

SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

QUARTERLY REPORT ON NORTHERN TERRITORY.

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Government Resident's Office, January 1st, 1885.

Sir—I have the honor to submit to you my report on the affairs of the Northern Territory for the quarter ending December 31st, 1884.

PASTORAL OCCUPATION.

There can be no doubt that at the present time this, the first established, is the one really progressive interest in the Northern Territory. From causes which are of course well known the development of our waste lands, as of those of our neighbor Western Australia, is proceeding at a very rapid rate. The intelligence from the eastern routes is of large mobs of cattle for the country from Limmen's Bight to the Victoria River. All holders of good country are stocking up to obtain their leases, and lessees are pushing on the development of their runs in order to secure as early as possible a return for their outlay. The fact which very distinctly fronts those who intend to breed extensively on the northern coast of Australia is the necessity of finding a market for their fat stock. It is to be presumed that ultimately large freezing works will be erected, and shipments of carcasses will be made to Europe. But before that is done, the markets of the East will afford an outlet for a large number of live cattle. It is satisfactory to report that, even at this early stage, three markets are being tested. Messrs. Fisher & Lyons have during the past few weeks dispatched a trial shipment of mixed cattle from their Marrakai and Daly Stations to each of the following ports:—Hongkong, Sourabaya or Batavia, and Singapore. I had the pleasure, at the invitation of Mr. Stevens, to see the two lots for Java and Singapore after they had been shipped on board the *Catterthun*; and was much gratified to hear, from all those who were entitled to judge of the quality and condition of the stock, that they were as prime beasts as they looked. This enterprising firm have leased a frontage on the further side of Stokes' Hill, and erected a yard and a jetty at considerable outlay in order to get the cattle on board a lighter, to take them alongside the ocean-going steamers. When the railway jetty is erected, these tentative, tedious, and also expensive expedients will be unnecessary. Herds can then be driven alongside, or, at certain states of the tide, on board the vessels that are to convey them away. Naturally much interest is felt in the result of this threefold venture, and if successful I shall soon be in a position to report a strong increase to the export values quarter by quarter.

During the past six weeks the runs within the area of rainfall have been visited by splendid showers, filling up the creeks and billabongs, and causing the young grass to spring up most luxuriantly. At present there is a break in the rainfall, but the north-west monsoon will soon set in with its heavy downpour and refreshing airs.

The annual mustering on the Glencoe, Marrakai, Daly, and Victoria runs has just been completed. The results establish conclusively, Mr. Stevens reported to me, that the extensive range of country embraced is as well adapted for breeding as it is for fattening. If the experiment of acclimatizing the fine draught of bulls which Mr. C. B. Fisher shipped from Melbourne had not been so unfortunate, the musters would have been better still, as there has been a lack of bulls. Still, notwithstanding the difficulties which beset pioneer enterprises, the Victoria country shows an increase of 75 per cent., and the Adelaide River country about 40 per cent. The young stock are reported as in fine, vigorous condition. During my up-country trip, the particulars of which I gave in my last report, I had an opportunity of seeing how strong and full of life the calves and yearlings were at the close of the dry season, and they could hardly fail to improve on the succulent young feed which now covers hills and plains alike.

The foaling for the year is also reported as equalling expectations. The stallions, except during the two driest months of the year, are maintained on the native herbage, so that the test may be regarded as a fair one of the capabilities of the country for horse-breeding. Should this prove to be true on an extensive scale, and the stamp of young horse prove right, we may shortly expect to hear of shipments of horses to the Indian market.

The Daly River run, which is reserved for bullocks only, has shown an improvement on the results of former years, which were not held to be as satisfactory as might have been expected. The bulk of the stock depastured there came off some of the best Queensland runs, and the long overland journey and change of climate and pasture in the north coast country injuriously affected them for a time.

On the Victoria River country, the neglect of which for so long a period after Gregory's careful personal examination and report is so difficult to understand, is proving itself of greater value from the testimony of every fresh explorer. I gave in my last report the evidence supplied by Mr. N. Buchanan, and I now furnish further particulars supplied to me by Mr. Lindsay Crawford, the manager of Messrs. Fisher & Lyons's Victoria station.

Mr. Crawford states:—

In July last I left the Victoria River head station for Gregory's depôt, on the river at the head of the navigation, for the purpose of establishing communication with the boats in charge of Mr. Stevens, and to find a suitable road for carting the stores inland. After crossing the Wickham River about seventeen miles N. of the station, which is situated on the S.W. branch of the Victoria, crossed a plain extending five miles, well grassed; then got into limestone ridges with scrub on them. At twelve miles N.N.W.

I must not omit to add that the intelligence which was received, that it was the intention of the Government, at the beginning of next session, to seek to obtain powers to construct the whole transcontinental line, gave the liveliest gratification to this community, and has given great confidence to all pastoral tenants of the Crown along the line of the telegraph. In fact, it appears to me that now railway construction has been sanctioned on the north coast, there can be no valid reason for delaying the connection with the south. Every square mile of pastoral country will be increased in value by it. The seventy or eighty thousand (80,000) square miles of country which have been forfeited, when offered at auction, will fetch such an added price in consequence of the construction of the railway being taken out of the realm of probability into the realm of fact that it alone is a consideration of great monetary value. It will certainly give to the whole north coast of Australia, and to Palmerston in particular, an importance it is difficult even for the most sanguine to over-estimate.

Should the proposals of the Government meet with the approval of Parliament, then during the next ten years at least four millions of public money will pass through this port either in direct wages for labor due or in handling the permanent way and other goods that may be imported. So far as the rolling-stock is concerned, it is certain that passenger carriages and trucks can be made more cheaply here than either in Adelaide or England, and I presume, as the Northern Territory will have to pay the interest on the money borrowed, all the labor that can be employed, even on equal lines, will be employed in the Northern Territory itself.

ABORIGINALS AND SETTLEMENT.

I fear unquiet times may be expected in connection with the native tribes. The blacks are beginning to realise that the white man, with his herds, and his fences, and his preservation of water, is interfering with what they properly enough, from their point of view, regard as their natural rights. Their hunting grounds and game preserves are being disturbed, and their food supply both diminished and rendered uncertain. They can no longer, as they could a few years ago, travel from one lagoon or billabong to another, and be certain that on arrival there would be flocks of wild fowl to be snared. Nor can they, as of old, when they desired a repast of snakes, iguanas, or other reptiles, set fire to the first piece of well-grassed country they encounter. The stockholder uses the billabong for his cattle, and wild fowl are scared away; he wants the grass for his cattle and very vigorously lets the blackfellows understand that it is at their peril they put the firestick to it. Naturally out of these conditions conflict arises and will continue. The natives will resist the intrusion of the whites and regard themselves as robbed of their inheritance; they will set the grass alight when they are so minded, and, if hungry or by way of reprisal, they will spear cattle when they think they are out of the range of the rifle. How to deal equitably with these aboriginals—how, while facilitating the settlement and stocking of the country by Europeans, at the same time to atone for what is an undoubted loss of food supply in consequence to the natives, is a problem much easier to state than to solve. That settlement and stocking must and will go on is certain—that outrages will be committed by both sides is probable; but even those who do not claim to be philanthropists are not satisfied with the contemplation that the blacks are to be improved off the face of the earth.

It appears to me that reserves but imperfectly meet the case—though large reserves ought, I think, to be proclaimed—because the native life is essentially nomadic, and because the imperious demands of hunger take him where the water-lily roots, yams, and game are to be found. Serious and unhappy conflicts can only be avoided by a strong sense of justice and consideration for the natives on the part of the Europeans, and probably not even then.

This subject has been forced upon public attention by the recent outrages on the Daly River and at Argument Flat. It is still more deeply impressed upon me by the intelligence which reaches me from station managers and drovers. At the Katherine, Eusey, and Newcastle Waters, difficulties have arisen in connection with the blacks and cattle. Mr. Lindsay Crawford states that on the Victoria the blacks are daring and defiant; Mr. Creaghe states that at the Limmen River they are spearing his cattle, and that he must take measures to prevent recurrence; Mr. Hay states much the same condition of things as existing on the Roper, where one or two of the natives have firearms.

The arrival of the force of black trackers will give us a very valuable adjunct to the police force in bringing offenders to justice, but no number of trackers or of police that could be organised can prevent outrages over the immense area of country which is now being stocked.

At present I can but state the difficulty, and do the best as circumstances arise.

No doubt, so far as the Daly natives are concerned, the conviction of four of their number after trial, and their execution near to the scene where the murders were committed, will have a wholesome deterrent effect; but beyond the region occupied by the tribes who frequent the river, little or nothing of it will be known.

THE STEAMER "PALMERSTON."

The *Palmerston* has been engaged in survey work at the Victoria and Daly Rivers during the greater portion of the quarter. Captain Carrington's reports on these rivers will be found below. It is certain that the Victoria will be a port of first importance in the near future, and, although the results of Captain Carrington's investigations and observations have not the official *imprimatur* of the Admiralty, they will probably be regarded by mariners as possessing equal authority. I quite agree with the opinions expressed by Captain Carrington of the great future which lies before the Victoria River as a port of import and export.

The carefully-conducted survey of the entrance to the Daly River is opportunely completed in view of the projected working of the copper mine at its head waters, and the survey of the alluvial lands on its banks. The authentic information embodied in the report, and set forth in detail on the chart which is forwarded herewith, cannot fail to enhance the value of every acre of land which will be either sold or leased.

I feel it to be my pleasant duty to mention that Captain Carrington's enthusiasm in his work, which is carried out amidst much exposure and hardship, is unabated; and his painstaking care and attention to duty, irrespective of personal convenience, are deserving of high praise. The fact that he has been sailing the *Palmerston* without accident now for nearly a year in strange waters, entering rivers unnavigated except by small sailing boats, and conducting soundings to discover shoals, rocks, and quicksands, which other vessels are to avoid, is proof enough of his seamanship and care. The reports which I have had the honor to forward are evidences of the interest, intelligence, and capacity he brings to bear upon his work.

I may perhaps be permitted to add, in view of opinions which I have seen publicly expressed, that I am satisfied it would be difficult to obtain a steamer better suited for our work, and certainly that a smaller one
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