

SILVERTON—PAST AND PRESENT.

(BY OUR SPECIAL REPORTER.)

When German Charlie—"The King of the Barrier," as he was termed—kept the little store, a few years since, on the bank of the Umberumberka Creek, he little thought that it would prove the foundation of the present town of Silverton. German Charlie—whose real name was Charles Karl—had been for several years in business at Mount Gipps, the oldest settlement on the Barrier, before he came to Umberumberka. Purchasing the store and some 40 acres of land from Jack Smith, he selected 80 acres of the land adjoining, and, the mining rush setting in shortly after, Umberumberka became a flourishing little centre. The only other business place at that period on the Creek was a public-house, kept by John Stokie, one of the earliest prospectors of the field, and who like most pioneers has not had his share of good luck. Both "pub" and store were built of stone, and are still to be seen on the outskirts of Silverton. The long low-walled and low roofed store has a semi-businesslike look about it ; but the glory of the house of refreshment has departed for ever. Never more will its "longsleevers " and "deep-sinkers" make glad the heart of the brawny miner, and never more can a weary swagsman wash down the dust with a "Jimmy Weedser." The licensing laws are imperative as regards the size, convenience, and construction of every hotel, and in these directions Stokie's public house has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Now, when a drink becomes an absolute necessity in Silverton, thirsty souls wend their way to Tantram's Saloon, Hamlyn's Shades, or the other nine or ten bars in the town. And yet three or four years ago more money was taken at Stokie's miserable little bar in a week than is now taken in four weeks at all the hotels in Silverton.

For many years the hamlet—for township it could not be called by any stretch of the imagination—of Umberumberka constituted the only settlement, with the exception of Mount Gipps, which also consisted of a store and hotel, in the Barrier Ranges. In the early days these places, unimportant as they might have appeared to residents of the more populous and better known portions of New South Wales, were not to be despised. They were the only centres of civilisation from the Darling on the east to far beyond the South Australian border on the west, and from the Paroo on the north to Wentworth on the south. Their public-houses and post offices were the sources from which all knowledge of the outside world was obtained. They formed a connecting link with the far-off regions of busy life, and the shearer and boundary-rider derived as much genuine pleasure in "knocking down" his cheque at these isolated places as the wealthy wool-grower would in going to see the Melbourne Cup after a successful shearing. The "chain-lightning" and "tanglefoot" consumed in those days throughout the whole of the back country was enormous, and this notwithstanding the despicable quality of the liquor. Drink the people would have at any cost, and it was nothing short of a national calamity if the grog gave out before the arrival of the bullock, drays with a fresh supply. Sometimes the teams would be long delayed, owing to the drought or bad roads, and then, indeed, a dark pall overhung the bush public-house. During one of these periods of depression, a traveller, so the story runs, called at a wayside public-house and asked for a nobbler of rum. The liquor handed to him, and which he tossed off at a draught, nearly scalded his throat and took away his breath. "That's not rum," he gasped; "why, you have' given me painkiller." "Dry up, can't you," said the barman, "you don't know when you are well off ; why, the crowd at the other end of the bar are drinking 'farmer's friend.'" A gentleman whose official duties took him through Umberumberka some four or five years since tells me how, when the coach drew up at Stokie's door, he was

particularly struck with the melancholy appearance of the 20 or 30 frowsy looking individuals surrounding the hotel. Some were leaning gloomily on empty whisky and brandy casks, mourning in fact over departed spirits ; others lounged un-easily about, and others again, with a mixture of disappointment and dirt on their features, had thrown themselves down at full length beside the house, or out on the sand, but all, as my informant expressed it, were in a "disgrace- fully sober condition."

The explanation of this unwonted depression of spirits on the part of the wallaby trackers and sundowners was in reality the absence of spirits. For two whole days not a drop could be obtained. So when the barman suddenly ran out and dived into the "boot" of the coach, abstracting therefrom a small keg of whisky, the countenances of that seedy crowd became suddenly glorified. They fairly gleamed with joy. The holy calm that had reigned before was rudely broken—three hearty cheers were given; glasses and pannikins were quickly handed round, filled and refilled. "Shout" followed "shout," and all through that night the language and proceedings were far removed from the lines of a Young Men's Christian Association meeting.

Some good stories other than the above are told of the straits to which publicans and shanty-keepers in the re-mote west were put to when the liquor supply fell short, and of the concoctions made to do duty as grog. Of course many of these stories are far-fetched, while others are humorous to a high degree. One of the best is told by German Charlie. A publican called upon him and wanted to buy some rum. "I am shust out," said Charlie, "but vat for you vant to buy rum, vhy not make it yourself?" "Make it, how?" enquired the publican. "Vhy, easy enough," replied German Charlie. "You shust go round to your own 'deadhouse' and the oder 'deadhouses' in de township, and you gathers up all de old dirty shlay pipes and cigar stumps dat the old boozekins have dropped while dey is havin' a sleep. Dobaccovill do you know, but den dobacco costs money. Vell, you sweeps out de deadhouses, and you puts all de old chlay pipes and cigar ends into a pot and you boils 'em down. Den you adds some plack sugar—ration sugar— de placker de petter—and after boilin' for a while you strains off de pipes and cigar stumps. Den you bottles de rum, and meingott, if after a couple of nobblers of datsthuff the two best vriends in de vorld don't fight, dey must be downright gowards." Another story illustrative of life on the Barrier is told by German Charlie with a grim humour which is simply delicious. One of his boarders took ill, and lapsed into an apparently dying state. In the fearful climate of the West illnesses are of short duration, and German Charlie, there-fore, at once got a coffin prepared and a grave dug. The man, however, recovered, and on asking for his bill was astounded to see the following items :— To making your coffin, £1 ; to digging your grave, £1. Demanding an ex-planation, German Charlie informed him of the circum-stances, and finished off by emphatically stating that the account must be paid. A protest on the part of the man that he had not used either coffin or grave, and didn't want them at any cost, was met by the remark, "Vell den, vhy didn't you die." A long argument followed, until at last it was agreed to play Yankee grab as to whether the items should be paid for in full or only 10s. given to fill up the grave. German Charlie, much to his disgust, lost, and as he pocketed the latter sum, remarked, "Vell, it ish a great shame, but dat coffin might turn in handy yet—before de season is over."

The first buildings erected, consequent on the discovery of silver in the neighbourhood, were Messrs. Chapple and Allen's offices, and Mr. Walter Sully's store—in what is now designated Bourke-street. At a meeting held some months afterwards in Mr. Chapple's office to apply for a post office, Mr. Stokie suggested that the township should be called Silvertown or Silverton, the latter designation being finally chosen. About the 1883 the township was laid out by District-surveyor Barlow, the principal streets being named after the early explorers—Burke, Sturt, and others, who had passed through the district with expeditions en route to the north of Australia. Originally most

of the allotments were held under business licenses—the cost being £1 per annum. In this way a quarter of an acre can be pegged out in the town proper, and half an acre in the suburbs, within 30 days improvements to the value of £10 must be put on each allotment, and the occupier can afterwards, if he wishes, purchase the land, on its being valued by the district surveyor and recommended by the Land Board. Three months are allowed in which to pay the money, but if a further extension of three months be required 10 per cent, is added to the figure at which the land has been valued. Allotments which have not been pegged out are generally submitted to public auction.

The demand for land in the newly-surveyed township was so great that the allotments went off rapidly, and in one instance the price paid equalled £10,000 per acre.

The Royal was the first hotel built on the Government township. Then followed Tantram's, erected by Mr. De Baun, and having been added to since it is now quite an imposing well-furnished two-storey structure, in fact the principal one on the Barrier. Mr. Williams, proprietor of the Royal, realised the cost of his hotel within 10 weeks of its erection.

Another hotel in Thackeringa paid itself in six weeks. Business of every description was brisk, money being plentiful. A brilliant future seemed to be in store for the little town, which stretched itself along the bank of the creek and the slope of the neighbouring hills.

Between two and three years ago Silverton attained the zenith of its prosperity, but within the past 12 months it has been in a manner overshadowed by its rapidly growing younger sister, Broken Hill. Silverton is, however, a solid little town, and will always command from its healthy position and central situation a certain amount of importance. The traffic from Purnamoota, Euriovie, and the newly discovered tin-field, Waukaroo, must necessarily come to Silverton as being the nearest railway station, although on the other hand it will ultimately lose a good extent of business by the fact of the Adelaide train passing through the town to its terminal point at Broken Hill, 17 miles distant. The contractors (Messrs. Miller Brothers) train arrived in Silverton for the first time on the 8th instant, and the extension to Broken Hill will be complete in a few weeks.

The tin mines just discovered at Mundi Mundi, a few miles south of Silverton, will also give an impetus to business of every description. The country in the vicinity has been prospected for some time, but it was only on the 12th instant that following on the publication of some important finds, the whole of the country was pegged out. A regular exodus took place from Silverton, every one apparently anxious to secure a claim so close to the town. Mundi Mundi station belongs to Mr. Wade, and its homestead is within 12 miles of Silverton. There is no other station so near, and farming in every sense is a dead letter throughout the entire district.

Silverton contains a population of between 1200 and 1500. The only mining done in the vicinity of the town is at the Umberumberka Company's claim, about a mile and a-half to the west; mining is, however, carried on in all parts of the district. Besides the claim just mentioned, the Pinnacles, Thackeringa, Day Dream, Silver King, Black Prince, Terrible Dick, Tower Hill, the Maybells and other well-known mines are within 20 miles of the town.

Like most mining centres, Silverton contains one principal street, with several cross streets, of inferior note. Situated on the slope of the hill just above the main street are churches belonging to the Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Baptist, and Bible Christian denominations. The two first-mentioned are built of stone, and the others of corrugated iron. A Presbyterian Church existed

until recently, but the building is now used as a hall, wherein "the city fathers" meet, and where at times unity, peace, and concord do not reign.

And this reminds me that the said city fathers number nine—Mr. Butterworth being Mayor, and Messrs. Ring, Hamlyn, O'Connor, Crommelin, Dr. Thompson, Hocking, Port, and Blunt (aldermen), and Mr. Tait, town clerk. The council have recently done wisely by planting trees in the principal streets, an act which was principally due to the energy of Mr. H. C. Armstrong, a large property-holder in the town.

The hospital occupies a healthy site on the top of the hill south of the town. It is an iron building, and its present capabilities being only equal to eight patients, a new build-is to be shortly erected. From whichever side you enter Silverton, the building that first catches the eye is the Bank of Australasia, a massive, well-built two-story structure, under the management of Mr. W. A. Ross. This building formerly belonged to the Commercial Bank of South Australia, which collapsed some two years since, as did also another South Australian institution represented in Silverton—the Town and Country Bank. The building formerly occupied by the latter now serves as an office for Messrs. Rakow and Fischer, the well-known mining agents. In justice to the two financial institutions which have collapsed, it is only right to state that they started and stuck to the Barrier at a critical period of its existence, and it is certainly a pity that they did not survive to share in its prosperity. One of the few links binding Sydney to the Barrier is that the Commercial Banking Company have a branch in Silverton. This is about the only establishment on which the word "Sydney" can be noticed. In a mercantile direction Mr. C. Clark, who has extensive establishments in both Silverton and Broken Hill, stands almost alone in the way of dealing with Sydney merchants. Mr. Clark informs me that, notwithstanding the numerous difficulties in the way of carriage by sea, railway freight, and the intolerable and continuous trouble in connection with Customs duties, he considers Sydney by far the better market in which to purchase supplies. His experience should prove of benefit to those business men who, up to the present, have held aloof from Sydney, even as Sydney speculators have hitherto fought shy of investing in either land or mining in the Far West. Adelaide and Melbourne have long ago gauged the value of the Darling and Barrier trade, and have spared no pains in order to extend and retain it, so that it will now be many a long year before Sydney obtains even a fractional value of the Western trade.

The Stock Exchange at Silverton has recently been closed—and this is, perhaps, the only sign of dullness (sic) of times in the town—although residents complain that things are not as they were in "the good old times" three or four years ago.

A neat brewery owned by Messrs. E. Resch and Co. stands on the outskirts of the town, and another belonging to Mr. E. Crossing is situated a couple of miles away. The first sound of steam on the Barrier was the whistle blown at Messrs. Resch and Co.'s brewery.

A District Court has been for some time established in Silverton, and since the visit of the Minister of Justice, a few weeks ago the erection of a new courthouse has been proceeded with.

Warden Brown, P.M., in whom every confidence is placed by the mining community, and who is everywhere popular, presides over both Silverton and Broken Hill courts. The warden has got plenty to do one way or the other, and so also has his clerk, Mr. Saunders, who holds besides several other appointments, including that of mining registrar. The want of judicial power possessed by the warden has been already commented on in these columns, with the result that the Ministers of Mines and Justice have promised to do everything possible in the way of extending his powers

to decide upon mining matters that up to the present have had to be submitted to the Minister of Mines.

At the commencement of "the rush" the police station was represented by a hut, a tent, a tree or a log or all combined. Alderman O'Connell, now the largest property holder in Silverton, was at that period senior-constable in charge, a position that was by no means a sinecure, considering the rough material in the shape of persistent law-breakers he had to deal with, and the absence of anything like gaol accommodation. Even, however, among the lawless lot who then infested the Barrier and who now and again got into O'Connell's clutches, there was a code of honour—a sort of esprit de corps. On one occasion a prisoner, chained to a tree, was in the habit of slipping his leg-irons at night and dodging up to the nearest public-house, returning immediately he had had a drink and manacled himself. This, although observed by his companions in misfortune, was kept a profound secret until the escapee was observed regaling himself with a "long shandy" by a constable who had strolled unobserved into the hotel. Another prisoner, of a more ingenious turn of mind, who was chained to a thin sapling from which the limbs had been lopped, used to climb the tree, slip the chain up and over the top, and then scurry away through the darkness for a nobbler. He would return and retire to rest in like manner; but he, too, was in the end bowled out, although not through any fault of his fellow-prisoners.

The Customs office, notwithstanding that more business is done in it than in any other—outside of Sydney and Newcastle—is a wretched iron building, resembling more a third-class shanty than a Government office, and Mr. Mooney, the sub-collector, and his assistants hold the un-enviable position of being pre-eminent in misery as Government officers. Mr. Kinnane and his assistants in the post and telegraph department are certainly better off, but even here, as in the case of the Customs, a change for the better might well be made by the Government. Journalism is creditably represented throughout the Silverton district by the Silver Age, owned by Messrs. Reid and Co., and edited by Mr. Taylor, an old Herald man—who takes me by the hand almost from the moment that I enter the town. Like all mining centres a love of sport reigns pre-dominant among the Silvertonians. Two meetings within the year are held by the Jockey Club, which, thanks principally to the energy of Mr. Reginald B. Pell, the hon. secretary and treasurer, is in a very flourishing condition. The club was formed in October, 1884, and numbers nearly 100 members, while already £2100 has been paid away in stakes. A grandstand cost £150, and other improvements bring the total expenditure up to £600. Great interest is also taken in cricket and football-matches being regularly played with Broken Hill and other parts. Three years ago the town suffered from a scarcity of water, and thereupon Messrs. Pell and McCabe contracted with the Government to construct three dams across the Umberumberka Creek. These, together with the splendid Government tank constructed under the supervision of the energetic road-superintendent, Mr. W. J. Hanna, should effectually prevent a repetition of the drought so far as the town is concerned. The Government tank, situated little more than half a mile from the town, contains between three and four million gallons, while another, large tank for stock purposes has been constructed at "The Rathole," near Umberumberka, and about three miles from Silverton. All the goods traffic goes now by rail to Cockburn, the South Australian border town, but passengers have to take coach, owing to the line being still in the contractors' hands. The coaches belong respectively to Hill and Co. and Mathieson and Wilkinson, and run daily to meet the Adelaide train at Cockburn. Messrs. Charters Brothers have four lines diverging from Silverton—one daily to Broken Hill, a bi-weekly to Euriowie tin mines, another to Wilcannia, and a fourth runs once a week between Broken Hill and Euriowie, 60 miles distant. The latter coach does not carry a mail, although Mr. M. Charters, the local managing partner, offered, on behalf of his firm, to do so at a reasonable rate. The Government should certainly grant the enterprising residents of

this rapidly extending township the privilege of obtaining news from Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide at least more than twice a week, as at present.