

the country round McLellan's residence had been on fire for the last fortnight, but the flames did not approach the station till Thursday last, on which day they spread rapidly. He endeavoured to drive his sheep to the home station, but on his arrival found it on fire. He called on the inmates, but to his great terror there was no answer. He was unable to reach the hut on account of the flames, and in order to preserve his life he left the sheep and ran for the creek, into which he plunged, and remained immersed to the neck the whole of the day. On going to the hut he found McLellan, who informed him of the death by burning of his wife and children. Witness then went to give information of the disaster, and returned with a dray to assist in searching for and removing the bodies, which were found a short distance from the hut, burnt almost to a cinder, and terribly disfigured.

George Pansh, a labouring man, stated that he knew McLellan, and on hearing of the fire at the station, and the death of Mrs. McLellan and her family, he set out for the purpose of rendering what assistance he could. The witness considered, from the position of the hut to the flames, that it would be utterly impossible for any person inside of it to escape the fire and live. On arriving at the scene he found the bush blazing in all directions, while McLellan's hut and outbuildings were reduced to ashes. The six bodies of the deceased were lying at the back of the hut. Witness assisted in putting the bodies in the conveyance which had been brought for them.

The coroner said it would be easy to adduce additional evidence to what had been given, but he would put it to the jury whether more was required when it was known the awful conflagration which had raged throughout that dreadful day.

The jury, without retiring, returned a verdict to the effect that the deceased persons came by their death accidentally, from the extension of a bush-fire to the hut in which the family were residing.

Great, many, and noble were the exertions made by the people of Melbourne to alleviate the sufferings of the colonists. A public meeting was held on Melbourne by all the rich and influential residents of the metropolitan district, when a large sum of money was subscribed, and under the direction of a large committee was distributed amongst the unfortunate individuals who had been left in a state of destitution.

On the Melbourne side of the country it is reckoned that over thirty men, women, and children fell a prey to the fire. Many thousands of sheep and cattle were destroyed, and numbers of farmers, stock-holders, and squatters would have been ruined almost beyond redemption had it not been for the liberality of the banks and the mercantile community in making advances to enable the land to be re-stocked, homesteads rebuilt, and lands fenced in.

The aborigines had, strange to say, predicted some three months before the terrible events of that day what came to pass; and this belief was so strong in them that a week before the fire several tribes made their quambying ground on the tops and sides of bald hills, situated within their tribal territories. It has been stated that the country had been set on fire in various parts at the same time in revenge for the white population driving them off the soil, but although believed in by many, it was generally doubted by those intimately acquainted with the character of the Australian aboriginal.

#### No. XXIII.

#### THE MYSTERY INVOLVING THE EARLIEST GOLD DISCOVERIES.

In a former reminiscence I mentioned that the first discovery of gold in Victoria occurred towards the close of 1851. This was the discovery which produced the first rush to Ballarat, and very shortly afterwards to other parts of the colony; but the existence of gold was known in the Western districts at the close of 1849.

One Charles Brentani, a naturalised Italian, was the owner of a watchmaker's and jeweller's shop in Collins-street, and not only the name, but the face, antics, and peculiarities of this somewhat remarkable man will be remembered by all colonists living in Melbourne between the years 1847 and 1854. Late in the afternoon of a day in January, 1849, as Mr Brentani was sitting at his work repairing a watch, a small-sized, insignificant-looking man, dressed as a shepherd, walked into the shop, and produced a piece of quartz richly studded with gold. The shepherd wanted to sell, and Brentani scarcely believing it was really gold which had been shewn him, declined to purchase until the specimen had been submitted to the usual chemical test. This was allowed, and the ore was shewn to be pure gold. Greatly amazed was Brentani, and many were the questions he asked as to the locality of the

finding. The man replied by saying that he was a shepherd on a sheep run in the Pyrenees country, and that where that lump of quartz and gold came from there was plenty more for the looking up. This rich specimen, be it understood, had been found on the surface of the ground over which the shepherd's flock of sheep had fed

day after day and month after month for nearly two years.

Mr Brentani procured the aid of two artizan jewellers. These were Duchene and Forester, when the quartz specimen was pounded up, and gold extracted by the aid of quicksilver, and a proper assay made, when the result was several ounces of gold of great purity and of a standard equal to twenty-two carats. The shepherd, by name Henry Chapman, was at once greatly cared for. He was fed and clothed by Brentani, who, by repeated questioning, got from the man all that was to be learned.

Excited by dreams of treasure, Brentani planned an expedition on by which in company with Chapman, the locality of the gold-find should be thoroughly searched and prospected. The expedition left Melbourne within a fortnight after the gold had been shewn and offered for sale. The party consisted of five men, who had provided themselves with a dray and a team of bullocks to carry their provisions, bedding, tent, stores, and digging appliances. Then, in a few days Mr Duchene, one of the company, returned to Melbourne. He stated that his mates had purposely given him the slip. This was doubted by those who were in the secret, as Duchene was known to be a good bushman and a smart, wide-awake man. Brentani, who was married, had a shrewd woman for a wife; although it appears she had not been informed for what purpose the expedition had set out, she made a not very bad guess. She became alarmed for her husband's safety, and thereupon accused Duchene with having murdered her husband. And it was to save himself from such a charge that full particulars connected with the expedition were given through the columns of the newspapers. So far, however, from allaying the fears of Mrs Brentani, these particulars merely tended to increase them.

It was just as a warrant was about being applied for the apprehension of Duchene upon a charge of murder, that Brentani and his party put in an unexpected appearance. I recollect well at the time the excitement which was created by the event. The arrival of our greatest Australian explorers, after discovering new country under the greatest of privations and hardships, never caused such an outbreak of feelings as the return of Brentani. The party had not made any very great discoveries, but they had picked up two nuggets which together weighed close upon fifty ounces. Then, when this became known and the specimens shewn in confirmation, a furor of feeling was aroused, such as no words can describe.

But now came an extraordinary part of the affair. When Brentani with his party had returned, Chapman, the shepherd, was not with them; nor, as far as is known, has he been seen from that time to the present. The whole affair was involved in deepest mystery; but it is believed that Chapman, when out in search for gold in the Pyrenees country, had lost his way in the bush, and had perished miserably. I shall, however, have more to say connected with the disappearance of Chapman.

That gold was found where stated is now known to be certain, and it is to Chapman, most undoubtedly, that Victoria is indebted for being the first to discover its vast mineral resources.

It is quite true that rich auriferous specimens had occasionally been picked up on the surface of the ground, as was the case in the early part of 1851, when an aboriginal brought a nugget weighing within a few pounds of a hundredweight, to Dr. Kerr, a resident of Sydney. There can be no reason to doubt but that Chapman had found on the surface the specimen he produced before Brentani, as independent of his want of any experience in gold digging, he had no implements, in the way of pick, or shovel, or cradle with him. Ballarat was the next locality where gold was found in quartz cropping out of the ground.

An unaccountable apathy prevailed for quite a year and a half after the Chapman-Brentani affair; for people, somehow, had come to be impressed with an idea that the whole thing was either a hoax or a swindle, got up by Brentani, for some purpose of serving himself. And so it

came about that the Pyrenees district was no more heard of until 1851, when Dr Bruhn, a German mineralogist, gave out that he had discovered gold near the scene of Chapman's first find. But Bruhn was suspected, being a charlatan, and his alleged discovery drew upon him very little attention. It was about May, 1851, that the country near Bathurst, in New South Wales, was found to be auriferous. This discovery was made by Hargreaves, who, although an old colonist, had left and gone to California in 1843. Struck by the similarity between the auriferous region of California and certain portions of New South Wales, Hargreaves returned, for the purpose of exploring the country for gold, and was not long in discovering it. The New South Wales Government despatched Mr Stutchbury, its geologist, to the spot, who confirmed Mr Hargreaves' statement as to the presence of gold in the soil. The sensation which this created through all the colonies was profound. The police force in one body, at that juncture so much needed deserted their posts, and made for the new El Dorado. Thousands followed, and a new era was inaugurated. New South Wales was jubilant; and Victoria, whose population was threatened, became correspondingly depressed. It was thought that Melbourne and Geelong would become depopulated. Then it was that a public meeting was convened in June, 1851, when it was

determined to offer a reward to any person who should disclose to the committee appointed, a gold mine capable of being profitably worked, provided it was within two hundred miles of the City of Melbourne. A few days after this Mr Frencham, a reporter to the PORT PHILLIP GAZETTE, in company with some three or four others, made in the direction of the Plenty Ranges, amongst which gold was said to exist, and where at the time two hundred persons were scattered about searching for the precious metal. This locality had probably been selected in consequence of two persons, named Sharp and Armstrong, having, as was reported, discovered some fine gold in the locality. They had sent it, when taken, to Van Diemen's Land, but receiving no return they had abandoned the pursuit, after enduring the greatest hardships and privations. It was a short period subsequent to this that the editor of the PORT PHILLIP GAZETTE announced that his reporter, "who had been scouring the Plenty Ranges with the twofold purpose of supplying the public with the latest intelligence and of enabling them to decide whether gold did really exist," had actually come on that which he was in search of. A letter shortly after was received from Frencham, which stated that he had discovered gold in a foundation of sandstone and slate, with perpendicular veins of quartz. Specimens forwarded were subjected to the usual tests, but the result was not satisfactory. The first assayer, one Beurteaux, who tested it, discovered gold, which was exhibited to the committee, but on the other hand a portion of the same specimen had been handed to Mr Hood, a practical chemist, who was unable to find any gold in it. The committee in consequence declined to pay Frencham the reward, but on proceeding again to the locality he actually discovered gold. By this time others had published to the world that they had found auriferous deposits in various localities. To Frencham, however, is due the credit of having found out a rich digger. He named it in honour of his employer, and because the first diggers were Scotchmen, the Caledonian, which name it may probably bear to the present day, although the ground has been worked out many years. There appears to be no doubt that the next individual after the mysterious Chapman who found auriferous deposits was Mr William Campbell, who, if my memory serves me, was the first of the five elected members of the first Legislative Council of Victoria. It was in March, 1851, he observed minute pieces of gold in quartz on the station of Mr Donald Cameron, at a place known by the name of "Clunes." The discovery was, however, concealed, from some apprehension that the squatters' stations would be ruined if it should be made public; but some three months afterwards Mr Campbell communicated the discovery to the world. It was soon after this that Messrs Michell, Habberlin, Greening, Haton, Melville, and Furnival discovered gold on Major Newman's station, at Anderson's Creek, on the Yarra, and it was some time about the middle of June the party brought

a considerable sample of gold dust to Melbourne, which was exhibited to the Gold Discovery Committee.

Now, it was a party consisting of Edmonds, Kelly, Burns and Pugh who discovered gold quartz reefs on the Pyrenees near a station known as Donald Cameron's. The next in order of time who announced that he had been successful was Dr. Bruhn, who found gold near the Jim Crow ranges, which he forwarded to the Melbourne Committee.

The most important discovery, however, was made by Thomas Hiscock on August 8th, and made public by the writer of these "Reminiscences," through the columns of the GEELONG ADVERTISER, on the 10th of that month. Hiscock had come upon a deposit of auriferous earth in a gully near Buninyong. The whole of this district was soon swarming with parties searching for gold, and as Ballarat was on the same range, in a short time two parties almost simultaneously came on to the adjoining range to Golden Point. This, which subsequently proved to be the richest spot of ground known to the world, was worked for some time without any marked success, but the Cavanaghs, a hard-working, shrewd family, lately arrived from Ireland, having entered a half-worked claim and carried it below a layer of blue, greasy pipeclay amidst decayed slate, struck the rich pockets which were almost universally found there. This discovery placed Victoria at once at the very head of the gold producing countries of the world.

Not only Ballarat, but Forest Creek, where inexhaustible mines had almost simultaneously been discovered by some shepherds in the employment of Dr. Barker, began to produce many thousands of ounces weekly, and before the close of the year the colony had undergone a total revolution in all its relations.

BY SNYDER.

#### THE CONDITION OF THE DIGGERS PREVIOUS TO THE BALLARAT REBELLION.

The memory of the Eureka outbreak will not be easily affected by those who were witnesses to it, and who were intimate with the cause which led up to such scenes of outrage which were perpetrated, to the lasting disgrace of the then existing Government.

Between the years 1851 and 1854 the appointment of Gold Commissioners and their subordinates was left altogether in the hands of the Executive Government. Fitness for the duties these officials were called upon to perform was never for a moment allowed to weigh. Relatives were chosen who had done nothing since they came to the colony but hang about the doors of Government offices, or had filled some office where, if a man could write an official memo on official foolscap with the official quantity of margin, and sign his name to a public voucher, it was considered all that was necessary. Indeed only a few had reached this standard of competency. Able men—men accustomed to responsible duties—men of education—were thrust on one side to give place to miserable tools of one of the most incapable (and corrupt in proportion to incapacity) set of Ministers which has existed from that time to the present day. Mere boys were placed in command over the police, who were perhaps as big a lot of scoundrels as could well have been selected, the greater proportion having been Tasmanian ex-presses. The oppressive, cruel, and arbitrary acts of these officials incited the diggers, who were generally quiet, inoffensive, and amenable to authority, to commit deeds of violence which were altogether alien to their antecedents and natures. By turning over the pages of the newspapers of the time, it would be seen that it was no uncommon thing for men to be seized at the order of mere boy-Commissioners, and bound by chains or ropes to trees during the intense mid-day heat of a Victorian summer, and for no greater offence than that of not having a digger's licence in their possession. These men might not have been gold-seekers; but following the occupation of cooks to parties of diggers, or taking charge of tents, keeping tools and cradles in repair, or the like; however it was ruled that every man on a goldfield was to be taken to be a digger, and a fit subject for being

hunted down, chained up, and consigned to a log built prison, watched over by sentries who thought very little of sending a bullet through the body of a man who might, under his outraged feelings, and the humiliations he was made to undergo, offer any resistance.