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LIFE AND PROGRESS IN AUSTRALASIA

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AUSTRALASIA

BY

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"LEAVES FROM A PRISON DIARY," ETC.

WITH TWO MAPS



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PREFACE

THE following pages are an outcome of a recent seven months' journey through the seven Australasian colonies. The limited time occupied in the tour affirms, of course, the equally limited means afforded for learning enough of these countries to write with authority upon their populations, resources, politics, and progress. Nothing is claimed, however, by the author beyond an opportunity of gratifying a desire to make these distant and intensely interesting lands a little better known to the public of Great Britain and Ireland than they are at present. If this wish does not to some extent palliate the perpetration of a volume of travelling impressions, the writer must only console himself by falling back upon the generous latitude allowed to themselves by this class of offending mortals, in which to inflict their views of people abroad upon the innocents at home.

Considering who the Australians are, it is amazing how small is the fund of general knowledge we possess about the countries they inhabit. This is not a result of distance, or of any indifference as to what may or may not happen at the Antipodes. Nothing of the kind. It only requires a cricket match at Adelaide or a boat race on the Parramatta, in which the fame of some "home" team or sculler is at stake, to excite the keenest competition among newspapers in satisfying the popular

demand for information upon the event in question. Curiosity about the people and countries out there dies away, more or less, after the match is over, or remains dormant until a new gold mine awakens another kind of European desire to know something more concerning the particular region of the discovery. Cricket and gold mines, and not school books or newspapers, are the monitors that have taught the general public of these islands practically all they know about the rising communities in the Southern Pacific.

This is not as it should be. There are innumerable reasons why we ought to cultivate a more intimate knowledge of the countries inhabited by Englishmen, Irishmen, Scotchmen, and Welshmen at the other end of the earth. Be our races, politics, or prejudices what they may, the new States which our respective kinsmen are united in building at the Antipodes should attract a more considerate and more constant attention from all classes, but particularly from working men, than they have hitherto obtained. The need for more sympathetic knowledge and greater intimacy is becoming daily more apparent, and it is in the conviction that this closer touch and freer intercourse will soon be an indispensable part of the thinking and working life of Great Britain and Ireland that this volume makes its appearance.

I try to give, in short sketches of each colony, the information and impressions, gathered on this tour, about the general life, resources, politics, parties, progress, prospects, and scenery of the countries travelled over. The treatment of such an area of topics must necessarily be somewhat kaleidoscopic. Any attempt to deal fully with all that concerns seven such countries would require as many volumes as there are colonies. The

chief purpose of the book, however, is to interest its readers in Australasia and its peoples, and not to write their history.

The Antipodean Colonies possess only a few large cities. These usually monopolise most of the attention of untravelled readers and of many visitors from the old countries. In fact, with people who have not yet journeyed so far, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Wellington, and Coolgardie stand for Australasia. The cities named rightly stand for a great deal that is to the credit of their respective colonies in wealth, progress, and enlightenment; and I try to give my readers a description of them, along with some facts relating to their wonderful growth and prosperity. But I purposely give equal attention to the smaller towns and villages I went through in each colony, so as to point out where rising cities of the future are likely to be found, and to make places never heard of "at home," except by a few, known to a wider circle. It is the country behind the larger cities which has made them what they are. It is to such places, and not to overcrowded centres, that the attention of those who may possibly wish to seek out a new home should be drawn.

The views expressed upon the Coolgardie, Hannans, and other Australian goldfields, are not those of an expert, or of one skilled in the "bulling" or "bearing" of sources of investment. My object in going to these places was one of mere curiosity—to see the life and study some of the characteristics of mining camps. What I have to say, therefore, about the mines visited by me must be discounted in its possible value by my want of trained or technical knowledge of mining generally.

I went to the Murray River Labour Settlements, in South Australia, to see and learn all I could about them—their origin,