

Joe Collyer Died Nov 22 1894

The Great Reaper has gathered in another old identity and a fine old English gentleman, in the person of Joseph Collyer, a well known resident of this district and South Westland. The late Mr Collyer was a native of London, and was now in his 76th year. He was a Blue Coat School boy in his youth, and the old gentleman was rather proud of his association with the historical institution. He came to the colony very young, and has been an honest, straight forward colonist during his long career. He was a very early arrival in Westland, and in his prime took a prominent part in its political welfare, being a member of different bodies, including the Westland County Council, to which body he was returned for the Jackson Bay Riding in 1877. As Government officer, storekeeper, ferryman, guide, philosopher and friend, he was a very notable figure in South Westland. His generosity was limited only by his means, and no one ever appealed to Mr Collyer in vain. He was the best hearted of men, a fine open-minded, honest fellow, whose memory will always be cherished for the excellent traits which marked his fine character. Mr Collyer was a man of many parts, a great lover of music, and a staunch churchman. He was the type of man who made a useful member of any community, and in his happy combination of character will be greatly missed by those who were fortunate to know him. Mr Collyer held a Commission of the Peace, an honor he well deserved.

Nov. 22 1904

Mabelle Guadini 1904 Nov. 24

A Lyell telegram on Saturday stated a prospecting party near Lyell had struck a reef of 2 feet of clean stone, showing gold freely, supposed to be Mabelle's reef, as a penny was found on the top of the reef. The Westport News says Mabelle was a surveyor in the Lyell district about 1872, and reported that he had made a rich reef discovery within sight of Lyell. He said he had left a penny planted on the reef. Mabelle went to his native country, Italy, for machinery but the vessel containing it, together with the discoverer, was lost on its way out to the Colony.

A PIONEER'S STORY.

LONG JOURNEY IN OPEN BOAT.

PRIVATIONS BY SEA AND LAND.

The headlong rush to the West Coast diggings was the occasion for deeds of daring which deserve to be regarded in the annals of the race. By special request, Mr Samuel Fiddian, one of the old pioneers, wrote the following account of his experiences. The following is the full text of the letter, which is dated December 14th, 1920, and is now published for the first time:—

"I am writing a few lines of my experiences on the West Coast, thinking it may be a help to you. I may say I landed in Melbourne in 1857. I was twenty years of age at that time, and I am now in my eighty-fourth year. I left Melbourne in 1861 and came to Dunedin on the Gabriel Gully rush. I followed the diggings, leaving the Nokomai, in Otago, with my mate, Thomas McLroy. We came to Orepuki, north of Riverton; we stayed only a short time there, when we made up a party of thirteen to prospect the coast north of that place. We bought a boat that had been built to carry firewood on Waiholo Lake, near Dunedin. She was twenty-eight feet long and ten feet widest part; we fitted out with sails and provisions, eleven hundred of flour and other articles. We left Riverton at noon on a day in the middle of January, 1867, and sailed along all night. Next morning a northerly sea sprang up about 10 o'clock, so we landed on Mussel beach, a few miles south of Preservation Inlet. Owing to bad weather, we were bound there seven days, which we spent prospecting, but had no luck. On the eighth morning, early, the sea had calmed somewhat, so we put out thinking to get into Preservation Inlet, but the sea from north got very heavy when we got opposite the entrance. Although we got two on each of the five oars we could not gain an inch, as the wind was by that time blowing a gale off the land and there was a heavy northerly sea running.

"They were mostly sailormen on board; one, I must mention, was born in the Shetland Islands. I think he would be 65 years of age, and had spent most of his life in the North American fisheries, so I guess he had some boat experience. We called him the skipper. We held a consultation, and it was decided that there was only one thing we could do—that was to run across the straits to Stewart Island. So we rigged a small sail and steered for the island. We had to run before the sea, which got very heavy and was breaking over

the stern of the boat. It kept one baling hard all the time with a gold dish while often two were baling. We were all wet through with spray and rain. By evening we got near the north end of the island, which they said was Smoky Cove. I thought it a terrible-looking place. Presently darkness came on. We rigged a small log-of-mutton sail to keep way on the boat. We could not see the land. It was a dismal night, the sea still breaking over the stern. Then I heard the old skipper say to himself, 'Oh, Pilot, 'tis a fearful night, there is danger on the deep.' He was sitting in the bow of the boat looking out for land or rock. After some hours of darkness we got near a lot of rocks. It was as much as we could do to keep off the rocks with two of us at each oar. Presently the skipper said, 'We're getting into smoother water,' and soon we bumped on a shingle beach in a bay between Paterson's Inlet and Port William. At two o'clock in the morning, nearly perished, we managed to light a fire and got some hot water. When daylight appeared we saw a homestead. We soon made for it, and when we told our story the owner, whose wife was a half-caste Red Indian, soon made us very welcome. They were curing fish for market, and had men with two cutters to go out fishing on shares. Two sailing vessels came into Port William next morning. They had lost a lot of their gear, and were three weeks weather-bound.

"One afternoon we saw them go outside, so we made another start. Our thirteenth man said he had had enough of boating, so he left us. When going out from the bay, we saw the rocks were so near on that dismal night when Providence with the tide took us in and landed us safely on that beach. We soon saw the two sailing vessels, who had a very light breeze. We wanted to round Pyssegur Point, but the wind was not favourable. So, after being out all night, we got into Chalky Inlet next forenoon. We were in there ten days prospecting, but did not get payable gold. We lived splendidly on fish and birds, which were plentiful. During that time we made two unsuccessful attempts to get round Pyssegur Point; the third time we managed it with great difficulty, and got into Dusky Sound. We considered the most difficult part of our trip was passed when we had rounded the point. We passed two nights in Dusky. Going right through, we came out to sea at Breaksea. We were in several other sounds or inlets. We came opposite the entrance to Milford after sundown. We had been pulling all day, having no wind, but here there was a strong breeze blowing out of the sound, which made it a big work with two on each oar to get in. It took us over two hours. We left next morning with very small sail, as the wind was still very strong. When we got clear of the entrance, there was not a breath of wind, and we had to pull all the way to Big Bay. That was on my birthday, March 18th, 1867, and I was then thirty years of age. Next day, with light breeze, we sailed to Jackson's Bay, leaving the following day for the Haast river. Captain Turnbull was the harbourmaster there then. He hoisted the danger-signal, so went north of Heron Point. We lay there all night, dipping our oars to steady the boat. When daylight came, we landed in the little river. At noon on the second day we put out again for Haast. Still the

danger signal, so we steered for Okuru. A Maori (Jack), who had a gold medal for saving life on Lake Wakatipu, and who had just arrived overland, came out to us in a small dinghy, and steered us in at 10 o'clock at night. Thus finished the end of our eight weeks' boating."

The above simple story is typical of thousands that might have been recorded of the hardships endured by those who uncovered the riches of Westland to the admiring gaze of the world.

THE KEA.

IS HE CARNIVOROUS? A SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE. ("Weekly Press and Referee.") INTRODUCTION.

The Kea, *Nestor notabilis*, or mountain parrot, is found only in the Middle Island of New Zealand, where it lives among the peaks and valleys of the Southern Alps.

When discovered by Mr Wm. Mantell in 1856, the kea's chief food seemed to consist of insect larvæ and berries; however, as early as 1858 it was suspected not only of eating meat, but of becoming a bird of prey of no mean order. Rumours were heard to the effect that the bird attacked and killed sheep for the sake of the kidney and the kidney fat, which formed its special delicacies.

The first recorded instance, which was published in the "Otago Daily Times," runs as follows:—

"For the last three years the sheep belonging to a settler, Mr Henry Campbell, in the Wanaka district (Otago), appeared to have been afflicted with a new kind of disease. The first appearance of this supposed disease is a patch of raw flesh on the loin of the sheep, about the size of a man's hand. From this, matter continually runs down the sides, takes the wool completely off the part it touches, and in many cases death is the result. At last a shepherd noticed one of the mountain parrots sticking to a sheep and picking at a sore, and the animal seemed unable to get rid of its tormentor.

"The runholder gave directions to keep watch on the parrots, when mustering on high ground. The result has been that during the present season, when mustering high up on the ranges near the snow line, they saw several birds surrounding a sheep, which was freshly bleeding from a small wound on the loin; on other sheep were noticed places where the kea had begun to attack them, small pieces of wool having been picked out."

Though this record casts grave suspicion on the kea, it does not by any means absolutely prove that it was the culprit.

In the first instance, the bird was only picking at a sore on a sheep's back, just as to-day starlings are commonly seen in the same position, and to say that this fact proves that the sheep was killed by the kea, is putting more weight on the evidence than is justifiable.

In the second instance, the shepherds saw several keas surrounding (notice, not attacking or pecking) a wounded sheep, and with the uncertainty which existed at that time as to the true culprit, it might easily have turned out that some other animal had wounded the sheep and the keas had only been attracted by its struggles.

It seems from later investigations that the sheep had been killed by the keas, but the record here is only on circumstantial evidence, which can never, by itself, satisfactorily prove a scientific theory.

In the third instance, these shepherds jumped to the conclusion, that because the other sheep had some wool pulled out, the keas must have done it.

This shows that when men are anxious to prove a point, almost anything is taken as conclusive evidence, even though there is not the slightest reason for doing so.

This early record, though not conclusive, is very important because it points out in what direction the true sheep killer may be discovered, but before taking this supposition as correct, a very exhaustive examination should have been made for several years, to see if further researches confirmed the evidence of these men. However, though nearly fifty years have passed since the record was first published,

there has not been one genuine attempt to enquire into the case, and up to the end of 1905, this is the only definite case recorded where a man actually saw a kea picking at a live sheep. Of course many articles have been written, both in magazines and scientific works, but I cannot find one writer who says that he ever saw a kea attack a sheep, nor is the name of any man given who said that he had seen the bird at work.

It has been since proved that there were, and are at the present time, many men who have been eye-witnesses to the birds' depredations, but from the available records in 1905, not one could be found. It seems a great pity that men of scientific standing should publish in their books, on such paltry evidence, as though it were an undoubtedly proved fact, that the kea had become not only carnivorous, but a bird of prey.

I think I am justified in saying, that up to 1905, all the literature that had been published, stating the kea was guilty of the crime, has been giving to the world as a fact a statement which has never been satisfactorily proved.

If there is anything that wants to be most conclusively proved, it is a scientific fact, and as long as investigators continue to publish, as true, half-proved theories, only error and confusion can be the result.

As might be expected from such unsatisfactory evidence, later investigations do not always uphold these hasty conclusions, jumped at by early writers.

It is rather surprising to find that no one questions the weight of the evidence until 1900, when Dr. L. Cockayne, the retiring president of the Canterbury Philosophical Institute, while reading a paper "On some little known Country in the Waimakariri District" made the following statement:—

"I have never seen it (the Kea) attack sheep, nor have I ever met with anyone, shepherd, musterer, or mountaineer traveller, who has done so; the most that my enquiries have elicited is that sheep are found from time to time with holes in their backs, and that Keas have been seen hovering round sheep."

A very warm discussion followed, and from that time, people have been looking into the evidence. The result has been that there are more people who disbelieve the kea's guilt to-day than there were ten years ago. Dr. Cockayne and his supporters do not state that the kea is innocent, but that at the present time the recorded evidence is not strong enough to condemn the bird.

Let us glance through the most conclusive recorded evidence, and see on what grounds the bird's guilt has been declared proved.

The late Mr T. H. Potts condemns the kea from what appears to be hearsay evidence only. He writes:—"Through the kind offices of Mr Robert Wilkin, the writer has been greatly assisted with valuable notes, acquired by sheep farmers, owners of stations, shepherds, etc." Unfortunately, Mr Potts does not state that any of his informants ever saw a kea at work or whether the notes were merely the sheep-station rumours, of which a bookful could be collected to-day.

Again, he does not seem to have seen the bird attacking sheep, but as his guarantee, mentions the names of several men, but there is nothing to show that even these men were eye-witnesses.

In 1878 the Hon. D. Menzies writes a paper on the kea, and is certain of the kea's guilt, but he also does not give his authority, which, however, is evidently some shepherds.

Sir Walter Buller gives a complete description of the bird, and also an illustration of a kea attacking a sheep, but again no eye-witness is mentioned, with the exception of a shepherd, who said that a kea attacked some sheep while he was driving them. There is no name given, and so we do not know who the man was or anything about him.

In 1884 Reischek wrote an article giving his actual experience with keas, but though he saw them eating the carcasses, and also found wool and fat in

their crops, he never saw one attack a sheep.

Mr C. H. Huddleston, in 1891, gives an account of his experience in Kea country, and condemns the bird, but from his own account, he never saw the sheep attacked by one.

In 1894, Mr Taylor White accused the bird, but yet does not seem to have been an eye-witness, but bases his conclusions on hearsay, for he says, "One day my brother John came home and said that he knew what caused the holes in the backs of the sheep. It was done by the Kea. This surprised me greatly, but I soon afterwards had evidence of the fact myself, for when some of these birds had once found out that blood of the sheep was good for food, others were initiated into the performance."

What Mr White and his brother saw is not stated, and we think that if a Kea had been seen attacking a sheep it would be almost certain to have been mentioned in the paper. I have since had a letter from Mr Taylor White, stating that he has never seen a Kea kill a sheep.

In February, 1906, at a meeting of runholders, held at Culverden, some strong remarks were made about the loss of sheep caused by the Kea, and the Wellington Philosophical Society was ridiculed for upholding the statement that at the present time the recorded evidence against the Kea was not sufficient to condemn it. However, in spite of all their talk, only one speaker was reported to have seen the Kea attacking sheep. The rest all spoke from hearsay, and I have since received a letter from the reported eye-witness, stating that the newspaper had misrepresented his remarks, for he had never said any such thing at the meeting. This meeting was the means of leading many people to believe in the Kea's guilt, and yet when the evidence was sifted, not one man saw the Kea do it.

This is the pith of the recorded evidence up to the end of 1905, and not one writer brought forward a reliable instance where a sheep had been seen to be attacked and killed by the Kea. The strongest evidence against the bird was the circumstantial, which may be classed as follows:—

- I. Against the Kea—
 - a. The account of the Wanaka shepherds.
 - b. Only where Keas were known to live, were the sheep wounded after the Kea's method. Where they were unknown, no instance of this special kind of sheep-killing had been seen.
 - c. If sheep had been killed, and the birds in that place were shot, the killing at that spot ceased.
 - d. Keas had been seen to fly off the bodies of sheep, and wool and fat had been found in their crops.
 - e. Some Keas in captivity would eat meat, fat, skins, etc.

This evidence may be sufficient to satisfy the general public, but it is inadequate to prove it conclusively as a scientific fact.
- II.—For the kea—
 - a. The lack of recorded eye-witnesses.
 - b. In many places where keas were known to live, no sheep had been killed after the kea's method.
 - c. Many keas in captivity would not eat meat, etc.
 - d. Many of the men who accused the bird were paid for exterminating them, and they would naturally wish the story to be believed.