

THOUGHTS.

(By Mernda.)

Being in a thoughtful frame of mind, and thoughts of days long since gone by troubling me now and then, I have made up my mind, with your kind permission, to give your many readers the benefits (if any) to be obtained therefrom. In the first place my memory carries me back to the month of April, 1850. When then a wee laddie in my tender years, I came to reside on the banks of the Plenty at the charming spot now called Mernda. It was the year of that terrible Black Thursday, when the whole country side was blackened and devastated by fire. Among the very few old residents living in Mernda, or rather the Yan Yean and Morang Ridings of the Shire of Whittlesea, who were in the district in that terrible year are Cr Reid, his brother, Mr James Reid, Mr Patrick Nelson, who, like myself, was a young lad at that time, Mrs Pople, of Mernda, and myself. I can distinctly remember the blackened country on our journey up to the Plenty. On our arrival my brother, two sisters, and myself were delighted with our new home, the Plenty River then being a beautiful clear stream of water so clear that to a considerable depth fish could be seen swimming about; very different to the present depleted stream, which has lost its pristine beauty, also the ti-tree, dog-wood, and wattles that grew luxuriantly on its banks. As it has been the main factor in providing the Metropolis with its magnificent water supply I suppose it was inevitable for the alteration to come, but I cannot help a sigh coming when I think of the good old times now gone, alas, never to return; when neighbours were really neighbours in every sense of the word; and with very rare exception, to visit your neighbour was to receive a right hearty welcome, and that irrespective of your creed or nationality. Of course, there were exceptions. One old Highlander, long since dead, was a really hard case; she would ever be ready to accept hospitality that she got for nothing, but when it came to giving a return, it was a horse of another colour. In the early sixties I was in the habit of travelling all through the Plenty district up to M'Donald's Gap, and over to Merriang and back, through Woodstock, and wherever I landed, about dinner time, I was made welcome to join the family at dinner, except my Scotch friend, who would meet me with the salutation, "I'se warrant ye laddie ye has had yer dinner," and it really made no difference whether I had or not, and she reported me to my father for giving a present to another Highland lady who always treated me hospitably, and the funny part of it all was that my parents were Scotch, but nationality in that case did not count for much. After the stirring years from 1853 to 1857, when the Yan Yean waterworks were in full swing, and vast quantities of gold were obtained in the State, things quietened down a bit, and a more moderate and enlightened way of living came into existence. It was really sad to see men, fine, hardworking men, gather a few pounds together, and then travel to the nearest public house and knock it all down. It has always been a mystery to me how men can be so foolish, as it is a degrading habit to acquire to take away the senses a good God has given you, deliberately and wilfully. It will be a bright day for our fair State when prohibition is in force, but I hope if it is carried fair and just compensation will be paid to those whose living is taken away. The trade did not come in illegally, it came by a bad law I grant you, but all the same in a legal way, and if we desire to be just we must allow fair compensation to those we are depriving of what was a legal manner of getting a livelihood. In the olden times - in the fifties - I have seen in my time many

amusing episodes. Among others I remember the blacks catching eels in the swamp that is now the Yan Yean, and bringing them down to the old Bridge Inn, where the diggers, shearers, and others had gathered for their usual practice of knocking down their cheques, and I have seen more than one good eel fight, when the eels were the weapons, and good stinging blows were struck with them too as such. Another strange thing was performed by an old resident, who is now departed this life after an honourable life here. He made a bet that he would ride his horse 100 yards standing on his head in the saddle; this he did and won his bet, although the man he made his wager with waved his hat at the horse, but it turned out that the performer in his younger days had been a circus rider in England. On another occasion two men were enjoying themselves in the usual way, one I shall call Long K----o, the name by which he was known, the other's name was G-----e P-----h, the latter being a wag in his way. Well, the landlord owned a handy little truck or cart, and the two above-mentioned started giving one another rides in the cart. This was on the banks of the Plenty River, and about 100 yards from the hotel there was a crossing place, and just below that a deep hole of water. G-----e P-----h each trip got nearer and nearer to the deep water, and at last he made a run with the cart with Long K-----o in it and tipped it into the river with his passenger underneath and the cart on top of him. Fortunately the water was not very deep; if it had been the occupant would have been drowned. The late **John Grierson** saw the performance and hurried to the rescue, and with a good deal of difficulty got the cart off the man in it. The sequel was that no sooner was he out than he be after the joker and an amusing chase ensued, but the young and agile mischief maker was too fleet for the older man, and peace was only restored by the said joker shouting for all hands. Another silly custom that, I hope, will soon be a thing of the past. There were two habitués of the Bridge Inn in those days; one we shall call Harry, the other Hookey; both are dead and gone years ago. Harry was in the habit of riding a horse called Harkaway, a knowing stock-horse, a chestnut, one of the sort we rarely see now-a-days, but when I say he was a Sydney bred stock-horse, it tells what, in those days, was a passport for a good horse. To my tale. If Harry got a wee droppie too much, Harkaway always knew it, and he was in the habit of getting rid of his rider, and more than once when the pair left for home, on the road to which they had to cross the river at the crossing mentioned previously, the horse would put down his head to have a drink and suddenly give a jump and off would go the rider; but as drunk or sober he was a fine swimmer, hence he was in little danger. Poor Harry, his was a misspent life. Belonging to one of the best families in the part of England that he came from, his love of adventure brought him to Australia, and he passed his life here quietly; ending his days in one of the beautiful districts that is so common north of the metropolis. In the early fifties there was great stir and excitement over the diggings and bush rangers, who were numerous about that time. A short time before we came to reside on the Plenty a gang came up through the district, but they were run to earth at Glenvale, where lives were lost. I remember hearing our old friend, Dr. Ronald, telling his experience of the gang. They stuck his place up and gave him 10 minutes in which to say his prayers before they shot him. The doctor did not admire the prospect, and he set his wits to work to get out of the awkward fix he was in, and he at last thought of some whisky that was planted in a secret place in his house. He told the leader of the gang of the plant and thus probably saved his life. Dear old doctor, the poor man's friend, quaint and original in his manner. I can see him now in my mind's eye riding his grey mare Dolly, noted for her jog-trot, and no matter how urgent the case you could not hurry the doctor. I remember on one occasion my brother had broken his arm and I was sent for the

doctor. I rode a little thoroughbred mare, very quiet but spirited. After a deal of persuasion I got the doctor to ride my mare, on the understanding that I was to catch his mare and follow him. The doctor started on his journey, some four miles, and about one mile below his place I came along behind him at a sharp canter on the doctor's mare. Result: my pony was on for a race, and the faster I came behind, the faster she travelled, and the doctor arrived at his destination and told my father I had been nearly the death of him. I travelled many trips after that for the doctor, but I never could get him to mount my steed again.