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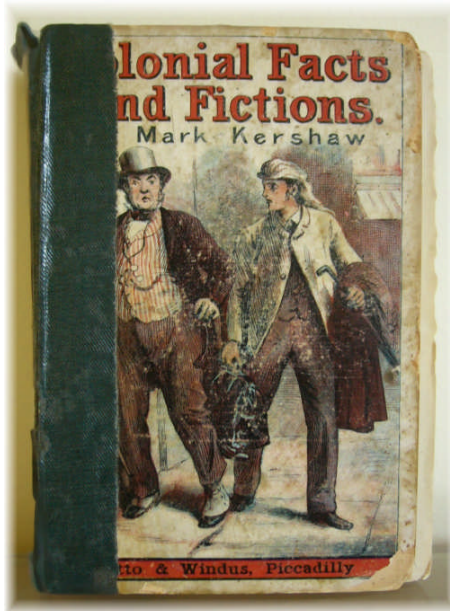
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## Colonial Facts and Fictions

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COLONIAL  
FACTS AND FICTIONS

Humorous Sketches

BY MARK KERSHAW



London  
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1886

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# Colonial Facts and Fictions.

## *NORTH AUSTRALIA.*

RESIDENTS in foreign lands often think that it is an impertinence if a passing stranger write about them. Those who have been for a long time resident in a country seldom write a description of their experiences. About many things they seem to have learnt how little they really know, whilst to things of every day occurrence they have become so accustomed, that they do not think them worthy of description. The persons who do write, and who delight to write about a place, are the birds of passage. These persons know very little about their subject. The very fact of only knowing a little about a place adds a charm to an attempt at its description. If you know everything about it you are inclined to write a series of facts, while if you only know a little, there is room for the exercise of the imagination, and the production becomes a combination of truths and untruths.

Reading a book of facts is like reading a dictionary. To make facts palatable they must be diluted as you

## *DARLING DOWNS AND NEW ENGLAND.*

THE Darling Downs were the last I saw of Queensland. From Brisbane you go to them by train. One of the waiters at the hotel told me that I had better take my luggage to the station on the evening before starting. If I took them before 8 p.m. I paid a shilling for a cab. If I took them between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. I should pay ten shillings. I shall have more to say about Australian cabs and carts by-and-bye. Independently of the cost of a conveyance, I was glad to take my bag and boomerang to the station in daylight. The latter might have been dangerous in the dark. The train left at 5.50 a.m. It was quite dark, and I did not see much of the country or fellow-passengers until about 7 a.m., when we reached a pretty big town called Ipswich. Here we had a scramble for a very bad breakfast, after which we got into the train almost as cold as when we came out of it. At Ipswich I saw several factories. Up to this point the country was undulating. Farther on I saw a number of post and rail fences, a few small houses, and a great lot of gum trees forming open woods. After a climb up a range of yellow sandstone hills, we entered a park-like country.

It wasn't long before the blocking up of the river and harbour with floating and sunken vessels began to have an effect by causing silt to deposit ; and, to make a long story short, after the floods of 1855, if there were one ship ashore there must have been at least 5,000 of them, and Captain Stringer's was amongst the lot. In the following year the Government had a new channel cleared out for the river and the land where the ships were became a marsh. One or two who had their ships in a dry place where grass had begun to grow, clubbed together and started a farm, using their ships as dwelling-houses and stables. Things were pretty expensive in those days. Land down where Flinders Street now is was worth £150 to £200 a foot ; and as for dwelling-houses, you could not get a weather-boarded cottage under £500 a year. The climate, too, was more trying than it is at present. Every other day we used to get those hot north winds called brickfielders. When these were blowing it was like standing in a baker's oven, and the dust was so thick that you could not put your nose outside the door. What with losing his ship, and the effects of rum so long as it lasted, old Stringer seemed to be dreadfully upset. Still, he kept up a certain kind of style, and wanted us to believe that he was well off. When we called on board his boat he would always produce something or other which he said he had specially ordered from London. Once it was some cigars. He said they had cost him two-and-sixpence apiece. The duty he paid on them was very heavy. But anyhow, they were the best Havanas ever made—in fact, part of a parcel expressly manufactured for the King of Hanover, and he hoped we should like them.



## TASMANIA.

I MADE two trips to Tasmania, one of them being from Melbourne to Hobart. On one of these trips the sea was as smooth as glass, and looking in the water you could see the reflection of trees and islets as if looking in a mirror. On another trip, however, it was so rough that all passengers had to be kept below, and a fourteen-knot boat, when it did not go backwards, seldom made more than four knots. So much for the moods in which you may find Bass Straits. When Bass Straits are amiable, the time taken from Melbourne to Launceston is usually about twenty-four hours. You commence the journey by going down the tortuous muddy Yarra. As I have before remarked, there are some people who say that this river smells. The only things of particular interest which I remember passing were two steamers which had just arrived with tea from China. Both of them had seen bad weather, especially one called the *Airlie*, which had lost her boats and all her live-stock. When we saw her she looked pretty much like a ship that had been through a naval engagement. A fellow-passenger told a friend of mine that these ships carried Chinamen as sailors. The captain

mole, while its head is like that of a duck. A very good picture of this interesting creature may be seen on some of the Tasmanian postage stamps. Not long ago it was discovered that this extraordinary combination of bird and mammal laid eggs. Their nests are usually situated in the topmost branches of the highest trees. The eggs, when boiled hard, are said to be delicious, whilst the animal itself, when stuffed with sage and roasted, is fit to place before Lucullus. The plural of platypus is platypuses, platypi, or platypodes. This interesting little animal is also found on the adjoining continent.

#### THE SMELTING WORKS.

While at Launceston I spent an evening visiting the Smelting Works. The tin-ore which is treated at these works comes from Mount Bischoff, one of the largest and most famous tin mines in the world. The process of smelting is apparently very simple. The ore is mixed with about one-fifth its weight of powdered coal, and then put into a reverberatory furnace for about eight hours. To purify the tin after it is drawn off from this furnace it is kept liquid in a large iron caldron, fixed at the bottom of which there is a piece of green wood. The green wood, as it is charred in the bath of molten tin, gives off gas which rises in bubbles to the surface of the metal. This gas oxidizes the impurities, which float up as a scum that can be easily removed. After this the tin is cast into brick-like blocks, which are carefully stored until the price of tin has risen sufficiently high to yield a profit to those who own the works.

*NEW ZEALAND; OR, THE LAND OF THE  
MAORIS AND MOAS.*

JAPAN and New Zealand are in many respects reflections of each other. The northern island of New Zealand corresponds in position and shape to Yezo, while the southern island is like the main island of this country. Nemuro is represented by Auckland, Hakodate by Wellington, Yokohama and Tokyo by Lyttelton and Christchurch, and Nagasaki by Dunedin. I ought to be paid for this suggestion, for it saves the buying of an atlas.

The northern island of New Zealand is the chief centre for the aboriginal Maoris, just as Yezo is the home of the aboriginal Aino. The mountains of New Zealand, like those of Japan, are chiefly on the western side of the island, and it is on this side of both countries that there is the greatest precipitation of rain and snow. Mount Cook, the highest mountain in New Zealand, is approximately the same height as Fujisan, the highest mountain in Japan. In both countries there are earthquakes, volcanoes, and hot springs, and each is equally celebrated for its beautiful scenery. In these and other respects New Zealand and Japan have a close

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  - what churches were there and what time were services held?
  - what other activities were there in the community?
  - look for others who had the same occupation or other interests

All of this and more may be available in a seemingly mundane book such as a directory. Learn much of the background of life at the time, even if your ancestor is not listed there.