A VETERAN COLONIST — CAPTAIN CHARLES, M.L.C.

A Link With Old History

Few people who see the stalwart figure of Captain Samuel Charles in the streets of Sydney today would believe that he has reached the patriarchal age of 81 years, which anniversary of his birthday he and his very many friends celebrated yesterday. He is possibly one of the oldest of the good old brigade, and probably one of the luckiest. There is in the record of his career much inducement for adventurous spirits to "go and do likewise"; yet perhaps the opportunities he enjoyed do not exist now. That may be as it may be. It at any rate remains that Captain Charles, M.L.C., is one of the pioneers of the colony, and one of the worthiest of them. The opportunities came to him, and he availed himself of them.

Captain Charles was born on August 2, 1818, at Ballyrowan, on the banks of Loch Neagh, County Derry, north of Ireland. He served an apprenticeship to shipbuilding at Belfast, and he learned navigation at the Rev. David Boyd's famous naval academy there. The training he received served him very effectually in his future career. He came first to Australia in 1843, landing then in Melbourne, and arriving in Sydney on January 20, 1844. His first employment was in the old ship Maitland, a coaster, between Sydney and Port Macquarie, then a penal settlement. Major Innes was one of the company owning this steamer, and Mr. Cohen, grandfather of the present Judge Cohen, was a partner in the enterprise. For a while Captain Charles stayed at Port Macquarie. Then, returning to Sydney, he built a vessel called the Pyrmont, constructed near where the Pyrmont Bridge now is. In this vessel he engaged in the coastal trade. Then he proceeded in a voyage to San Francisco, and upon the way out to that port the most interesting episode of his energetic career took place. He landed on his voyage to San Francisco at Owyhee (now known as Hawaii, and its famous capital of Honolulu). There he and his shipmates met a man who had runaway from his penal chains in New South Wales, and who, having married a native wife, had tilled a comfortable farm into profitable existence, and, seeing the white men, started talking of Australia. This denizen of the distant isle informed the voyagers that he could give them information of the circumstances of the death of Captain Cook. It was on this island that the famous navigator had met his death. Mr. Charles and comrades, voyaging to Owyhee in 1847 or 1848, learnt from this runaway of an old native who had officiated at the death and sacrifice of Captain Cook. The old native was very feeble and worn, and he was carried on a stretcher to point out the spot where Cook fell. There, he said, the captain was walking backwards to rejoin his boat when his foot caught in a hole, and before he could rise he was clubbed to death. His body was carried up to the lava sides of the adjacent volcano, and there offered up in sacrifice to the gods, whose sacred rights on the island surrounding waters had been profaned by the presence of the sailors. Captain Charles serves, there-
fore, as a connecting link between the old days of Australia and to-day.

Arriving in San Francisco, Mr. Charles sold his vessel, and spent a year or so at the diggings, even going to the far-famed Sierra Nevada. There he was not very successful, but, returning to "Frisco, he and his brother William became provision merchants, and were very successful. One particular stroke of luck was when one Captain M'Condrie came in with a cargo of flour. In those days all business in 'Frisco was cash, but Captain M'Condrie wanted to discharge his cargo, and he left it with the Charles Brothers, to "store or sell." That week all of ancient 'Frisco was burned down by a big fire, and the 100 tons of flour, the only store saved, rose in value at least 100 per cent. Then Captain Charles bought and fitted out a vessel to bring miners from California to the newly-discovered gold diggings of Australia. Upon reaching Sydney he sold the vessel, afterwards named the Fortune, to Mr. Merriman, the Mayor of Sydney. Eight months Captain Charles spent at Ballarat and Bendigo, and at the latter place he cleared £500. Then he went to England under engagement to a company, to build a vessel for the coastal trade. Thence he brought out the steamer Kiama, built on the Clyde, and still afloat, though out of commission. Captain Charles sailed her out under canvas, and for some years ran her in the coastal trade.

The real romance of his life was, however, to come. He bought a property at Kiama, which he called Eureka—1200 acres, which he still holds; 800 acres he speedily cleared, and let some of it in farms. A tenant of his had a farm of 28 acres. Day after day Mr. Charles walked his farm unconscious of the wealth he was kicking. He kicked his fortune of the future from his path. It, indeed escaped more than one peril. A Bishop of the Church of England had a fancy for that part of Captain Charles's estate for a seaside residence, and offered Mr. Charles £25 per acre for 20 acres, which he had bought for £60 in all. He declined the offer, and, soon after, his tenant was receiving £1000 a year for the blue metal taken out of his land to supply the Government to ballast the railways. Soon the lease of the farm fell in, and Captain Charles struck a bargain with the Government to lease them this area for a period, at first £1000 a year, and afterwards £800. So a curious and romantic foundation was laid to a worthy man's wealth.

He was nominated for Kiama in 1877, and, being elected by a big and unsought majority, he took his seat in the Assembly. There he was, for much of his political career, an opponent of Sir Henry Parkes, particularly on the educational question. He put in a plea for the religious instruction in schools, which, in its main features, we have now adopted. In 1881 he was nominated by Sir Alexander Stuart to the Legislative Council, and he has been a very frequent attendant in that chamber, though by no means an active politician. Now he lives in his green old age, hale and hearty, vigorous and vivacious, at his charming residence at Woollahra Point, Cliff
Towers, built by himself on his own design, one of the most comfortable houses in Sydney, and certainly one with the most beautiful view. The house, with its white turrets, is one of the most conspicuous objects seen from the harbour.

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