

THE AUCLAND ISLANDS.

The Auckland Islands were discovered by Captain Abraham Bristow in August, 1806. The discovery is related in the log-book of the "Ocean," which at the time was on a whaling voyage. In the following year, Captain Bristow visited the locality in the "Sarah" and planted the British flag there; before he left he let loose a number of pigs. The place was a favorite resort of whalers who generally made a good harvest in the surrounding waters; into the numerous bays the whales would go to calve in the months of April and May, and large numbers of seal—principally seals—were caught there. The islands did not excite serious attention for many years; in 1829 they were visited by an American navigator, Captain Morrell (the discoverer of the guano deposit at Ichoaboe), and in the year 1840, by many vessels, amongst others by those engaged in the United States exploring expedition, under Captain Charles Wilkes. During the whole of this time the islands were uninhabited; but shortly after 1840, a band of New Zealanders came over in a whaler, and landed on Enderby Island. The Messrs. Enderby (owners of the "Ocean" and the "Sarah") obtain a grant of the group from the British government, and made Enderby Island the centre of the operations of the Southern Whale Fishery Company. This was in 1850, and great hopes were at that time entertained of the future of the Auckland Isles, but two years afterwards the whole settlement was abandoned—the great Southern Whale Fishery Co. had proved a failure—the New Zealanders had rebelled against themselves and separated; and from that time to this the only human beings living upon the islands were those who had been driven there by stress of weather, or whose ships had been wrecked upon the treacherous rocks. While the New Zealanders were on Enderby Island, they proved the quality of the soil by raising turnips, potatoes, cabbages, and other vegetables, the excellence of which was subject of remark. There are no animals upon the island with the exception of a few rabbits and goats, and the domestic pig introduced by Captain Bristow. The pigs live upon the "Cabra potaria," which Dr. Hooker describes as "one of the most beautiful and singular of the vegetable productions of the island it inhabits; growing in large orbicular masses on rocks and banks near the sea, or amongst the dense and gloomy vegetation of the woods. The copious bright green foliage, and large umbels of waxy flowers, have a most striking appearance." The trees are from thirty to seventy feet in height. Numbers of these are overturned in every strong gale; this is owing to the light peaty soil in which they grow. The climate is moist, and water abundant. At certain periods of the year they abound in seals. Captain Thomas Mearns, who was sent away on the islands in the beginning of 1851, says in his diary: "We saw hundreds of seals; both the shores and the water were literally swarming with them; the tiger seals keep one side of the harbor, and the black seals, which are much the largest, the other. But in one instance we saw a black and a tiger seal fighting. They were at it when we first saw them. They fight as ferociously as dogs, and do not make the least noise, and with their large tusks they tear each other almost to pieces. We also saw a sea lion; he was very large, and had been fighting his neck and back were lacerated in a fearful manner; large pieces of life and flesh were torn off, perhaps a foot long, and four or five inches wide. We were close to the seal and looked at us in the boat with all possible coolness and unconcern." Many kinds of birds abound, among others, the green parrot and robin red-breast.

It has been often suggested that, in the absence of free settlement, the island should be rendered available as a convict station. In that case, the hardships of the unfortunates who might happen to be cast away on those shores would be much mitigated. Within the last four years three vessels have been lost there—the "Grafton," the "Invercauld," and the "General Grant; and the crews of all three have perished through cold. Of the fate of these we know but little, other vessels, whose course lay past the isles, have sailed and never been heard of; it is almost within the region of certainty that some of these have met their fate in that locality; for the position of the Auckland Isles is most dangerous for vessels on the homeward-bound track from Australia to Europe and the east coast of America. The highest mount is only 1,325 feet above the level of the sea, and in the winter there are dense fogs, which frequently entirely obscure the land. There is another peril; the nature of the islands is extraordinarily magnetic; they have been described as one huge magnet. At the time of the visit of the "Erebus" and the "Terror," Sir James Ross states that "some magnets were found entirely to depend for their direction of the North and South poles on the fragments of rocks around them, and that the compasses in the "Terror" were so much affected, as to mask the local attraction of the iron in the ship."

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