THE REV. W. B. CLARKE IN ILLAWARRA:

In a recent Bulletin it will be remembered that we promised extracts to show the quality of the Rev. W. B. Clarke's 1839-January, 1940, Journal. The first extract, which is given by special permission of the Trustees of the Mitchell Library where the original Journal is, relates to Clarke's visit to a farmhouse in Kangaroo Valley. On 6th January, 1940, Clarke left Wollongong, travelling through Dapto and up Osborne's Butter Track and passed over the mountains into Kangaroo Valley to the "station" of the Rev. Matthew Devenish Meares. The party arrived after dark, and on arrival experienced hospitality and conditions which were very typical; the description may prove to be of value from a sociological aspect of local history. The tired travellers were greeted by their hostess . . .

"The good woman quickly prepared us a fire and some tea and we lay down on stretchers in a rush-floored log hut, having holes between the planks in all the walls, without curtains and though the night was damp we slept soundly, the great logfire blazing cheerily in the great wooden chimney till awokened (sic) by the crowing of cocks and the quacking of ducks next morning. We were annoyed by wicked mosquitoes and bugs — a few fleas danced a welcome to Kangaroo Valley, but the wall near the fireplace was covered with thousands of cockroaches, which gave us no trouble. People in London would call this hut a pig-stye, — perhaps English piggeries are better built, but we found it comfortable, convenient and warm, and after riding upwards of 40 miles, ascending and descending a mountain, 2,000 feet high, and crossing 11 rivers and about 20 dry creeks, we found a cup of tea, a new egg, a slice of damper, and a stretcher before a logfire, a comfort that many a Dandy in London would envy . . .

Tuesday, January 7: "Having taken a comfortable breakfast and inspected the stables and farm buildings, we went out to explore. The house in which we had slept was built of logs and shingled, the chimney being a wide wooden building added on at the end."
"The windows are mere frames, with no glass, only a wooden shutter. Between each board in the walls which were unplastered, you could not only see but put your hand. This is the case with all the farmhouses in the country. Two high square stools such as naughty boys sit on at school, and a table equally rude, made up the furniture of our sitting room; yet we had contrived to make ourselves tolerably comfortable. Two rooms such as this, with a reed floor, make the master's apartments: the servants, i.e., the steward and his wife, had two rooms containing more dairy utensils but not more real furniture. The regular farm servants who were assigned 'convicts' live in a large shed apart from the others and with as little comfort as may be necessary. Yet in the climate of Australia this is a very good way of passing life and if one should wonder how people accustomed to better things at home put up with these miserable accommodations here, the answer is, when comforts cannot be had the wise man learns to make contentment supply their place. The view from the hut was of a lofty mountain clad to the summit, having a river, that which we had passed at the waterfall yesterday, at its base, and between the hut and the river a field of wheat cut and sheaved. The valleys here being surrounded with lofty mountains affording no outlet for carriages, only sufficient grain is grown for home consumption, the object of each station being the increase of cattle, horses, etc.

"... We took a bush dinner of tea, damper and fried chicken and departed for Coolangatta at 2 p.m.

"Our road lay to the right of that by which we arrived yesterday and through another portion of the Valley running E.N.E. and W.S.W., where the green open forest was most beautiful. This bush-riding has quite an air of romance about it. You gallop along over a green but not level track, studded with splendid trees, through which you wind your way, every trunk varying with the interchange of light and shade, which in this country is stronger than elsewhere. Suddenly you come upon some dry water course with lofty banks, the bed of which is strewn with large fragments of rocks over which and through which we must ride. Then, again, you cross rivers full of water, gliding along under a canopy of branches, and having a thick jungle of ferns upon their edges, affording spots of the most cooling aspect amidst the sultry heat of a noon-day sun. And sometimes you pass through a thick scrub, or close packed forest, where the number of trees is so increased as to diminish the light or reduce it to a sort of noon light. Occasionally on this route, which consisted not of a regular road but of rather a footpath trodden as by cattle or sheep we had to leap innumerable trees fallen across it so that the ride has more the character of a steeple chase than anything else, and frequently recalled to my mind our boyish game of 'follow the leader' as one saw the stockman guide cantering along in the van without slacking his speed, over trees, through stumps, suddenly disappearing down a steep bank and suddenly rising again up the opposite bank..."

And thus, observing en route the saw pits and rough palm-leaved huts of cedar cutters in the mountains, aboriginals, and geological and botanical points of interest, they completed a 30-mile ride to Alexander Berry's large establishment at Coolangatta, where they spent the night.