

Sir Julius von Haast.

Obituary

by

Dr. G. von Hayek.

(Extract from the obituary in the „Lyttelton Times”).

Sir Julius von Haast was born near Bonn early in 1824, and was consequently in his sixty-third year. He arrived in New-Zealand in 1858, having come to the Colony with the intention of reporting its possibilities, as a field for German emigration, to the Prussian Government. A strange chance turned his energies into widely different channels, and altered totally the whole tenor of his future life. By one of those singular coincidences that often govern the lives of men, a frigate of the Austrian Imperial Navy was coasting down to Auckland on the very day his immigrant ship cast anchor. It was the Novara, then within a few months of completing her tour round the world with a company of savants, whose researches were being made in the interests of their country. Sir George Grey had seen them at the Cape, and it is needless to say that the geysers, the solfataras, the terraces, the glaciers, and the fiords of New-Zealand lost none of their charms under his description. The geologist of the expedition, the late Dr. Ferdinand von Hochstetter, was bent on exploring such a rich and untouched scientific field, but saw little chance of executing so very natural a wish. Luckily a geologist was just what the Government of the day required — Judge Richmond was one, the late Mr. H. J. Tancred was another. A short, polite note from Governor Gore Brown to Commodore Baron Wüllerstorff-Urbair, the commander of the frigate; another equally polite and nearly as short from the complaisant commodore to the Governor settled the

matter. Dr. von Hochstetter was given leave of absence from the frigate for six months to make explorations at the charges of the Government of New-Zealand. Sir Julius, then plain Dr. Haast, was associated with him, became his colleague and trusted friend, while his subsequent journeys, his scientific conclusions and opinions were accepted by the Austrian savant, as authoritative concerning the geology of this Colony.

The North Island explorations finished, Hochstetter, after a short survey of the Nelson coalfields for the Government of that Province, went Home again. The independent Colonial career of Sir Julius dates from then. His first appointment was as Provincial Geologist of Nelson, and while in that service during the latter part of 1859, he undertook more explorations in the south-west of the Province, then an uninhabited wilderness. Coal and gold were shown to exist in abundance, and the official »Notes on the Geology and Geography« of the country, published by him, were rich in interests of a widely varied character. The next year proved another turning point in his career.

In Canterbury, towards the end of 1860, the fate of the great Moorhouse tunnel scheme was trembling in the balance. Messrs Smith and Knight, the original contractors, had come and put down their experimental borings, and driven their shafts. They had quickly met with rock of the most terrible hardness, and supposing the whole of the hill to be of the same adamantine nature, threw off the project as an impossibility. The sanguine Superintendent was unconvinced. He sent for Dr. Haast to report on the geological formation of the hill. The report was to the effect that Lyttelton Harbour was an extinct crater; the strata on the hill in question would be found to consist of a number of ancient lava streams of varying hardness, which the tunnel would cut obliquely; and that consequently, the rock would be of all consistencies, from basaltic impenetrability down to something little worse than consolidated ashes. Armed with this scientific authority, Mr. Moorhouse went to Melbourne, Messrs Holmes and

Richardson took the contract; the tunnel became a possibility, a probable success, a great accomplished fact. The commercial connection between the plain down to the Waitangi with his only harbour was assured. It was a triumph of reasoning from scientific observation.

From February, 1861, Dr. Haast continued with the Provincial Government of Canterbury. The first years of his service as Provincial Geologist were almost wholly spent in exploration. The mineral resources of the Malvern Hills, the features of the Mount Torlesse Range, and the wild »back country« adjacent to it were examined and reported on in 1861. The wonders of the Mount Cook district were explored in 1862. The sternness of those solitudes, until that time untrodden, must have then been doubly striking — its glacier system sketched and mapped, its botanical curiosities examined. Hochstetter Dome, Franz Joseph- and Müller-glaciers and many another German-sounding name, bear witness to the nationality of him who first explored their fastnesses, no less than to his courage, endurance, and skill. Lake Wanaka and the unexplored ranges and head waters of that part of the country were visited in 1863; Ashburton and Rangitata searched for coal in 1864. The goldfields of the West Coast traced in 1865 — the Provincial geologist was greedy of work.

In 1866 the first of the great »finds« of moa remains was made at Glenmark. In that year the first seven skeletons which formed the nucleus of the collection unique and unequalled, and the glory of the Christchurch Museum, were set up by the then taxidermist, Mr. Fuller. The fossil remains of the Glenmark moa-swamp proved the endowment of the Museum, and a constant source of enrichment through exchanges, etc. A few years the geological survey of the Province was fairly complete, and the Director thereof was enabled to give it his almost undivided attention. With him it was a real labour of love, and his energy and thoroughness soon made it swell into such proportions that a larger house than the modest apartments in the old Provincial buildings became an absolute necessity.

The building in the Domain was opened in September 1870, and has gradually, or rather rapidly, considering the normal progress of museums, developed to its present magnificent proportions under the untiring attention of its late Director, whose best and most fitting monument it will ever be.

As Director of this Museum and a constant helper in any educational or artistic work that fell to his lot as a citizen, Dr. von Haast had been making his name respected in the Colony. Meantime his fame had spread to Europe. He was a corresponding member of all sorts of Societies, and medals, orders, and titles were his in abundance. Among the most valuable of them all was that medal of the Royal Geographical Society, which is only given to discoverers and explorers of the first rank, such as a Murchison, a Livingstone, or a Stanley. It was given especially for those arduous Alpine explorations to which we have referred already. It was the first bestowed for work in New-Zealand, and therefore a more peculiar honour even than of ordinary. At length came the knighthood, which is the token of British appreciation of Colonial merit and hard work. In 1885 Sir Julius was chosen by the Government as the Colony's representative and Commissioner at the Great Indian and Colonial Exhibition. How he went, and how well he discharged the duties of that office is matter of recent history, and needs no repetition now. The great and rare distinction of Doctor of Science, so jealously guarded, and so seldom bestowed, was given him by the University of Cambridge in August last. It was, perhaps, the greatest event of his public life.

By the arrangement of the Board of Governors of Canterbury College, Sir Julius, after the Exhibition set out on an extended tour of the great museums of Europe. In spite of serious illness at Bonn he carried out his proposed scheme, and visited Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Dresden, Vienna, Halle, and also Venice, Florence and other Italian centres early in this year. A vast quantity of things were obtained for the Museum, and Sir Julius had the personal pleasure of meeting scientific friends of years' standing through

correspondence. The enormous labour gone through in connection with his Exhibition work, and the subsequent wear and tear of travelling while in weak health, appear to have overtaxed his strength. He died exactly a month after he returned. He leaves one daughter and four sons born in New-Zealand, one of whom is studying painting at Düsseldorf, and another son by a former wife is an officer in the Prussian army.

Sir Julius was apparently in his usual state of health on Monday, August 15th, and attended Mr. Tendall's lecture in the rooms of the Y. M. C. A. in the evening. There he complained of feeling somewhat unwell, but as he had been suffering from a slight cold for some days, but little attention was paid to the matter. He remained to the end of the lecture, and actually proposed the vote of thanks to Mr. Tendall at its close. After the short speech which the motion necessitated, however he said that he felt worse, and it was with some difficulty that he walked the short distance home to the lodgings, where he and his family were residing temporarily. Faintness and pains in the chest then attacked him, and he went at once to bed. Dr. Prins was sent for, prescribed a slight sedative, and went away. There appeared to be no cause to apprehend anything serious, and Sir Julius himself declared that he was sure he would be better after his night's rest. But about half-past one, Lady von Haast, who was watching in the room, was alarmed by hearing him breathe very heavily. Dr. Symes, who lives on the opposite side of the street, was immediately summoned, but when he arrived the sufferer was dead. He passed away without a word or sign of suffering.

A musician of no ordinary attainments, a man well-read in many matters quite outside his own profession, an enthusiastic, untiring worker, a man of genial, kindly nature, full of sympathy, and of a ready wit in every relation of life, whether as husband, father, friend, equally admirable, he will be sadly and widely missed. His place will be hard indeed to fill.

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