

ART. XVI.—*On an Account of a Massacre at the Entrance of Dunedin Harbour in the Year 1817.*

By A. HAMILTON.

[*Read before the Otago Institute, 11th June, 1895.*]

Plate II.

IN searching the old files of the *Otago Witness* for 1858 I came across the following account of a massacre at the Otago Heads, at the entrance to Dunedin Harbour, or, as the account calls it, "Port Daniel." Though evidently written in a guarded manner, the narrative appeared to me to be probably founded on fact, and I therefore made inquiry into the matter, to obtain, if possible, corroborative evidence. The scene of the episode is called "Port Daniel, a place only known to Europeans within the last seven years." I made many inquiries from old residents, but cannot hear that this name was ever given to the harbour, nor does it appear on any of the old charts or plans. The usual name for the inlet appears to have been "the River." I then made inquiries in Tasmania, through the librarian of the public library, Mr. Taylor, and he very kindly sent me a copy of the original article as it appears in the files of the Hobart paper, agreeing in every respect with that in the *Witness*. He also gave me the references to the shipping news of that date, in which the "Sophia" cleared for New Zealand on the given date, and also the date of her return. He said that the ship and her owners were well known, and that he had every reason to believe that the account given was a correct one. It may be mentioned that Mr. Kelly was the man who made an adventurous voyage round Tasmania in an open boat in the year 1815.

The extract from the *Otago Witness*\* is as follows:—

"ADVENTURE AT OTAGO FORTY YEARS AGO.

"(From the Hobart Town *Courier*.)

"The 'Old Stager' has handed to us a narrative of events that happened to him on the south-east coast of New Zealand, part of which was published on his return to the port in Bent's *Hobart Town Gazette and Southern Reporter* of 28th March, 1818. Full details of the narrative were not furnished, but now for the first time are completed from his 'ancient log.' Port Daniel, where the scene of the adven-

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\* 21st August, 1858.

ture is laid, is now better known as the peaceful settlement of Otago; the reader will therefore read 'Otago' for 'Daniel.' The 'Sophia' (Mr. James Kelly, master) sailed from Hobart Town on the 12th November, 1817, on a sealing voyage, and anchored at Port Daniel, on the south-east side of the southern part of New Zealand, on the 11th December (a place only known to Europeans within the last seven years). The master, Mr. Kelly, with his boat's crew, went on shore the same day, and met with a friendly reception from the natives, which they attributed to the knowledge the latter had of one of the crew, named W. Tucker, who had been well treated by them, and engaged their apparent friendship on former visits, and who was called by these people 'Wioree.' On the following day Mr. Kelly went in his boat with six men (amongst them Tucker) to Small Bay,\* outside of the harbour's mouth, and distant from the vessel about two miles. The natives here also received them kindly, and to them Tucker appeared equally well known, being challenged generally by name, 'Wioree.'

"Mr. Kelly made the chief of the village a small present of iron, and proceeded to his dwelling to barter for potatoes,† leaving one man to look after the boat. On reaching the house of the chief Mr. Kelly was saluted by a Lascar, who told him that he had been left there by the brig 'Matilda,' Captain Fowler. During a long conversation Mr. Kelly inquired after a boat's crew that was said to have been lost near Port Daniel, and learned that Brown, who had charge of the boat, with six men, had been killed and eaten by the natives. The Lascar then offered his services in bartering for potatoes for the vessel, and appeared familiar with the native tongue.

"By this time a great number of natives had assembled in the village, about sixty of whom were in the yard of the chief's house, where the boat's crew were standing. In an instant a horrid yell was raised by the natives, when Mr. Kelly, John Griffiths, and Veto Viole were thrown down by the mob.

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\* I am inclined to think the "Small Bay" must be the smallest of the three bays on the north side of the Heads, now called "Murdering Beach" (Whareakeake). Mr. F. R. Chapman, who has a most intimate knowledge of the topographical features of the coast-line, doubts this, and would be inclined to fix one of the small beaches on the south side of the Heads.

† Potatoes. De Surville was, with Cook, supposed to have been the introducer of the potato to the Maoris of the North Island and the northern part of the South Island. Many old Maoris contend that *tiwas* were known and largely cultivated before the advent of Europeans. The Maoris certainly had a number of named varieties as early as 1820, and here we find them in Otago in 1817 able to supply large quantities to whalers as a recognised article of trade.

Tucker, with the remaining two (Dutton and Wallon) were also seized, but got out of the mob and ran to the boat, where they found the man Robinson, who had charge, reeling on the beach from a wound in the head. Thinking it impossible that any of the rest could escape, they immediately launched the boat. In the meantime Mr. Kelly was engaged in a dreadful contest with the natives, and, luckily having about him a new billhook, he miraculously effected his escape, being only speared through the left hand, after wounding his principal opponent on the head. In escaping through the gate of the yard Mr. Kelly saw Veto lying on the ground, but did not see Griffiths any more. The feelings of Mr. Kelly on reaching the beach under such circumstances, at the moment of the boat being launched, may be better conceived than described. Tucker was still on the beach. Dutton, Wallon, and Robinson were in the boat, backing her out of the surf. Mr. Kelly made the boat, and was dragged by her through the surf, calling on Tucker to follow, who, however, would not attempt to do so till too late, a number of savages immediately rushing down on the beach armed with spears and hatchets. Tucker kept calling to them not to hurt Wioree, but, regardless of his entreaties, he was speared in the right thigh by the man whom Mr. Kelly had wounded on the head, and who was then covered with blood, and immediately knocked down in the surf, where Mr. Kelly and his three men in the boat saw the unhappy Wioree cut limb from limb and carried away by the savages, having only had time to utter, 'Captain Kelly, for God's sake, don't leave me.'

"Mr. Kelly and his three men before mentioned now returned to his vessel, and found on board a number of natives of the village they had first visited on the previous day. Those natives, on Mr. Kelly getting on board the brig, pretended to be very friendly and asked what had become of Tucker, Griffiths, and Peter Viole, as they missed them out of the boat. On being told that they were killed by the natives on the opposite side of the river, and that Mr. Kelly and Robinson were wounded, they became very much excited (there being at the time about a hundred and fifty natives on board, the decks, rigging, tops, and yards were full of them). Mr. Kirk, the mate of the brig, said to Mr. Kelly, 'They are going to take the vessel from us.' Mr. Kelly immediately called all his men to quarters, and formed a solid square on the quarterdeck under the main boom. Their head chief, whose name was Corockar,\* called to his men to

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\* Corockar=Karaka. There have been several chiefs of this name amongst the Maoris of this part. The present Maoris seem to know something of this or a similar incident, but are not clear as to the localities.

make the attack and seize us man to man. The natives stood so close around us that they could not make use of the weapons that they had in their hands; neither could we use our firearms, as we stood so close together. There was now only one chance left for us. We were all sealers on a sealing voyage, and each man kept two large sealing-knives slung by his side. Seeing that there was no alternative, Mr. Kelly called to his men to draw their knives and cut away, which had the desired effect. The natives began to fall so fast before the knives that a great number jumped overboard and were drowned, and many were swept out to sea by the strong ebb tide that was then running, and no chance of their getting on shore, as the tide was running five to six knots on the ebb.

“The gallant chief Corockar, seeing that his men were completely defeated, made a desperate attempt to kill one of our men with a tomahawk, but was seized by his arms, thrown down in the cabin, and locked up in the store-room till next morning. We then threw overboard sixteen bodies that were killed by the knives. The number who jumped overboard and were drowned must have been about fifty, and as many were wounded in the fight. We were fortunate, however, to find that only two of our men were slightly wounded in the affray. After cleaning up and washing down the decks, we sat down and congratulated each other on the very narrow escape we had from being taken and murdered by these savages.

“We kept a good watch during the night, in case of being attacked by a large number of canoes that were laying on the beach in front of the town. The next morning about 6 o'clock a large number of natives were gathered round the canoes. We expected that they were going to make an attack on the brig, and that they thought their chief Corockar was killed: they cried out often for him to come on shore.

“We tied his hands and let him come on deck. When they saw him there was great rejoicing. He called to them to bring a large canoe-load of potatoes alongside, to pay us, as we thought, for his liberation. A canoe was launched off the beach, with two men to paddle her off to the brig. On the canoe nearing the vessel, one of the men that was stationed aft called out ‘The canoe is full of men!’ We all rushed aft, and saw the canoe had a large number of men lying in her bottom covered over with mats. Our firearms being all ready loaded, lying on the deck, we lifted them and fired a volley into her. The natives, who were all armed with short spears and clubs, jumped over the sides of the canoe, and tried to pull it alongside the brig. Had they succeeded, they must have boarded and taken the vessel in spite of all that we could do. There were nearly forty of them, and only fourteen

in all of our crew. Several of them were shot and run through with boarding-pikes in trying to get up the sides of the vessel. Corockar jumped overboard to get to the canoe, but was shot in the neck. Two of his men swam to him and took him on shore in a most gallant manner, but he died next morning of his wounds. Thus we had another narrow escape of being taken and murdered. We kept a good watch all night, expecting to be boarded and taken at daylight.

“Next morning, being the 24th of December, 1817, a great number of natives were on the beach making a great noise, seemingly lamenting and crying because of the death of their chief Corockar. They were preparing to launch their canoes. We thought they were coming off to try and take the brig, and thought it better to stop them if possible. We immediately manned our two boats, and, taking arms and ammunition, pulled close to the beach where the canoes were lying. It was thought most expedient to destroy all their navy at once, to prevent them from making the attempt. As soon as the boats came near the beach the natives all ran away over the bank. We landed one boat's crew, and kept the other boat afloat to cover the men on the beach with their muskets. We then commenced with two long cross-cut saws cutting the canoes up, each into three pieces. They were forty-two in number, large and small, all of which we destroyed, and, as we wanted firewood, we split them up and took them on board. As soon as they saw all the canoes destroyed they rushed with clubs and spears up to their necks into the water trying to get hold of the boats, but they did not succeed in wounding any of our men.

“They having become more excited and inflexible at this attempt to seize our boats, we determined at once to land, set fire to the town and burn it to the ground. This was the 26th of December, 1817. It was a fine, clear summer day, blowing a fresh, hot wind from the north-west. We landed nine men, but kept the boats afloat. On our approach the natives all ran to the rising hills, and left us in full possession of the town. This town consisted of about six hundred fine houses, and perhaps a finer town never was seen in any part of New Zealand. The fire was lighted at the weather end, and in about four hours the beautiful City of Otago, as we then called it, was laid in a heap of ashes. We now required fresh water for our sea stock. There were several fresh-water holes on the beach where the canoes were lying. We observed the water in those holes of a curious colour, and recollected that Tucker had told us the natives were in the habit of poisoning the water if they expected their enemies were coming to invade them. This poisoning was done with a

large blue berry,\* broken up and thrown into the water, which had the effect of poisoning both man and animal that drank of it. On this information from Tucker we declined taking or using any of the water. On the 27th December, 1817, at daylight, we weighed our anchor and left Port Otago, and sailed for Chatham Island. Hundreds of natives came down on the shore to see us off. We fired a volley of musketry towards them to say 'Good-bye.'

"We have little to add to the narrative. Captain Kelly regrets having listened to the persuasions of Tucker and the wish of the other men to go on shore the second day without firearms, to which the loss of three unfortunate men may be attributed. Tucker's confidence, however deceived, was founded on some experience, and Captain Kelly has some reason to believe that these natives (though certainly not to be depended upon) were fired in their revenge by the recollection of two or more of their people being shot by Europeans."

Thus ends the first article. In a subsequent number of the *Witness*, many years later, the story is given as follows, with a few additional points, and offering another motive for the killing of Tucker:—

"After Mr. Kelly's voyage in a boat round Tasmania, in the year 1815-16, he was given the command of the 'Sophia,' owned by Mr. Birch, of Hobart Town, and sent on a sealing cruise to New Zealand. One of his crew was a man named Tucker, who had in a previous voyage stolen from the natives at Riverton a preserved head, and only saved his life, as *utu*, or reprisal, from the natives by the vessel getting away before the theft was discovered. This was in 1811, and the baked head was the first offered for sale in Sydney. Whether Tucker thought that the theft had been forgotten or his offence condoned does not appear, as he had the hardihood to return and claim the friendship of the natives whose kindness and confidence he had outraged on a former occasion. At first the relations between the natives and the captain and the crew appeared of the cordial kind, and a Lascar, who was living among the tribe, volunteered to act as interpreter, as Kelly wanted some potatoes in barter. On making inquiry after a boat's crew that had been lost in the neighbourhood, it transpired that the man who had had charge of the boat had been killed and eaten, with all the crew. Unwarned by this event, Kelly put confidence enough in the natives to go among them unarmed, when a shout or a signal was given, and Kelly and two men who went with him—Dutton and

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\* I do not know any *large* blue berry of a poisonous nature in New Zealand.

Wallon—were also seized, but got away from the mob and into the boat, where they found the man Robinson, who had charge, reeling from a blow on the head. The whole party was evidently meant for slaughter and food; but Kelly fought his way out, being half-armed with a billhook, which served him in good stead. Mr. Calder says, 'In the desperate hand-to-hand encounter which took place Kelly lost three of his people, and with great difficulty regained the 'Sophia,' from the deck of which\* he was doomed to see one of his men (one of whom was his brother-in-law Tucker) cut limb from limb and carried away by the savages.'

In conclusion, I may say that, taking all the circumstances into consideration, I think the vessel must have anchored in the stream about opposite to the present Maori settlement; that the captain and crew went ashore the first day on the south side; the next day they rowed about two miles outside the Heads to the north, to Murderers' Beach, when the massacre took place, out of sight of the ship; and that the settlement of Corockar ("the beautiful City of Otago of six hundred houses") was about where the huge drift of sand is now, on the south side of the entrance.

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ART. XVII.—*On the Forests of New Zealand.*

By A. HAMILTON.

[Read before the Otago Institute, 14th May, 1895.]

THE islands of New Zealand have, from the time of the earliest voyagers, been noted for their magnificent and impressive forests. Seen, as the country was, mainly along the coast, and up the estuaries and sounds, the hills and valleys appeared clothed with an almost unbroken dark-green mantle. The climate, though varied, was everywhere favourable to a luxuriant Flora, and stored up in the shady depths of the forest were vast reserves of moisture, which encouraged the growth of all plant-life, and acted as a reservoir for all the streams and rivers.

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\* Here the writer is probably incorrect, and meant that the captain saw Tucker cut up from the boat in which he was escaping (as in the first account), not from the deck of the vessel. In the first place, the vessel was two miles off, and probably not in view, and, even if it were, it would be difficult to see a man cut up at a distance of two miles; secondly, the natives would hardly defer the operation till the captain regained the ship.