

CHAPTER XIV.

GREAT FLOODS IN THE CLUTHA: VISIT OF SIR GEORGE GREY
TO CLUTHA.

AS stated by the early surveyors, signs were found by them that the Clutha River was liable to great floods, and their reports were time and again proved by the unfortunate settlers to be perfectly true. There was at one time a very rich flat at the mouth of the Clutha, held together by flax roots. As the settlement increased the flax was destroyed, and an early flood washed the greater part of the flat away.

The following account of the 1866 flood is taken from the "Bruce Herald":—"On Wednesday, the 10th of January, 1866, the river commenced rising rapidly about 2 o'clock p.m., with every indication of a flood. At 3 o'clock it began to overflow the banks on the south side, taking its course through Battrick's paddock towards the Main Road. A number of persons began to collect near the Crown Hotel, some of the oldest settlers relating how high the water at the highest previous flood had risen. The highest within the remembrance of anyone was fifteen years before. Another flood, which occurred five years before, was also under discussion, and on the blacksmith's old shop were shown marks to which the water had risen, which appeared to a great many incredible. The water continued to rise, and the Bank of Otago was the first to suffer from inundation. The manager entered the bank building at 6 o'clock, and placed the books, etc., in what he considered a safe place. The water was eight inches deep on the floor of the bank. The water by this time had found its way over the South Main Road between Stewart and Fraser's store and Hawkins' butcher's shop. All appeared to think that the principal danger was now over, as the water seemed to have a good fall through Mr. McNeil's field down to the reserve below. The shops belonging to Mr. Mason (shoemaker), Mr. Rankine (tailor), and Mr. T.

Crawford (draper) were now 12 inches deep in water, and such was the sudden rise that the owners had not time to secure their furniture, and barely to move their goods.

By 8 in the evening the water began to spread itself on the lower part of the reserve, and G. Coghill and family and Mrs. Kean and family removed to the house of J. McNeil, senr. He being one of the oldest residents in the ferry, quieted them for a time by showing them on the doorstep a mark which the water had never been known to exceed. The river overflowed its banks higher up, and a torrent came rolling through A. McNeil's paddock, covering most of the South Road and the greater part of the flat close to the ranges. By 1 o'clock on Thursday morning the whole of the road was covered, with the exception of a few yards opposite Battrick's Hotel, and at this time things looked very serious. Mr. Latimer, who lived on the reserve, had gone to the ferry for assistance, and from some cause had not returned. Mrs. Latimer, after moving money and other valuables as high as she could in the house, was standing up to the armpits in water holding her children out of harm's way. She had coo-eed for assistance till she was hoarse, and had resigned herself to die with her children, when she was rescued by P. Rankin, T. Crawford, W. Christie, and R. Smith, who took the ferry boat and pulled to her place. At 2 o'clock in the morning Mrs. Latimer and children, Mr. and Mrs. Christie and servant, Mr. E. Barr, Mr. Jenkinson's two children and servant, Mrs. Melrose and family, Mrs. Latta and children, and Mr. G. Bain and family were conveyed in carts to the ranges, some only partially dressed. They were all generously received by J. and A. McNeil, who paid the greatest possible attention to the exiles. R. Smith, manager at the ferry, heard at daylight a coo-eeing from Jas. McNeil's, and, looking in the direction, saw McNeil waving his hands for assistance, when, with T. Crawford, Rankin, and another, he pulled down the boat, and took Mrs. Kean and family, Mr. and Mrs. Coghill and family, and Mr. and Mrs. McNeil and servant to the New Market Hotel, where they succeeded in getting one of the upper rooms in the house, and were made as comfortable as circumstances permitted. Sergeant Cobden evidently thought himself safe from the flood, and stopped with his family in the house until the water covered the floor, when he succeeded in getting

R. Barr's spring-cart part of the distance to his house, and with the assistance of Rankin and Crawford the children and Mrs. Cobden were got out safely. Mrs. Cobden, who had lately been confined, fainted during the time she was being carried to the cart. Hawson's house, being built on low ground, was quickly flooded. Mr. and Mrs. Hawson and family were in bed, and had just time to secure their own clothing and get the children out of the house when the chimney was washed down. The children, in their nightdresses, got shelter in the Crown Hotel, together with Mr. and Mrs. Cobden, and Mr. and Mrs. Swanston and family. Mrs. Provan had a narrow escape, her husband not being at home. She was advised to go to bed about 10 o'clock on the evening of the flood, and was assured there was no danger. At 6 o'clock she woke up, and, taking her baby in her arms, rushed out of the door, making for the road, but had it not been for assistance, she could not have gone against the current. She was assisted to Algie's house, where she and the baby had every attention. On Thursday forenoon, at about 11 o'clock, a signal was seen from the upper window of the New Market Hotel, when John McNeil's boat was manned and went to the place, when McNeil was directed to go to Couperthwait's, on the north side, half a mile above the ferry, where the house was surrounded with water, and something was seen moving on the roof. The crew at once pulled across the river to the house, and were glad to find that R. Paterson had been with his boat and taken the family to his house. After satisfying themselves that all was safe, they returned to the ferry, leaving a fowl and the dog on the roof of the building. During Thursday a number of sheep were seen floating past the ferry, also fowls, chairs, tubs, chests, large trees, diggers' cradles, and straw, and about four in the afternoon something was seen floating down the river at a very rapid rate, with a boat in pursuit. The people at the ferry could not make out what it could be, and, not being able to go within a good distance of it, had come to the conclusion that it must be one of the punts used higher up the river that had broken away. About six o'clock the mystery was solved by Paterson and crew pulling up alongside Battrick's Hotel and stating that it was Pillans's Bridge that had been lifted bodily from its place and washed away, but that they had secured it at a short distance down the

river. Immediately after, another boat was seen approaching the hotel, and turned out to belong to Jones & Co., wood-cutters, on Manuka Island.

“On being asked what could bring them to the ferry at such a time, they stated that they had had a chase after the bridge and had succeeded in making it fast near Paterson’s Flat, and that, although they had been unfortunate in having thirty cords of firewood washed away, they anticipated a good sum from the Government for the trouble they had been at in securing the bridge. On Thursday night the flood was at its height, the oldest settlers never having seen the water as high within two feet before. Anyone acquainted with the ferry may judge when it is stated that there were three feet six inches of water in the Bank of Otago. The whole place had a miserable appearance, only about three houses in the place could be occupied—the Crown Hotel, Miss Russell’s, Mr. Algie’s, and the upper portion of Jopp’s Hotel. The water was rushing in all directions, and the loss at the ferry was severely felt. J. McNeil’s garden, one of the best in the district, was destroyed, as was Stewart and Fraser’s store, which was also used as the Post Office. Jopp’s loss was £150, the stock in the bar was lost, the furniture in the long room was floating about, and such was the depth of water in it that a person swam round it. Winchester, the contractor for the church, was a heavy loser, the whole of the timber and shingles being washed away, although a portion of the timber was afterwards recovered, some of it having lodged in McNeil’s bush. His loss could not be less than £100. J. Wright, wheelwright, lost a considerable quantity of timber, the water rushing on him so suddenly that he had not time to save his tools. His loss was £200. J. Rattray, blacksmith, was a heavy loser, but, however much sympathy was with him, no one would have been sorry if the flood had washed away the apology for a shop which he occupied, as he would then have been compelled to build more in conformity with the place and with the flourishing business he did. Bain and Sanderson took the precaution to secure their timber and other property on the premises, and were not great losers. Jenkinson’s loss was £70, principally sugar, salt, and oats. Had due precaution been exercised his property in the store might have been saved, but the furniture in his house was much destroyed. Latta, brewer, was also a considerable loser, a floor of

barley being destroyed and the kiln sunk through the ground giving way.

“Mrs. R. McNeil and the farm labourers who lived on a flat about three miles above the ferry had to make for the ranges during the night, her homestead being surrounded by water. D. McNeil and family were more fortunate; they managed to get on the top of a straw stack, and there remained till the flood abated. Hunter and Harvey had to leave their residences in the night and make for the ridges. The damage done to the jetty at the ferry and its approaches by the foundation being washed away stopped the transit of all vehicles, the coaches not being able to pass for several days. There were now ten loaded waggons and drays waiting on the north side of the ferry, and three on the south side. The damage to the road and ferry was estimated to cost £300 to repair. On Friday, about two o’clock, the flood commenced to subside. It was expected the water would fall rapidly, as was generally the case in all the great floods, but it lowered very slowly. People, however, began to have more confidence, and on Saturday afternoon the postal authorities managed to distribute the letters, while some of the owners were able to get into their homes. One house, when the owner entered, was not quite clear of water, and when the door was opened out floated the clock. The house had three feet of water inside, and everything seemed to be wedded to each other. The owner was advised to close the door and leave until the water had gone, which advice he reluctantly followed.

“On Thursday afternoon a man attempted to get to the Ferry House with a loaf of bread under his arm, but he slipped into the current. The loaf was seen floating away on the surface of the water, the man had disappeared, and it was thought he had got jammed under one of the buildings and drowned. After a time he was heard shouting for help, and on the boat getting to the place he was found hanging on to the rafters of the smithy, when he was released from his perilous position.

“On Saturday, two brothers were walking along the road apparently in earnest conversation, when one suddenly dropped over the head in water. A deep and dangerous chasm was made across the road opposite Bain and Sanderson’s and the Bank of Otago, and a deep blind creek at each end cut off all communication between the ferry and the Crown Hotel, excepting with boats. Several

plans were made to effect a passage. S. Shaw made a rope fast to himself, and throwing the other end to the crowd on the opposite bank gave a signal to be pulled across the chasm. He was pulled out in safety, and strange to say he neither lost his cap nor let go his hold of a tomahawk he had in his hand. After he was safely landed the crowd considered it was one of the best performances of the day.

“Next morning (Tuesday, 16th), Mr. Smail, the Government Road Inspector, was actively engaged in having the stages leading to the punt made passable, and he stated that the chasm in the road would be made safe for waggons, &c., to pass by next day. On Saturday, but for his presence, a great portion of the road would have been destroyed by persons trying to get across to their places of business, and it was gratifying to see that he did not stand on ceremony and red-tapeism, but at once entered into judicious arrangements to have the road and ferry made passable. The chain which connected the punt with the wire had been broken, and had not yet been repaired, so the manager at the ferry, R. Smith, refused to cross the punt with the connecting tackle, the anchor belonging to the punt not being forthcoming. Should the tackle have given way, there was nothing to save the punt from going down the river. The authorities should see that such an important appendage as the anchor should at all times be ready on the punt.”

The following account of Governor Sir George Grey's visit to the Clutha District is of special interest, as being the first visit of a Governor to the district. This account is also taken from the “Bruce Herald,” published in March, 1867:—

“His Excellency the Governor arrived at the Clutha Ferry on Saturday afternoon, accompanied by the Hon. Major Richardson, Rev. M. Thatcher, Major Grey, Captain Hope, J. P. Maitland, Esq., and R. M. W. Christie, Esq. A large number of ladies and gentlemen were waiting on the jetty and on the bank of the river to receive His Excellency, the members of the Dalton Lodge of Odd-fellows being conspicuous amongst the company. On landing from the steamer “Tuapeka,” he was loudly cheered by the assemblage. William Maitland, Esq., drove His Excellency in an open carriage to the Crown Hotel. A number of settlers was introduced to His Excellency, amongst others being James McNeil, sen.,

Esq., one of the oldest residents in the district, who met with a hearty reception from His Excellency. After lunch His Excellency heard an address from the Oddfellows. His Excellency and suite then paid a visit to W. Christie, Esq., at the Bank of Otago, Ltd. The members of the Masonic Lodge assembled opposite the bank in uniform, and received His Excellency in true Masonic style, and walked in procession to the New Market Hotel, where a room had been fitted up with the emblems of Masonry, characteristic of that body. Much credit is due to W. G. M. Smith, of the Lodge, for the elegant manner in which the room was furnished, and the creditable way in which the proceedings were carried out.

“An address was presented to His Excellency by the W.G.M. on behalf of the members of the Lodge. After the Governor had left the New Market Hotel, Mr. J. H. Jenkinson presented an address on behalf of the settlers of the district. His Excellency said he had not had time to consider the address, but would have a written answer sent in a few days. Three cheers were then given for the Governor, when, amidst the cheers of the assembly, His Excellency and suite proceeded on board the ‘Tuapeka.’ After he acknowledged the honour done to him, the vessel steamed down the river, and the Governor was landed at the residence of F. S. Pillans, Esq. On Monday morning His Excellency proceeded to Port Molyneux in the ‘Tuapeka’ steamer. After visiting the Tairaroa, he proceeded on horseback to Major Richardson’s, where he made a short stay. He then paid a visit to Mr. Peter Ayson, sen., Wharepa. About six o’clock p.m. he arrived at Clutha Ferry, accompanied by about fifty horsemen. In front of the Crown Hotel the scholars from the District School, under the superintendency of their teacher, Mr. Todd, had assembled. His Excellency halted in front of them, when they sang ‘God Save the Queen.’ the company uncovering. After a short address to the children, he proceeded to the steamer ‘Tuapeka’ amidst the plaudits of the company, and left for the residence of F. S. Pillans, Esq. At ten o’clock a.m. next day he was met by a large number of the yeomanry of the district and escorted to Lovell’s Flat.”

“Monday, 11th March, 1867, was a day long to be remembered in the South Clutha. It was seldom that any event occurred to break the quiet monotony of everyday life in the district. This was not owing to any want

of natural advantages, for we venture to say that there are no districts in New Zealand for which Nature has done so much, the district being intersected by beautiful streams, reminding one (especially if he is a Scotsman) of the streams of his native land.

“For a week before the event came off, it was known that Sir George Grey, the Governor of New Zealand, was to visit the district. The Governor left the residence of F. S. Pillans, Esq., on Monday morning, the 11th inst., in the steamer ‘Tuapeka.’ After a delightful sail down the Clutha, he visited the Clutha coal field, after which he returned to the ‘Tuapeka,’ and steamed down to Port Molyneux. On landing, he was saluted by hearty cheers from upwards of 200 people, who had assembled from the town and South Clutha, many of them being mounted, with the intention of forming an escort to conduct His Excellency on his visit through the district. Before leaving the jetty His Excellency was presented with the following address:—

To His Excellency Sir George Grey, K.C.B.,
Governor of New Zealand.

May it please Your Excellency,—

We hail with the utmost satisfaction your Excellency’s visit to this somewhat remote portion of your province, and avail ourselves of the opportunity thereby afforded of expressing our warm affection and steadfast loyalty to the person and government of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, and to the person and government of your Excellency, as Her Majesty’s Representative in these parts of the Dominion.

The magnificent river down which your Excellency has just sailed, the extensive coalfield just visited, the rich fields just passed, tell of the adaptation and capabilities of this district: capabilities which need but time and population for their full development.

With the capabilities of New Zealand generally, your Excellency has long been familiar, and to these your Excellency has often given expression. We rejoice to learn that your Excellency’s tour through the provinces has not failed to increase the favourable impression already formed regarding the capabilities of New Zealand, and to strengthen the hope to which your Excellency has often given utterance that a great future lies before this portion of Her Majesty’s Empire.

May a gracious Providence long spare your Excellency to help towards that future, and to witness New Zealand occupying the position and exercising the influence of which your Excellency has so often expressed the fond anticipation.

By appointment of settlers,

Signed by G. Hay, J. Shaw, D. P. Steel,
P. Bayley, J. W. Thomson, J. Paterson,
and W. A. Bews.

The address was read by George Hay, Esq., as the oldest settler in the district, to whom the Governor intimated that a written reply would be communicated, but in the meantime he would express the satisfaction he felt with the reception he had received, and with all that he had witnessed of the districts through which he had passed. Several parties were then introduced to the Governor, among them being J. Shaw, Esq., D. P. Steel, Esq., P. Borough, Esq., J. W. Thomson, Esq., Rev. W. Bannerman, D. Henderson, Esq., W. Brown, Esq., Mrs. Brown, Miss Shaw, Mrs. Cleveslay, Mrs. R. L. Begg, Mrs. Bannerman, Miss Lewis, and Miss Begg. On the jetty were assembled several Maoris, to whom the Governor addressed himself. One of the most interesting incidents connected with the visit of His Excellency to the Port was the presentation of Miss Helen Hay as the first female and Master James Hay as the first male child born in the district. His Excellency then rode to the residence of E. F. Rich, Esq., where luncheon was provided for him. On entering the township he was met by an escort of about seventy horsemen, who accompanied him to the residence of Major Richardson. On his way thither he was met and saluted at various points by parties in holiday attire, who saluted the cavalcade en passant. Arches had been erected in various parts of his progress, those especially deserving of notice being at the store of W. Brown, Esq., at the house of D. P. Steel, Esq., and that of W. Wilson, bootmaker. On arriving at Major Richardson's, His Excellency was saluted by several of the neighbouring proprietors, whose wives and children had assembled to welcome His Excellency. On seeing them, His Excellency immediately dismounted, and had all introduced to him. Among those assembled at this point were Mrs. Bannerman and family, Mrs. Curtis and family, Mrs. Gifford and family, and Miss Ord, to all of whom the Governor addressed himself. Thereafter His Excellency and suite, accompanied by about twenty of the settlers, entered Willowmeade, where a sumptuous repast had been provided by George Richardson, Esq. While the parties with him were recruiting themselves with the good things provided, the cavalcade was not forgotten. Roast beef, fowls, with the needful to wash them down, were abundantly provided, Major Richardson himself especially attending to the wants of those who had shown their loyalty by turning out to attend His Excellency.

During the Governor's stay he, accompanied by the Rev. W. Bannerman, found time to visit the grounds attached to Clutha Manse, and the romantic river Puerua that flows through the same; with these and the Scotch firs that beautify the manse garden, His Excellency expressed the utmost satisfaction.

On His Excellency's return to Willowmeade the escort mounted, and after again paying his devoirs to the ladies and handling the children, the Governor also mounted, and set off to Clutha Ferry, via Wharepa, where he intended visiting Peter Ayson, Esq., the first settler in that district. On arriving there, he for a brief time became an honoured guest. With true Highland hospitality, Mr. Ayson had left no effort untried to accord to his distinguished visitor a hearty and fitting welcome. A collation, at once elegant and substantial, was provided; family, friends, and neighbours were assembled in holiday costume. At the entrance gate a prettily conceived floral arch was erected, and over the house top the Red Cross Banner of England waved right royally. His Excellency was received by Mr. and Mrs. Ayson and family and the Rev. Mr. Waters. Luncheon was then partaken of, good cheer being also bounteously dispensed to all in attendance here as at the Major's. After a short rest the party proceeded to Balclutha, which was reached about dusk, thence taking the steamer "Tuapeka" to the residence of Mr. Pillans, and proceeding next morning to Tokomairiro.

Although Sir George's progress through the country was hurried, and his opportunities for observation but necessarily fleeting, yet he seemed greatly impressed with the constantly recurring evidence of agricultural thrift and prosperity, and his impression of the loyalty and friendship of the people could not be otherwise than favourable, except so far perhaps that they became at times just a trifle too demonstrative in their display of welcome, and allowed their zeal to outrun the bounds of strict etiquette and due decorum. In the progress of the cavalcade there was no attempt at order, marshals and bugle men were non est, and each man rode as if trying the merits of his steed as a steeplechaser, rather than as a guard of Her Majesty's Representative. But Sir George was well mounted on Dr. Smith's celebrated horse, and steadily kept the lead, while the motley crowd of hot and dust-begrimed equestrians following in wild con-

fusion, like Colonial huntsmen chasing an old man kangaroo, found before the journey was ended that both themselves and steeds had quite enough of it.

BALCLUTHA.

The following three addresses were presented to His Excellency Sir George Grey on the occasion of his visit:—

To His Excellency Sir George Grey, K.C.B.,

Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Colony of New Zealand, and Vice-Admiral of the same.

May it please Your Excellency,—

We, the brethren of the Clutha Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, in common with the honourable representatives of the mystic tie throughout the Province, desire to approach your Excellency with assurance of attachment to Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen and our loyalty to Her Throne.

We desire to join with the colonists generally in hailing with satisfaction your Excellency's visit to Otago, and pray that your Excellency may be long spared to see Otago prospering, and the craft progressing with the prosperity.

We pray that your Excellency, in your exalted position, may recognise our humble address, and accept our best wishes for your Excellency's future welfare, and our sympathy for your Excellency's trying position in conducting the war in the North Island to a successful and peaceful termination.

On behalf of the officers and brethren of the Clutha Lodge, Balclutha, this 9th day of March, 1867,

We have the honour to be,

R. Smith, R.W.M.; Robert Latta, S.W.;
J. Gibson-Smith, J.W.; W. Christie, Treasurer;
J. McNeil, S.D.

To His Excellency Sir George Grey,

Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over Her Majesty's Colony of New Zealand and its Dependencies, and Vice-Admiral of the same.

We, the undersigned officers of the Loyal Dalton Lodge of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows' Friendly Society, on behalf of our brethren, beg most respectfully to congratulate your Excellency on your visit to this portion of Otago, and to express our warm attachment to the Throne of our Gracious Sovereign Queen Victoria, and to your Excellency as her Representative in this Colony.

As a branch of an influential body, the objects of which are to relieve those of our Order in distress, we sincerely trust that your Excellency's presence on this occasion may have a tendency to further promote the objects we desire, and to unite us more in the bonds of goodfellowship and charity, and to maintain that loyalty to the Government under which we live.

Accept the fervent wishes of our Order that you may live long to rule over a happy and deserving people.

On behalf of the members of the Lodge, we have the honour to be your Excellency's obedient and humble servants,

Hugh Bowen, P.G.M.; Peter Mason, G.M.;
Wm. J. Cope, N.G.; Jno. McEwan, P.V.G.;
Jno. Low, V.G.

To His Excellency Sir George Grey, K.C.B.,

Governor of the Colony of New Zealand and its Dependencies, and Vice-Admiral of the same.

May it please your Excellency,—

We, the Clutha settlers, in presenting this address to your Excellency, desire to testify our loyalty and affection to the Throne of which your Excellency is the Representative in this Colony.

We gladly welcome your Excellency on this occasion, particularly as you have been so honourably connected with the past and present of New Zealand, and hope that your Excellency's visit will be conducive to the future interests of this Province.

We congratulate your Excellency's Government on the probable termination of the deadly strife carried on for some time between the Native race and Europeans, and we feel assured that under your Excellency's Government the honour of the British Flag and the Queen's prerogative will always be maintained with wisdom and benevolence.

We congratulate your Excellency on the rapid progress which has been made in agricultural and other branches of material prosperity in this portion of the Province under your Excellency's administration.

We beg to express our best wishes for your Excellency's personal welfare and happiness, and hope, under the blessing of God, that you may live long to enjoy all prosperity.

On behalf of the members of the Clutha District,

I have the honour to be,

Your humble and faithful servant,

JOHN H. JENKINSON.

THE BRAVE OLD PIONEERS.

Into the abyss of the past
Time checks each passing year;
But while life lasts we'll ne'er forget
To honour the Pioneers.

They bade farewell to Britain's shore,
Home, friends, and kindred dear,
To settle 'neath bright Southern skies:
Those brave old Pioneers.

When o'er swift Clutha's golden stream
They viewed the prospect drear,
Bright Hope was then the beacon star
Of the brave old Pioneers.

With steadfast faith and strenuous toil,
And hearts that knew no fear,
They fought old Nature's untamed wilds:
Those brave old Pioneers.

And soon, o'er savage hills and dales,
A wondrous change appears;
Bright waving fields and happy homes
Of the brave old Pioneers.

But Father Time, on restless wing,
Ne'er stays his swift career;
While grim old Death has taken toll
Of the brave old Pioneers.

Yet, tho' they're passing, one by one,
Their memory we'll revere,
And blazon on the scroll of Fame
The deeds of the Pioneers.