shall not further particularise here the list of articles proper for a settler to take out with him, because all those particulars will be found detailed at full length in

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two letters, one from me and one from my wife, to friends in England, advising them as to what they should bring out with them, and copies of which I find noted in my journal. They are too long to insert here, but they will be found in their proper place. I will only say here, that it is better to have too many tools than too few; for, to want a tool in the bush, a saw or an axe, is an inconvenience that often stops important work. I was wrong in the sort of nails that I took out; they were good enough for the soft deals and other woods usual in England, but too weak for the hard woods of New South Wales. I took out two pair of cart-wheels, with their boxes and axles complete. These were very useful, but they make them in the colony now as good, and nearly as cheap as they can be imported; and the colonial wood, when well seasoned, stands the summer heat better. But I see I am forestalling my journal. Now to our voyage, which I shall make short enough. We set sail from Gravesend on the 7th September, We touched at the Cape of Good Hope; but I shall not stop to describe a place that has been so often described before. I want to hasten the way to the colony. After a passage of about five months, we arrived at Hobart Town on the 3rd February, The new ideas which the words "north" and "south" conveyed in those parts confused me at first; for, contrary to the impression which they convey in Europe, the north wind on the opposite side of the globe is the warm one, and the south the cold one. The aspect of the new country was not encouraging, and I felt a little damped at first. All the country up the river, from Storm Bay Passage to Hobart Town, had a mournful, desolate appearance. The trees had a sombre look, and the grass was a dirty brown, excepting here and there a green patch, where I was told it had been recently burnt. It looked like the close of autumn instead of the middle of summer, which it was, we arriving, as I said before, on the 3rd February, and the months of winter and summer being reversed here in this topsy-turvy place. A brown and dusky autumnal tint seemed to pervade all nature, and the place had a quiet, sleepy appearance, as if every thing had been standing still and was waiting for settlers to come and improve it. Mount Wellington, as the large high mountain, about four thousand feet high, is called, at the back of the town to the left as you go up the river, had a little cap of snow on its summit, which I have observed in summer several times since, but it seldom remains more than a few hours at that season of the year. The town had a straggling, irregular appearance; a pretty good house here and there, and the intervening spaces either unbuilt on or occupied by mean little dwellings, little better than rude huts. It is to be borne in mind that I am speaking of Hobart Town as it was twenty-two years ago; since then, great changes have taken place, as will be found noted from time to time in my journal. At that time every one had a kangaroo-dog who could contrive to keep one, and what with these and others, first one set up a growl, and then another caught it up, and he was of course answered from another part of the town, so that presently hundreds of dogs, watch-dogs, kangaroo dogs, and mongrels of all sorts and sizes, all would set up such a barking and tearing, that we thought to be sure something dreadful must be the matter; that the convicts had risen, or the natives had fired the town. We wished that all the dogs had their tails stuffed down their throats to stop their noise. But we soon got used to this, like the apprentice that was lost, and found asleep in the copper that the workmen were hammering at outside; and afterwards we found the value of the faithful and intelligent kangaroo dogs in the wild bush, for their vigilance saved us all from being murdered by the natives, or perhaps burned to death, as I shall have to relate in its proper place. Well, I did not care, at this time, for the statistics, as the term is, of the town or the colony; I was too much taken up with my own statistics, and with arranging to settle ourselves on our land and get out of the town, for we soon found that our money would melt away very fast if we stayed there, and no return for it, every thing being so dear. Butter, for several years after, was from 5s. I was puzzled to understand how it was that there was not plenty of milk and butter in an agricultural country; but I soon found out that there was a reason for every thing. To get milk from the wild cows, in a country without fences, you had to catch them first.

Chapter 2 : Tales of the Colonies

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