

EIGHTY THREE YEARS IN NEW ZEALAND 1863 - 1946

The Reminiscences of FREDERIC CLEMENT UTTING

These reminiscences were typed out for the family, with copies being made, then copies of these A carbon copy of a copy was scanned, then put into text form in a computer. This was not without some difficulty, owing to the blurry nature of the copy used; some letters ('m', 'w', and commas in particular) produced interesting variations, to say the least, necessitating a great number of corrections to be made to the scanned output.

Generally no changes have been made to the text, apart from correcting two or three typing errors, and adding or removing some commas for clarity.

No doubt these reminiscences could be edited — for example, with the addition of estimated dates of events described, dates of births, deaths, and marriages, names of spouses and children, background information relating to some places, incidents, etc. Perhaps these could be added as footnotes.

CHAPTER ONE

On August 8th, 1856, at Wisbeck in the county of Cambridgeshire, England, a son was born to Mr & Mrs F.J.Utting, Lower Hill Street, Wisbeck and was christened Frederic Clement, now in his 90th year and writer of these reminiscences.

My father was a licensed surveyor and civil engineer. He was twice married and had a family of four sons and one daughter by his first wife.

Finding things rather dull in the old country he decided to emigrate to a new one. In the year 1859 he took passage to New Zealand on a ship called the "Red Jacket", bringing with him his four sons named respectively Edwin, Walter, Clifford and Arthur; leaving his daughter Edith with his second wife and her young family of three girls and two boys in the old country. The names of the children were Annie, Jane, Emily, Fred and Charlie. The incidents recorded in the following pages show that for the first 45 years of my life it was a continual struggle to make both ends meet. During that period I never had a five pound note to call my own.

From my earliest years I always had a fancy for carpentering but was not able to follow it up owing to family troubles. During the course of my life I have been engaged in several different occupations, including flax milling, saw mill work, gum digging. surveyor's chainman, carpentry, dairy farming and fruit and strawberry growing.

After my 45th birthday the tide of fortune turned. By what means this was brought about will be explained later. Suffice to say here that events over which I had no control kept me in debt and difficulties.

CHAPTER TWO

Four years after leaving England my father sent for his second wife and family to join him, which they did, coming out in a ship named "The Bombay" (Capt. Sellars) arriving in Auckland about the end of 1862. Incidentally I may mention that the ship "Bombay" made a second trip to the colony, arriving in the harbour in tow of the warship "Curucca", in a disabled condition, having been dismasted off the Three Kings. Her passengers settled in the district that is now called after the ship,

My poor father's hopes of making his fortune in New Zealand were doomed to disappointment. He was evidently born under an unlucky star. As long as he lived he was always in debt and difficulties owing to not being able to get sufficient work at his profession. His oldest son Edwin who had passed his examination as a licensed surveyor, fell into a decline and passed away at the early age of 26, and was followed soon after by his brother Clifford, both victims of that terrible scourge consumption. His second son Walter escaped the disease and lived to the age of 89. He had been a member of the firm Vines, Utting and Perston, Island traders for a long period. The youngest son Arthur died when farming at about 60 years of age. Edith the only daughter of the first family, married a Mr. William Causeley, also fell a victim to the disease of consumption, died a few years later, leaving two children to mourn her loss.

CHAPTER THREE

When I arrived in Auckland as a boy of 7, 83 years ago, Auckland was a very small place indeed. My first recollections on landing were of seeing a lot of Maori canoes drawn up on the beach, not far from the foot of Shortland Street, filled with large kits of luscious peaches which the Maori were offering to the Pakeha for a “herring” (an English shilling). Peaches seemed to be the only thing that was plentiful in Auckland then, except mud. The dray conveying our luggage got bogged in Upper Queen Streets then the principal thoroughfare, not being properly formed. The Maori war was raging at the time so two of my elder brothers had to join the militia. I remember having to take lunch to them when on sentry duty at Government House. English soldiers had been sent out to defend the young colony. I remember seeing the soldiers playing cricket in their barracks near where Princes Street is now. These barracks were surrounded by a high stone wall with big gates at either end which were closed to the public at sunset. Auckland up to this time had no proper water supply, getting only a meagre supply from the domain ponds.

Applications were invited for a scheme for a better supply.

My father advocated the Western Springs and spent a lot of time over it, but although his scheme was eventually adopted he got little remuneration for his trouble. Just prior to this my father had had a two-storied house built in Grafton Road, but not having sufficient money to finish it he had to raise a mortgage and after a year or two, owing to hard times, was not able to keep up the interest payments. It eventually fell back into the hands of the Mortgagee, my father losing all his interest in it, which was considerable.

When about nine years of age I was sent to Dr. Kidd’s Collegiate School in Karangahape Road. The building, a three-storey one [is still there], though now surrounded by shops. Dr. Kidd soon after gave up his school to become Headmaster of the Grammar School.

I can recall the names of some of my fellow scholars, namely Weymouth, Longdill, Cooper, Hill and Vialou. To get to school I had to scramble across the cemetery gully twice a day, the swing bridge had not then been erected. Originally there was a sawmill somewhere about where the Town Hall now stands. Fire destroyed this mill, so of course a lot of us boys had to go down during the dinner hour to see what was left of the mill, which however wasn’t much as only the engine and the boiler remained. We were not allowed to approach very close as there was a danger of the boiler bursting. Talking about fires, I remember a disaster that occurred a few years after, nearly all the houses and shops on one side of Shortland Street being swept away. Among the buildings destroyed was the Land Office in which a lot of title deeds and other valuable papers were lost, necessitating a fresh survey having to be made in some cases.

It was a very anxious time for the settlers in Auckland during the Maori War,

the enemy sometimes approached within a few miles of the city. On one occasion my brother Arthur was chased while after the cows on a farm at Papakura, but managed to escape.

Things being so dull in the surveying line my father resolved to leave the town and go up country to try his hand at farming.

He left the city and settled at Port Albert in the Kaipara district. We reached there by means of a steamer called the "Prince Alfred", then trading between the Manakau and the Kaipara Harbour. The steamer had a lot of sheep on board consigned to Coates Bros., of Matakoho, one of them becoming eventually the father of Gordon Coates, Prime Minister of the Colony.

CHAPTER FOUR

The settlement of Port Albert had been founded three or four years before this by a party of settlers calling themselves "Nonconformists". They were on the whole a fine lot of settlers comprising a variety a variety of tradesmen including carpenters, blacksmiths, drapers, shoe-makers, tinsmiths, farmers, &c, and some with no trade at all. There were among them several first-class musicians both vocal and instrumental. A Mr. Wm.Armitage was, I believe, one of the best violinists in the Colony.

Concerts were given occasionally to break the monotony of bush life. The great day of the year was the 29th of May, when a great tea meeting and concert were held to celebrate the anniversary of the settlement. People used to come from far and near, both Pakeha and Maori. There were also a few good cricketers among them, some of whom made a name for themselves in later years in matches against Rodney County. I have a distinct recollection of watching the swift round arm bowling of Mr. Hoby Brookes. Later on I shall have more to say about cricket.

Among the social amenities inaugurated was a Mutual Improvement Society which used to meet in rotation at each member's home.

Altogether we used to have pretty good times in those days, in spite of there being no radio to listen to or picture shows to attend.

The Agricultural Society also started an annual show, which although at first on a very small scale, grew in the process of time to quite a large affair and was kept up for a long period.

Among the settlers who came out with the nonconformists was a Dr. Bell, who however was lost to the settlement after four or five years. He was taken very ill while attending a patient at Wharehine and died of what was called inflammation of the bowels, but which now I suppose would be called appendicitis.

There was also another sad death which occurred soon after, a young man named Wattam accidentally shot himself while after wild duck. It was also somewhere about this time that my two brothers, already referred to, came home to die.

The sad events just recorded cast quite a gloom over the settlement for a time.

CHAPTER FIVE

As already stated my father came to Port Albert in the hopes of bettering his position financially. These hopes however were not realised because his efforts to make a living off the land were not very successful and consequently finances got down to a very low ebb. For a long time we had nothing for breakfast but Sharp's porridge. My brother and I had to go about in clothes made from flour bags, branded in large letters in black and red.

My mother, who was a delicately nurtured lady, was not cut out for a farmer's wife. However she did her best to help by opening a small school where she taught her own children and had a few other pupils, who however did not pay much to help the family exchequer.

I may say in passing that all the schooling I ever had was what my mother gave me and less than two years at school, but when I left school altogether to go to work at the age of 11 I was as far advanced as if I had passed the sixth standard. My father had to pawn some of his surveying instruments to keep things going. He had hoped to make a surveyor of me but as he could not afford to keep me at school he had to abandon the idea.

My first job was at a flax mill at a wage of seven shillings a week. I remained there for a year or two when it closed down as it was not paying. While working there I was nearly drowned. I had gone bathing with some of my companions and was carried away by the outgoing tide. I became unconscious but luckily I was rescued before it was too late. I next tried my hand at gum digging, there being a small gum field nearby. Although I used the spear until my back ached, I didn't strike much gum, but had the mortification of seeing other diggers stagger home with as much gum as they could carry, while my bag remained nearly empty. Later on I may have more to say about gum digging.

My next job was at the Topuni Saw Mill, run by a Mr. R. Nicholson where I was paid 36/- a week. I had to work ten and a half hours on five days of the week and five on Saturdays. Previous to this when my father did get any surveying to do, I always went with him as chainman; eventually I learned to use the theodolite as well. Soon after that the Tauhoa block of land was thrown open under the Homestead Act. Under this Act, a man could take up a certain number of acres of land, the same quantity for his wife and half the quantity for each child. All he had to do was to pay for the survey, erect a house to the value of £70, bring a certain quantity under cultivation and reside on the selection for three years, after which if he fulfilled the condition he could claim the title. My father was given the job of subdividing the block, so of course I had to leave the mill and go to his assistance. For a considerable time we were kept quite busy.

Unfortunately however, quite a number of the selectors failed to pay for the survey, some only paid a part and some nothing at all. Consequently after paying wages to the men employed to cut the lines, there was not a great deal left.

Soon after the death of Dr. Bell a medical club was formed and an effort made to keep a medical man in the district. None of them stopped long however as the district was, I suppose, too healthy to maintain a doctor. We had however, a Maternity Nurse who, I was told, ushered into the world nearly one hundred babies without the loss of either mother or baby.

A few years later, when the district had been without a doctor for a considerable time, one was discovered on the gumfields. He was a clever doctor but had fallen a victim to drink. He was induced by some good temperance people at Port Albert to sign the pledge and join the Good Templar Lodge. He was provided with a house and decent clothes to wear. For several months he kept his pledge and became quite a respectable member of society. Unfortunately (although Port Albert was a prohibition district) wine was allowed to be manufactured, and sold in wholesale lots. Some of his so-called friends invited him to partake of their home-made wine with the result that he fell once again a victim to the vile stuff. The Good Templars got him back again but eventually he fell again, left the district and died a drunkard's death soon afterwards.

CHAPTER SIX

Communication with Auckland was a very difficult matter for a long time. In the early days there were only two ways of getting there. One was by cutter to Helensville, thence by coach to Riverhead, and then by another small steamer to Auckland. My mother who needed to go occasionally was once four days on the journey. The other route was overland to Mangawai and thence by cutter. My father essaying to go that way on one occasion, arrived at Mangawai just in time to see the cutter disappearing around the heads, she having taken advantage of a fair wind and left before her advertised time. My father finished the journey on foot taking nearly a week to do it. After a time a wharf was built at Port Albert and a steamer took the place of the cutter.

The railway had reached Helensville by that time. This was of course a considerable improvement but still far from what it might have been. The next improvement was the opening of a road through to Warkworth a distance of 18 to 20 miles. Considerable difficulty was experienced in making this road; about 10 miles of almost impenetrable bush lay between. No less than seven different surveyors were employed at different times each one cutting a line in a different place. One surveyor kept as much as possible to the hills and ranged to avoid as many bridges as possible. Another went to the other extreme and kept to the valleys making a lot of graceful curves and picturesque bends. Eventually a road was formed comprising portions of some of the different lines.

Although the road was formed it remained unmetalled for a considerable time, consequently it was almost impassable in winter time. There was also another difficulty to be overcome. About halfway between Port Albert and Warkworth was a stream of water, called by courtesy a river. The stream in ordinary times was only about 30 feet wide, has been known to rise 50 to 60 feet, overflowing its banks and flooding the surrounding country. However when the bush had been cleared away it did not rise to anything like the height it used to, the water getting away more quickly. Of course it was necessary to build a good high bridge over the stream. While the bridge was being built, an incident occurred which may interest my readers. One of my sisters and her lady friend and her brother decided to go to town by way of Warkworth. They had two horses and I was induced to go with them to bring the horses back (incidentally these horses had side saddles on). I knew little or nothing about riding at the time only having been on a horse once or twice before. When we arrived at the Hoteo, as the river was called, we found the temporary bridge, which the men working on the bridge had been using, under water. My sister's friend's brother and I could have got over ourselves but to get the girls over was another matter. The men building the bridge told us that the flood was going down and if we waited until the morning we might still be able to catch the boat at Warkworth. They told us that we could doss down in the empty shanty that was there. They said they would toss us some tucker over.

As my friend was very anxious to get to town they decided to take the men's advice. From the top of the pile, which they had already driven, they started operations. First they threw a loaf of bread which fell short and was carried away by the stream. The next attempt was no more successful. They then threw a lump of corned beef which also fell short. Having no more food to waste all we had for tea was dry bread washed down with some cocoa we had in the shanty but with no milk or sugar. In the morning, none of us having had any sleep worth mentioning, we decided that the flood was still too high for the girls to cross, we decided to go home again, which we proceeded to do.

We met with further adventures on the way. As neither of the girls were used to riding they suggested that they walk and we menfolk ride the horses. The change being made, all went well for a time. The horse I was riding had been previously ridden by my sister's friend, Miss K. Edgar. Her luggage was strapped on the off side of the side saddle when, going down a rather steep hill, the surcingle suddenly broke, allowing the parcel to dangle under the horse's belly. The horse took fright and bolted, and I held on like grim death to the pommel of the sidesaddle. Having kicked the parcel to pieces and scattered its contents all along the road, the horse eventually slackened his pace a bit allowing me to recover the reins and pull him up.

CHAPTER SEVEN

About this time my poor father took to his bed from which he never rose again. departing this life at the age of 65. My mother thereupon went to live with her daughter Emily who had married a Mr.P.Beecroft and had a family of five boys. My sister Jane married a Mr.B.M.Gubb, a schoolmaster who later became an orchardist. They had a family of six or seven. My other sister had married a Mr.Abercrombie and lived in Auckland.

A little before my father passed away I had been engaged as a chainman with a surveyor named Blythe who was surveying a road from Huntly to Raglan. I had for a companion a man named Lundrus who was supposed to be learning surveying. Mr.Blythe also had to supervise a gang of Maoris who were forming the road as we went along. Mr.Blythe owned a horse but every time he wanted it he had to give the Maoris 5/- to catch it for him. On Saturday afternoon our party, accompanied by a lot of Maoris, used to ride down to Huntly a distance of 6 or 7 miles from our camp.

On one occasion a mishap befell the boss. The horse on which he was riding fell while going down a steep hill, throwing the rider and stunning him. Whereupon a big hefty Maori picked him up and threw him across his shoulder, and carried him down to a stream of water where he soon recovered consciousness. Although no bones were broken, he was so badly injured that he had to be sent to hospital leaving me in charge of the work. On his return three weeks later he expressed surprise that we had made so much progress with the job.

Soon after this, the money voted for the job came to an end so I had to return home, or rather I had no home until I married the girl I had been keeping company with for some time, although what I married on, goodness knows.

However we decided to chance it. Soon after this Blythe, having another job, sent for me to join him but having got married I could not very well go. Had I done so I would have been present at the Tarawera eruption. The names of Blythe and Lundrus were very prominent in the newspapers.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I did not commence my married life under very auspicious conditions having little or no money and possessing only a mortgaged farm. I had however six heifers to break in with which I proposed to start dairy farming. These heifers had been running wild for a considerable time and took some breaking in. My wife, when I married her, was to all appearances a strong and healthy girl, who before her marriage had often to milk ten or eleven cows for her father. I had not been married many months before my troubles commenced. Owing to the state of my wife's health, she could not give me much help with the cows. I had to get a doctor to attend her on two or three occasions There being no doctor at Port Albert I had to get a Dr.Mountain from Maungatoroto, 35 miles away, at the cost of 4 guineas.

I soon found that I could not make a living off the place, butter only fetching 6d per pound and eggs the same price per dozen. Fruit was also a drug on the market (this was before the export trade was started). The little fruit I sometimes sent to the market sometimes hardly paid expense, apples sometimes only fetching a ½d per pound. After trying in vain to get a decent boy to milk, I gave up in disgust, dried the cows off, or rather they dried themselves off owing to the very dry summer we were experiencing.

About that time I got one of my wife's sisters to keep her company while I went to work at Aratapu, on the Northern Wairoa. However the job I was given, namely working at a big circular saw with two other men, proved too heavy work for me. It consisted of squaring, logs for export and involved heavy jacking. After a few weeks at it I had to give it up, owing to a pain in my side which the local doctor diagnosed as a heart disease. I did not altogether believe that so I went to Auckland and consulted another doctor, Dr.Knight, who told me that I had strained the muscles of my heart by too heavy work.

Soon after this a Mr.Mander opened a sawmill at Port Albert, where I obtained a job as tallyman and timber stacker, where I stayed for two or three years. While working there we formed a cricket club and used to play against some of the surrounding districts. On one occasion we arranged to play a match against Warkworth. The mill hands nearly all owned horses so to get an early start we obtained permission to put the clocks on an hour. No less than four people tinkered with the clock and advanced it an hour with the result that the whistle went at 3a.m. instead of 7a.m. As the mill clock was always kept an hour ahead the whistle actually went at 2a.m. All hands turned up except one who did not hear the whistle, so we finished our week's work at 6 a.m, and were able to make an early start on our journey. We were fortunate to reach our destination uninjured, as unknown to us the Council's workmen had taken up an old culvert, intending to replace it with a new one, leaving a gap of ten feet in the middle of the road. When the three leading horsemen (of whom I was one) came careering around the bend at full speed, it was impossible to pull up, so we had

to take a flying leap over. The rest of the team who were not going so fast managed to pull up. A few years previous to this while working at Nicholson's mill, we used to play matches against the Mutual Improvement Society. We used to call these games "Intellect v Sawdust". I being eligible to play for either side used to play for "Sawdust". Intellect usually came off second best. There was also a Port Albert Club in existence for a number of years. We used to play matches against the surrounding district, Warkworth, Wharehine, Hakaru and Wellsford

CHAPTER NINE

The settlers north of Auckland had for a long time been agitating for the railway to be pushed on. It had been taken as far as Kaipara Flats and there it had stuck for several years. Two different routes were proposed, one through Port Albert, the other through Wellsford, the latter route being decided on. Previous to the railway being made, Wellsford was looked on as a suburb of Port Albert, all traffic coming to catch the steamer at the latter. Now it is the other way about; Wellsford has gone ahead by leaps and bounds while Port Albert has remained stationary, that is numerically; the majority of them have prospered financially and are, as a rule, in comfortable circumstances. Several of them have large orchards, so Port Albert had quite a name for its apples. Of late years however, owing to the many pests they have had to contend with, some have cut down their trees and gone in for dairying as a more profitable proposition.

At the time I was working at the sawmills, kauri timber was being exported in large quantities. While I was working at Aratapu there were four mills on the Northern Wairoa, some working night and day. Most of the timber was exported to Australia, a small quantity going to England. Only the very best timber was exported, the ruling price was only 10 to 12 shillings per hundred feet. Now it is between 70 and 80 shillings I believe. The wages that mill hands received varied from six to eight shillings per day of 10½ hours.

Just prior to my marriage, two of my companions and I decided to leave the mill and try our hand at gumdigging. Gum was fetching a very high price at the time, a lot of gumdiggers making four to five pounds a week. We being new hands at the job did not do so well. After being at it for about six weeks, with poor success, the price of gum suddenly dropped, so we packed up and went back to the mill again, having cleared about as much as if we had stayed there.

CHAPTER TEN

About this time I was called upon to mourn the loss of my dear Mother. She went down to the township one morning in her usual health, and while there she was struck down with an apoplectic fit, and passed away about 24 hours after, never having gained consciousness.

My dear wife's health, having improved after the birth of her first baby, in the course of a few more years presented me with four more babies, all five boys. Soon after this however, she was taken ill again and had to be sent to the Auckland Hospital to undergo an operation.

During the interval between working at the mills I again tried my hand at gum-digging, but with very indifferent success. On one occasion an old chap working near me struck a patch and dug out about £20 worth of gum in less than a fortnight. Having disposed of his gum, he went back to town, got on the booze and was soon back on the field without a penny. I could not help thinking that I could have made better use of the money, had luck come my way.

As I have already remarked, most of the settlers were making a comfortable living, including two of my brothers-in-law, who used to come and upbraid me for not doing better. None of them however, had had to contend with so many extra expenses and misfortunes as I had. One of the reasons why my orchard was a comparative failure was that my father fixed on an unsuitable situation and had made a hobby of planting as many varieties as he could, planting out no less than 70 to 80 different varieties of apples, a large proportion turning out unsuitable for marketing purposes. So when the codlin moth made its appearance the orchard was soon ruined, I not being able to contend with the pests successfully for want of time and capital. Another pest I had to combat was introduced by the Acclimatization Society, namely the pheasant. They used to scratch up my maize crop just as the shoots were coming up, necessitating re-planting two or three times over. Not only that, they used to strip the cobs just as they were beginning to ripen. However I had my revenge on them to a certain extent, shooting about 20 of them within a fortnight or so.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

After struggling on as best I could until my eldest boy was 14 years of age, I was suddenly left a widower, my dear wife being taken suddenly ill and dying after 24 hours. Her life might have been saved if the doctor previously referred to had been quite sober when sent for. I was terribly cut up over this sad happening as our union, in spite of all our troubles, had been a very happy one.

As my elder boys thought they would like to learn a trade we decided to sell the farm and go to town, which we accordingly did. After disposing of my mortgaged farm and paying all my creditors, I arrived in Auckland with £5 in my pocket. My oldest son, Charlie, was taken on as a pupil teacher under the Education Board. Bert, the next was apprenticed to a builder named Beecroft, an old Port Albert boy; the next, Fred, was apprenticed to another builder named Small, the other two boys being still at school (Newton West).

Up to the time of leaving Port Albert I was always in debt and difficulties, but on coming to town things soon began to improve. I managed to get work as an improver at the carpentering trade at 7/- per day and that with the boy's wages we managed to scrape along. My eldest son was sent by the Education Board to Cambridge where he received 11/- per week and as he could not get board under 20/-, I had to find the balance out of my small income. As I could not afford to keep a housekeeper, I had to cook for myself and four hungry boys.

I find on consideration that I have gone ahead too fast so I will now hark back and relate a few incidents that occurred before leaving Port Albert. Most of the settlers at that time owned traps or buggies. I however had to be content with a sledge. On one occasion I had to fetch a nurse from Wharehine in a hurry. I had previously sent a nephew and niece in a boat to fetch her but she refused to trust herself on the river with them, so hitching up my horses I made them travel the seven miles and back in record time. Being winter time, of course the roads were in a bad state, up to the knees in mud in places, so in order to escape the mud as much as possible I was driving on the bank on the side of the road. On descending to the road again the sledge capsized, depositing the nurse in the mud. However she was not hurt so far as her person was concerned, only her feelings were outraged.

Nearly all the houses in the early days had shingled roofs, which of course got very dry in the summer time, Well, one morning, while milking the cows, I happened to glance down at my house and saw that the roof was on fire. So, leaving the cows I hurried down as fast as possible, and there issued a fight with the fire which lasted two hours. When I did succeed in quenching the last spark the house was in rather a dilapidated condition. My wife was confined with a week old baby, so I had no one to help me as my nearest neighbour lived a mile away; also my tank was nearly empty so I had to be careful how I used what little water there was. Here let me say that water was a scarce article on my farm. In dry seasons the tanks used to get empty and then I had to haul water in a barrel on the sledge and the cows had to go about a mile every day to get a drink.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Mutual Improvement Society already referred to inaugurated a Saturday half holiday, the afternoon being devoted principally to playing croquet, which game was very popular for a time with both sexes. This was a summer time recreation. In winter the much discussed amusement of dancing was indulged in and became very popular although frowned upon by some of the more strict Methodists.

Although there were members of a good many different denominations among the Albertlanders, the only two that conducted regular services were the Methodists and the Christian Brethren. On rare occasions the Anglicans held a service conducted by a visiting clergyman. A large number called themselves non-conformists, but were really nothing at all. The Methodists for a number of years held services pretty regularly in private houses but eventually they opened a church of their own. These services were conducted by a band of loyal Local Preachers, occasionally being visited by Rev. Gittos, a missionary to the Maoris. There was also a Methodist minister named Worker who came out with the Albertlanders and he eventually settled at Wellsford, so we did not see much of him at Port Albert. There was also a Baptist minister named Boakes who came out bringing with him a small Church in sections, which was erected at Whare-hine where he resided. This church not being used much by the Baptists was lent to the Methodists, who started regular services there. Another minister, Rev. Samuel Edgar, resided in the district for a few years. His house however was burned down after which he removed to Auckland. He was practically a Unitarian, to which denomination my father and mother were supposed to belong. I remember my father conducting a service in an auction room in Fort Street in the early days.

Up to the age of 27 I never made a profession of religion in any shape or form. Up till then my principal object and aim in life was to get as much fun out of it as possible. Along with several of my companions we used to attend the Methodist services fairly regularly, although I am afraid we did not profit as much by attending as we ought to have done. We amused ourselves by criticizing the idiosyncrasies of the preachers. One, although a comparatively uneducated man, was much liked, although we made fun of him. No matter what text he took, he never omitted to warn his hearers against the three deadly sins of the age; namely drinking, gambling and dancing. His condemnation of the terrible sin of dancing had no effect on me, for by that time I had become a fairly good dancer. There was not a dance held within a distance of 20 miles that I failed to attend, and I was for a time the leader of a dancing class, where I not only showed them how to dance but played my violin for them to dance to.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

About this time an American evangelist named Thomas came to our district and commenced holding revival services at Port Albert, and in the surrounding district. Quite a large number professed conversion, among them the writer of these reminiscences. As a climax a Camp Meeting was decided on. A large marquee was provided. Visitors came from long distances including a contingent from Auckland who brought their own tents. The Camp Meeting commenced under very favourable conditions; the leaders' hopes for a large gathering ran high, but for reasons which were never satisfactorily explained, these hopes were doomed to disappointment. In their zeal some of the leaders went too far, some losing their mental balance. The Camp Meeting ended in a fiasco, the Police ordered the marquee to be pulled down and the meetings discontinued. This was a terrible disappointment to the faithful few who, although pained and puzzled, did not give up their new found faith, although a large number who had made a profession fell away. Among the descendants of the faithful few are quite a number of loyal church workers, several local preachers and at least one in the Methodist ministry.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

After joining up with the Methodist Church, I was faced with the question "What about dancing?" Although I could not see much harm in the amusement myself, I was induced out of respect for the feelings of some of my fellow members of the Church to give it up, it being considered in those days inconsistent for a good Methodist to be seen taking part in a dance. Nowadays however the ban on dancing has been lifted to a large extent.

After being a member of the Methodist Church at Port Albert for several months, I was approached by the brethren to assist in conducting the services. Not being a fluent speaker I was dubious about agreeing to do so, but was eventually induced to allow my name to appear on the preachers' plan on trial. After a time, having preached a trial sermon before the Rev. Bavin, who happened to be in the district on a visit, I was received as a fully accredited local preacher, and for the next 14 or 15 years I took four or five appointments each quarter. I was never what might be called a popular preacher, having to write my sermons (or essays, as one article called them) in full, as I could not trust my memory to bring out my thoughts in proper order. I, being then the youngest preacher on the plan and incidentally the best rider, got the biggest

share of the appointments to the distant places. Once a quarter I was planned to take three services on the Mahurangi side of the circuit (Port Albert was then included in the Mahurangi Circuit). Dome Valley in the morning, Sandspit or Mullet Point in the afternoon and Warkworth in the evening. On several occasions while working at Mander's mill I used to start about 8 o'clock in the morning getting home again at 11 o'clock at night, after having ridden 65 miles. I did not however look upon this as a hardship, being quite willing to do what I could for the Master.

After coming to Auckland, and residing in the Pitt Street Circuit, I was not asked to take any services, I presume because they objected to the written sermon. However I found other work for the Master at Arch Hill, Kingsland and Dominion Road Sunday Schools respectively.

While residing at Arch Hill, I was called upon to suffer another sad bereavement, in the loss of my second son Bertie. He had been nearly three years at his trade and was getting on first rate. One evening he complained of not feeling well. The next morning he was no better so a doctor was called in, who immediately ordered his removal to hospital. When four doctors had a consultation over him, they came to the conclusion that it was a case of appendicitis and that it was too late to operate as blood poisoning had set in. He passed away early next morning. I was with him at the last having received an urgent message from the hospital at 1 o'clock in the morning. So at the early age of 17 a promising life was cut off. Although I was terribly cut up I had the satisfaction of knowing that all was well with my boy. He had been a very steady young fellow and was secretary of the Arch Hill Sunday School at the time of his passing.

After living in Auckland for three years without a housekeeper, I began to think that it would be a good thing to get some kind person to take pity on me and be a second mother to my boys. I eventually induced Miss Sarah Shepherd of Port Albert, who I had known for a long time, to undertake the responsibility. We were accordingly married at her father's house at Northcote by Rev. Gittos, a life long friend of the family.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

After my second marriage, as already stated, things began to improve financially. My wife having a little money of her own bought a section and we decided to have a house built on it. Her father had promised to assist in financing it so I approached two builders, who I had previously worked for, to give me a price, As their prices seemed to be rather high I decided to build it myself which I accordingly did, saving about £50 on the transaction. My son Fred, who was just out of his time with Mr. Small, agreed to join me so during the next sixteen years we built and sold about 70 houses in and around the city, mainly in the Mt. Eden and Mt. Albert boroughs.

A year or two after my second marriage I undertook to build a house at Kaipara Flats for a Mr. Alfred Gubb. Included in the job was the removal of the old house nearer the river, to be used as a barn.

A year or so afterwards I received a letter from Mr. Gubb telling me that an exceptionally high flood in the river Hotea, already referred to, had carried the barn off its blocks and deposited it on some willow trees about two miles down the river. At the time the barn contained a chaff cutter and a lot of hay. To give an idea of the height of the flood I may state that the barn was carried over a bridge nearby without hardly knocking the handrail off. When I state that the floor of the bridge was more than thirty feet above water at ordinary times it will give some idea of the height of the flood. On another occasion this small stream overflowed its banks and flooded the Wayby railway station. A picture appeared in the Auckland Weekly showing only the top of the station roof standing out above the flood. Some years previous to this, this river was responsible for keeping our survey party marooned for two weeks having to live on potatoes only for the last few days.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Soon after the first world war broke out in 1914, as there was nothing much doing in the building line, we all shifted over to Birkdale, I having bought some seven acres of land. This property was partly improved having a strawberry patch and a small orchard on it, but no house, so the first thing we did was to build one. My third son Willie enlisted and went to the war. After being there for two or three years he was badly wounded at the Gallipoli landing. He was sent to Malta where he remained for nearly a year, but was eventually invalided home. Being too lame to work at his trade as a carpenter, he obtained employment under the Harbour Board. where he still is, although he recovered from his lameness long ago.

The two eldest boys Charlie and Fred did not volunteer, both being married and having small families. Incidentally I may mention, Charlie, although taken on as a pupil teacher, was forced to relinquish the job owing to a misunderstanding between himself and the head teacher and the Education Board. In my opinion he received very unfair treatment. However after several other ways of earning his living, including tram conducting, he eventually started a milk round at Eden Terrace.

Shortly after coming to the Birkenhead Circuit where local preachers were very scarce, my name again appeared on the circuit plan, taking services occasionally at Greenfield, Greenhithe, and Albany. On the last occasion I went to the latter place I was returning home driving the circuit trap, when on descending a hill, the belly band broke causing the horse to take fright and bolt, capsizing the trap and then kicking it to pieces. I was fortunate in escaping without injury owing to the fact that I was tipped into a lot of high fern. The circuit trap, being past repair, was given to the nearest settler, the horse was sold and a motor car provided, but I was unable to drive the latter vehicle. Being over the age of 80, I decided not to take any more preaching appointments.

Three or four years later, having considerably improved the place, I sold out my Birkdale property and bought another place a little higher up the road on which I built a house. In the meantime the war had ended. Things in the building trade began to look up, so with the help of my son Fred (who also in the meantime had turned to strawberry growing but had given up in disgust) we started building again, taking contracts occasionally one at Papatoetoe and Okoraine, also five or six in Birkdale. I also supervised the building of a Sunday School hall at Birkdale. This hall served a good purpose for a good many years, but as the population gravitated to Beachhaven, it ceased to be of use and was sold for removal, as was also the Birkdale Church itself, the congregation having dwindled down to seven or eight.

After living at Birkdale for about 10 years, we made another shift; this time to Birkenhead, having bought a farmlet of eleven acres. There was a 4 roomed house on the property, but this was not large enough for our family. I therefore altered it and added three rooms, bringing it more up to date.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

My second family at this time consisted of three sons and a daughter named respectively Harry, Clifford, Frank and Gertrude. Harry, the eldest, was attending the Grammar School and used to travel backwards and forwards on his cycle. Later on he was taken on as a student at the Methodist Theological Collage and in due course was ordained as a minister. Soon afterwards he married a Miss Gladys Roberts of Birkenhead, and they now have a family of four boys and a girl. This however is a digression.

When I bought the property at Birkenhead, I fully intended to cut it up into sections to build on. Before I could do this it had to be roaded. It meant extending Wairoa Avenue, which was a blind street, and it was necessary to get the consent of the owner of the adjoining property. As he absolutely refused to give the necessary half-width of the proposed extension, or pay anything towards the costs, I then tried to buy him out, but without success. So I had to abandon the idea of dividing the land, and bought sections as I required them in Wairoa Avenue. When I bought the property it had only one house down at the bottom end, now it is lined with houses on both sides. With the help of my son Clifford, who I took on as an apprentice (though not legally bound), we built no less than seventeen houses in Wairoa Avenue alone, and several in other parts of the borough.

Soon after moving to Birkenhead, my wife opened a draper's shop at Highbury Corner, which she and Gertie carried on successfully for several years. My next boy Frank, after being a clerk at the Morningside Timber Mill for a few years, married and then opened a fruit shop, also at Highbury, which he still carries on (he has since retired). Both he and his brother Cliff, although both of them married and had families, were called up and had to serve their country overseas for over two years. I am happy to say however, that they both returned safely. Their home coming was saddened by the fact that there was no mother to greet them on their return, she having passed away after a short illness, leaving me for the second time a sorrowing widower. About a year before her death my wife had sold her business. We then decided to have a new house built close by, where in the ordinary course of events she had hoped to live many years, surrounded by her three married children and eight grandchildren who lived nearby, but it was ordered otherwise. Truly the ways of Providence are mysterious. It seems strange that she should be taken and I should be left, considering that she was ten years younger than myself.

The anecdotes recorded in these reminiscences did not all take place in the order related, as I have kept no diary, so have had to trust to my memory. Some of the events recorded concerning the early days may perhaps not be quite correct as I was very young at the time. There are however a few incidents that now come to my memory that should have been recorded in their proper place. For instance, I remember that when we were living at Port Albert that there used to be an Inspector come around occasionally to see that boys from the

orphanages were treated properly. On one occasion a pompous individual to get from Port Albert to the Otamatea, so having hired horses and me to go with him to show him the way and to bring the horses back. We swam the horses across the river and my brother-in-law undertook to take the gentleman across the river in a punt. The punt was duly brought to the wharf steps and then a catastrophe happened. The gentleman put one foot in the punt, whereupon the punt not having been made fast, moved away, causing the gentleman to fall into the water, where he narrowly escaped drowning owing to my brother-in-law, in his efforts to save him, grabbing hold of one foot. However he was eventually rescued and taken up to the boarding house. As there were no trousers in the local store anything like big enough, he had to go to bed and wait for his on to be dried. This of course took a considerable time. His clothes were put through a mangle and then dried in the oven, so it was pretty late in the day before we made a start. Then another mishap occurred; the path from the beach led up a steep incline. When near the top the saddle girth broke, causing rider and saddle to slip over the horse's tail and roll down to the bottom of the hill again. This meant further delay as I had to go back to the store to procure a new girth.

I sustained another sad bereavement, which occurred soon after we came to live at Birkenhead, in the death of my son Walter, the youngest of my first family. He originally was apprenticed to a grocer. After serving his time he purchased a motor car and was on the stand as a taxi driver for several years. Eventually he gave that up and took a job as a storeman with a city firm. Incidentally he owned a motor launch, and never having married he used to bach on the launch, where he met with an accident. It seems that he fell from the mast, where he lay stunned for several hours. On regaining consciousness and not feeling much the worse, he went to work again the next day. About a year afterwards he dropped down in Queen Street and was taken to the hospital but passed away after about 24 hours. The doctor who made the autopsy gave it as his opinion that death was caused by a clot of blood on the brain probably caused by striking his head on the deck of the launch a year before.

Although I have made little or no mention of our Maori neighbours so far, I must not conclude these reminiscences without referring to them. The Omawhare natives were very friendly with the Pakaha as rule, but on one occasion while the war was on, a deputation from the King Country paid a visit to Albertland to try and induce them to join the rebels. They danced a war dance on the beach which considerably scared some of the settlers. The Rev. Mr. Gittos was immediately sent for and a long korero ensued. Owing probably to the great influence of Mr. Gittos had with the Maoris, the deputation was sent back unsatisfied, much to the relief of the settlers. As a rule relations between Maori and Pakeha were very cordial. The Maoris used to come in large numbers to our annual tea meeting. However they were not above taking advantage of a Pakeha when they got the chance. Occasionally a settler wanted to cross the river at Port Albert. The usual charge was 1/- but on one occasion an old Maori chief over reached himself. When about halfway across he suddenly stopped

rowing and demanded half-a-crown. Whereupon the settler, who was a good swimmer, coolly capsized the canoe and swam ashore. On another occasion I myself was riding along the West Coast road and on coming to the Makarau river, the tide being in, I asked a Maori to ferry me across. However as he wanted a halfcrown, I declined to accept his services. I therefore rode along the bank for a few chains out of sight of the settlement, I tied my clothes on the saddle and swam across (the stream was only about half a chain wide). I was nearly left in an awkward predicament as my horse, in climbing the bank, snatched the bridle out of my hands and got ashore first. However I managed to secure him before he got far.

In the early days the Maoris owned a large peach grove. For the sum of 5/- a year they allowed the Pakehas to get as many peaches as they liked. There also happened to be two or three quince trees there as well. On one occasion I was on my way home with a good lot of peaches in my punt, also a few quinces, when I was intercepted by an old Maori chief. He made me show him what I had in my bags and when he saw I had a few quinces, he went off pop, saying “Kakina — the Pakeha he thief, he not pay for the quinces but only for the peaches”. He then picked out all the quinces and took them away. As I was only a young lad at the time I could not stop him.

For quite a long time the opening of the West Coast road was held up. A small party of Maoris hailing from the King County settled in a place called The Poti. They refused to allow the road to be taken through their settlement. As fast as the surveyors put in the pegs, the Maoris pulled them up. The dispute was however eventually amicably settled. Although they had been so cantankerous about the road, they were not actively hostile to the survey party. On one occasion they invited us all into their whare and gave us a grand feed, of roast pork cooked in the Maori copper fashion, which we all enjoyed very much. They also provided us with knives, forks and plates, articles which they had not much use for themselves.

In concluding these reminiscences I should like to impress all parents the advisability, if possible, of allowing their boys to follow the trends or preferences for which they are naturally inclined. If I had not been prevented from doing so in my youth, I should not have had to struggle in adverse circumstances for so long, for once having got a fair start I have been able to make both ends meet without difficulty, and at the same time lay up something for old age, so that I do not need the old age pension.

1946

FOOTNOTE.

The writer lived for about 4 years after writing these reminiscences, dying in Auckland in 1950 [on 21 June], at the age of 93. He spent his last while in a private nursing home in the city retaining many of his faculties to the end, although bedridden.