

A NOTABLE PIONEER.

HORATIO SPENCER WILLS.

By K.W.H.

The subject of this sketch was born on October 3, 1811. He was the posthumous son of Edward Spencer Wills, a Sydney merchant, some of the members of whose family were leading residents in New South Wales in the early part of the 19th century. Horatio's eldest sister married Dr. Redfern (after whom Redfern in Sydney was named), and afterwards Mr. James Alexander, a London merchant. Another sister married Major H. C. Antill, of Jarvisfield, Picton, New South Wales. His eldest brother, Thomas S. Wills, owned a very considerable amount of property in and about Melbourne (where he resided for some time) and in other parts of Victoria. His half-sister married Captain John Harrison, the original owner of Swan Water Station, Victoria. During his childhood Horace, as he was generally called, spent most of his time when out of school on the wharves about Sydney, listening enchanted to the stirring stories of the sailormen of all sorts and conditions, and gradually became imbued with an irrepressible desire for a sea-faring life. This, of course, was strongly opposed by his mother as a quite impossible idea. But when he was about 15 years of age he took the law into his own hands and joined a ship bound for Manila, en route for China. His mother, on learning of the infatuated boy's mad venture, was in great distress, which turned to the utmost grief on hearing some weeks after that the vessel had been wrecked and all hands lost. Horror and sympathy were expressed by the community at the untimely end of the high-spirited and handsome boy. It appears that the ship had been blown during a violent storm on to one of the numerous coral islands of the Pacific and smashed to pieces. Horace Wills and two other men were washed ashore, but the two men were killed instantly by the savages who were waiting for them on the beach. The romantic story of how Wills escaped with his life, and was in time adopted by the savage chief and tattooed with due ceremony, and how at last, having almost given up hope of ever getting away, he was rescued after two years with great difficulty by the men of a ship which had put in to the island for water, was told by himself for the "Currency Lass" on his return to Sydney.

SETTLING IN VICTORIA.

Notwithstanding his trying experiences, he was not yet cured of his love of adventure, and, nothing daunted, a short time after his return from the island of "Uga" (probably in the Marquesas group) he joined a "whaler," and was absent again among the South Sea Islands for more than a year. On his return he spent some time in the office of his stepfather, who owned the first newspaper in Sydney. However, at the age of 21 he determined to settle on the land, and married Miss Elizabeth Wyre, who was even more youthful than himself. His first station was Burra Burra, near Gyndagar. But about 1840 he migrated to Port Phillip, travelling with his family and flocks and herds in true patriarchal fashion. He

travelling with his family and flocks and herds in true patriarchal fashion. He crossed the Murray at Albury, where he had to construct a rough bridge for their passage. The free and open life he had led at sea had made him very strong, and able to meet the difficulties and dangers of pioneering with an undaunted spirit and indomitable energy. At the same time it had not lessened his natural humanity nor altered his high standard of life in any way. He finally settled on the Gramplains, in the vicinity of Mount Ararat, which he so named because, like the Ark, he "rested there." His homestead, Lexington, is still in existence, though the station has been considerably cut up of late years for closer settlement. Of course, in common with all the early settlers, Mr. Wills had much trouble at first with the natives, who naturally resented the occupation of their hunting grounds by the whites. But he always treated them with tact and kindness, and it was the irony of fate that he should have met his death at their hands in the end. He would think nothing, if game were scarce, of running in a fat bullock and having it killed for them. If he found that they were spearing his sheep he would frighten them by riding out to their camp with a fowling-piece in his hand and fire it off in their direction. The men would retreat to a safe distance and hurl their spears at him, and he used to be amused at the cool way in which they would send the lubras and picanninies forward to pick their spears up from under his horse's feet, knowing that he would not hurt them. But in time the blacks came to regard him as their friend, and one old lubra went so far as to claim him as her long-dead son, "jumped up white fellow." He could have filled volumes with his encounters with the blacks, to say nothing of the desperate gangs of bushrangers who infested the bush in those days.

PROGRESSIVE IDEAS.

While at Lexington Mr. Wills imported some very fine merino sheep from Saxony. He was also the first to introduce wire-netting fencing against dingoes, as, when the diggings broke out, most of the shepherds ran away to more exciting scenes. Till then a good deal of the work was done by "assigned" servants, who were generally faithful and hard-working, many of whom had very sad life stories. Among the many kind things Mr. Wills did was to send "home" for the family of one of his men, who had been sent out for what would now be considered a trivial offence. After most of the European servants had left, the great difficulty was to find shepherds, and Mr. Wills employed Chinese for a time, and sometimes black boys. An amusing episode in connection with the Chinese shepherds is told. A new overseer had annoyed them in some way, and one afternoon they (nine of them) were seen approaching the house, an infuriated, gesticulating mob, armed with shear blades fixed to poles, evidently with the intention of running amok. Some force had to be used to bring them to reason, but ultimately they were soothed, and eventually their services dispensed with. Wild dogs, not rabbits, were the trouble in those days, and Mr. Wills was the first to introduce strychnine for poisoning them. The first big bottle in which it was imported is kept to this day.

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Wills sold the station and bought an estate (Belle Vue) near Geelong, and while living there he represented South Grant in the Legislative Assembly. He was also president of the agricultural society, and was very pleased one year at winning the gold medal for the best wheat crop in the district. Notwithstanding his many activities, he found time to take his three younger sons to England to school. His eldest son, Tom, had gone to Rugby some years before. He showed such aptitude for cricket that he soon became the captain of the Rugby Eleven, an honour always much coveted by all the boys in the school. This was the famous Tom Wills, "father of Victorian cricket," whose name will always be regarded with respect and admiration by all lovers of cricket. During his absence Mr. Wills visited some of the largest and best managed estates in England, in order to learn the latest ideas in farming, and on his return brought out the newest machinery.

MURDERED BY BLACKS.

Until 1860 he remained in Geelong. But about that time Queensland began to be boomed as a "squattling" country, and he decided to take up land there. With his usual instinct for a good site, he finally bought a lease of land on the Nogoa River, about 200 miles from Rockhampton. He returned home to make final arrangements, and said good-bye to his family in high hopes of success in the new adventure, and expecting to be away just long enough to get things in good working order. He took a large party of shepherds and station hands, some of whom had been with him years before at Lexington—two of them had their wives and families with them. He set out with his stock from Sydney. After about ten months on the road, Cullin-laringo (the new station) was reached. The Queensland blacks at that time were very fierce and wild, and Mr. Wills was warned of their treacherous nature, and he had made every preparation for defence in case of attack. Loaded firearms were always stacked ready in one of the tents, but the men would not carry them about. It was impossible to keep the blacks altogether away from the camp without going to extremes, as they did not then understand English; but it was hoped that by kind treatment, giving them presents and so on, they would gradually become conciliated. Those who did venture about the camp appeared so friendly that no violence was anticipated from them. However, on the

17th October, 1861, about three weeks after the arrival of the party, during the afternoon siesta a large number of blacks stole on the camp and killed everyone in it. It is supposed that the blacks approached the camp in small numbers, as usual gradually increasing, and without awakening suspicion surrounding each person, and at a signal killing everyone at the same instant. They had all evidently been taken quite off their guard. A child was at the door of a tent nursing her doll, the cook was by his fire, the bullock-driver with his team, and so on. Mr. Wills was found lying on his back a few paces from his tent door. He had evidently been killed by a tremendous blow as he ran out on hearing the cries of the others. His revolver was found lying near him, with one chamber discharged. Other men, scattered about the station, were also killed, making nineteen persons in all. There were only two survivors. They had been shepherding some valuable rams about a mile from the camp, and it was not till their return with the flock at sundown that they had any inkling of the horrible event. Appalled and terrified, one of them jumped on Mr. Wills's horse, which was found still tied up in the shade of a tree near his tent, and galloped to the nearest station with the terrible news.

Such was the tragic end of a very active and useful life. Mr. Wills was only 50 at his death, and was still as strong and full

and useful life. Mr. Wills was only 50 at his death, and was still as strong and full of the joy of life as in his youth. One can picture the terrible blow to his family, deprived suddenly and in such horrifying circumstances not only of a devoted husband and father, but of one possessed of such a virile and genial personality. He and his party were buried near the scene of the massacre at Cullin-la-ringo, and the Government has reserved the spot. Their graves will be a landmark in the history of Australia, showing at what cost the land was opened up. Mr. Wills's widow died in Geelong in 1907, in her 91st year. The surviving members of his family are Mrs. H. C. A. Harrison (Kew), who was probably the first white child born at Ararat; Mrs. E. L. Shaw (Armadale); Mrs. T. G. Coo (Hobart); Mrs. H. Blomfield Brown (Geelong), and Messrs. Horace and Egbert Wills (East Kew). Mr. Cedric Wills died a few years ago in Rockhampton, and Mrs. G. C. Harding in England.