

THE LATE FRANCIS COTTON.

As there were several slight inaccuracies in the first obituary notice published of the late Francis Cotton, we give by request the following record:—

Francis Cotton, the subject of this notice, was born in London in 1801, was educated at Friend's School, Ackworth, and having served an apprenticeship to a builder and contractor in London afterwards engaged in business on his own account. He was a member of the Drapers' Company, and held a certificate of the freedom of the City of London. He married Anna Maria Tilney, like himself a member of the Society of Friends, and daughter of John Tilney, the owner of a freehold in Kelvedon, Essex. Though making good headway in his trade, he much disliked it, and he disliked the London fogs still worse; and so after recovering from an attack of rheumatic fever, he wished to be a colonist in the Australias, which were then being colonized. After the birth of the fifth child, the family left England during the latter part of the year 1828, in the Mary, with the intention of settling in New South Wales. Many Friends came lovingly to see the last of them going to a land of which little was known. The voyage occupied about six months, during which the ship was dismayed after passing the Cape of Good Hope, and arrived at Hobart Town under jury masts. Tired of the sea, and struck by the beauty of the shores of the Derwent in early summer, they abandoned their intention of settling in New South Wales, and stayed in Van Diemen's Land. Francis Cotton started at once through the Midland district to see what land was available, and took his first Christmas dinner in company with William Pike, a fellow passenger by the Mary and Henry Jellicoe, in the tent of John Helder Wedge, which was set up in a honey-suckle flat, on or near the spot where Wanstead House, the residence of John Taylor, now stands. He resided in Hobart Town for about six months in Macquarie-street, in a house afterwards known as the "Royal Oak," opposite the Hutchins School," and built the house now called Northam, formerly occupied by Dr. Officer, and now in the possession of the family of the late Captain William Fisher. This he sold to Captain Wilson, brother of the late Sir J. M. Wilson, and took payment in sheep, barter being almost imperative in those days, owing to the insufficiency of currency. Having determined to settle in Swanport, F. Cotton and family left Hobart in the brig Leopold, which, to land stores, anchored off the penal station at Maria Island, Major Lord being commandant. Whilst there a ground swell came in, and drove the vessel ashore. Such was the rigour of the discipline on the station that food and lodging were scarcely obtainable for the shipwrecked passengers. They soon started for the military station at Waterloo Point (Swansea) in George Meredith's "meatboat" (a whaleboat raised on and partly decked). G. Meredith, Cambria, then supplied the Maria Island station with fresh meat. When the vessel was about half way to Swansea it was found necessary to return to the island, a small boat having been accidentally left behind. Impatient of delay, F. Cotton, wife and nurse, with three of the children, got into the very small dingy, which, thus loaded to the water's edge, he pulled on some fifteen miles in search of Swansea. It was an exceedingly placid afternoon, or the history of Francis Cotton had ended here. On arrival at Swansea they took possession of a sod hut, which Dr. Story, district assistant-surgeon and commissariat officer, had prepared. The sod walls had been built by the Government boat's crew, the doctor got it roofed, and the soldiers had thatched it. To this hut F. Cotton conveyed all the stores which he had brought from England, suitably selected for a colonist. Just as they had all their belongings comfortably arranged an unfortunate accident occurred—the thatch took fire on the inside, and instantly the whole roof was in flames, which spread so rapidly that everything was speedily consumed. Two kangaroo dogs were burned to death, and the children were hardly saved in their night dresses. They and their mother, with an infant (the sixth), were compelled to stand in the night air till they were found shelter by the soldiers' wives. F. Cotton was at this time with his hand in a sling, having had it crushed by a falling tree at his clearing then begun at Salt Water Lagoon (Kelvedon). He always referred with grateful feelings to the special kindness shown to his family by the wife of Commissary Woolrabe on that occasion. The commandant, Lieut. Lane, lent him the Government boat, coxswain, and crew, and he went off to Hobart Town for clothing, the boat being dragged by Robert Mather on a truck across "Mather's Neck," Muddy Plains. On their return, after having supplied himself with clothing and necessaries for the family, the first night's camp was N.E. of East Bay Neck, near the spot where Tasman first landed (and which J. E. Calder says Tasman would find unaltered now). Next morning they pulled on across the bay, and rounded Cape Bernier, and landed on ground then owned by Captain Glover, but now owned by Francis Cotton. The party, consisting of seven, made breakfast off a single wattlebird, and pulled on to Swansea. As lodgings were not procurable at Swansea, F. Cotton and family at once removed to Kelvedon, and took the men's hut while a cottage was prepared, with the intention of merely providing for present necessity, "the house" to be built afterwards, but with the family increasing, and other exigencies, more room was needed. So the cottage was expanded, and still stands, the house having not yet been built.

The blacks at this time were very troublesome. It was just before being burnt out at Swansea that they attacked the men clearing the ground where Kelvedon House now stands. The men, four of them, had piled their arms when the blacks sneaked on them and secured the guns, and then attacked in force. The terrified men said there were hundreds, and first made a rush for where the guns had been left, then separated and dashed across the arm of the lagoon and made for the sea. One man was speared through the leg, and another through the body, but broke off the spear and ran on, the blacks chasing him; he kept along the beach in the edge of the surf, and as they threw their spears and waddies at him "ducked" and let them pass over into the sea. When their ammunition was exhausted he attacked them with a stick and they fled. He struggled along the shore 4 miles, and

was found exhausted near "Webber's" (Piermont). After some months' careful treatment by Dr. Story, the man recovered. Francis Cotton met two of the flying men about one and a half miles towards Swansea, who reported hundreds of blacks, guns stolen, hut burnt, and the other two men killed. They earnestly dissuaded him from going on and their terror could not be overcome; so he hurried back to Swansea and obtained a party. Dr. Story, who had just ridden into Swansea, at once posted off in advance; the blacks had vanished (they could do so or appear without sound)—the men all turned up. F. Cotton himself never carried firearms as a protection from blacks. Always when the men were afraid to look for the strayed bullocks he would himself go alone and bring them in.

Omitting other incidents of blacks and the black line, it may be mentioned that Robinson, the "black tamer," camped at Kelvedon with a relay of his captured blacks, who displayed their agility in playing with a ball and in spear-throwing. A "gin" ran up a bare brick wall for the ball as easily as a mouse does.

About this time F. Cotton searched the east coast from Cape Bernier to Cape Portland to find a place to locate a "maximum grant." He met with strange experiences and hardships, but near Cape Portland found a piece of ground to his liking, and duly applied for it. After considerable delay he was politely informed "that section" had already been applied for by ——— and he could have an adjoining section, which he declined.

Some years after settling down at Kelvedon he added to his property an estate north of Swansea, purchased from the Gellibrand family. He was probably the first purchaser and exporter of wool in Swanport. It used to be sheared off the sheep for their health's sake and burned. He also bought whale oil for shipment to England: but the ship having to go into Rio for repairs and therefore unloaded, the oil in that climate all leaked away, and with this loss of hundreds of pounds terminated F. Cotton's career as a merchant. He contented himself thereafter on his own properties. An energetic hard-working man, who religiously hated idleness, he lived through times of great depression of the colony always holding his own, so that none ever lost by him; and on the other hand it was a satisfaction to him to know that he had never sold grain at famine prices—a singular circumstance.

Francis Cotton was always a good citizen, and gave much of his time and ability to public matters. He was the first convener of public meetings for Glamorgan (appointed by Colonel Arthur). He and Captain McLaine were a deputation from Swanport to wait on that Governor to request him to send a road party to improve the road over the Rocky Hills—the precise section the district still asks for, viz., "the Rocky Hills deviation," and it was commenced. He took a great interest in the roads of both his own and the adjoining districts; and when once, after a vice-regal visit, two "pass-holders" were offered tickets-of-leave to find certain new roads out of the district, F. Cotton was deputed to see what they had found; and as they could not show a practical line, and therefore felt assured they would not get their "ticket," they took care to lose him; but being a good bushman, he soon made his way home. He was in the road trust from the commencement, and the first on the poll of the first rural municipal election in Tasmania; an active member in getting the municipal institution into working order, and erecting suitable buildings. He was elected also a councillor in the Spring Bay district, and for many years he filled both offices with all his might, only retiring from active public life when old age compelled it. He was many times requested to fill the office of justice of the peace; but believing the command of Christ, "But I say unto you swear not at all," was binding upon Christians and not to be evaded—that it was not merely profane swearing that Christ precluded, but an unwarrantable familiarity with His holy name to back up our truth or falsehood; so he understood and obeyed. And what he dared not do, he dared not compel others to do. He was much urged by an influential deputation to take the place of a nominee councillor, in Governor Denison's time; but said he would never have his judgment nor his voice fettered, so he refused courteously but firmly. He once contested the representation of Glamorgan for the House of Assembly, but though influentially supported he was unsuccessful—he refused to ask for votes or to supply drink. He was afterwards asked to stand, but thought it better he should not. However, his interest in political matters never flagged; he strenuously advocated what he saw to be for the good of the people and the land, and opposed any impending legislation he deemed wrong. His epistles were weighty and powerful, as many a governor and public man in Tasmania this last half century could attest; but "his bodily presence and speech" had been far more effective.

As a man he was thorough, upright, and above-board—intensely practical. His advice in many matters was much sought, and was cheerfully and carefully given. He was a consistent Christian from early life—above all narrowness and sectarianism—practical in this as in all things. Not to be beguiled by symbol or by mysticism, he knew that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lust we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world," and thus by the grace of God he lived. He was a valued member of the Society of Friends, to which he belonged both by birth and conviction, and was helpful to his fellow-members in the concerns of this church. He died as he lived, unselfishly and bravely—not a repining word ever escaped his lips. The stomach, always his weak point had latterly given way, so that no solid food could be taken for many months past. About three weeks before his death the irritation culminated in vomiting whenever anything was swallowed. This went on and increased till he was starved to death. He was buried at Kelvedon, beside his wife, who had died only six and a half months before. They had been married 63 years, brought five children to Tasmania in 1828, and nine others were born to them in Swanport, of whom 10 survive—8 sons and 2 daughters.