

WAS WALLACE EVER IN NEW ZEALAND?

"Maritana" Composer Puzzles The Historians

ON St. Patrick's Day, 1836, William Vincent Wallace, who was later to achieve fame as the composer of "Maritana," landed in Sydney. To-day his chief interest to many New Zealanders is the mystery about his visit to New Zealand and his life among the Maoris.

According to the Irish composer and author, Dr. W. H. Grattan Flood, his illustrious fellow-countryman Wallace became wearied of Dublin musical life, and feeling threatened by consumption, set sail for Sydney in August, 1835.

He was accompanied by his wife and her sister, and his own sister. It is said that on their long voyage of eight months to Australia he paid such marked attention to his wife's sister that Mrs. Wallace grew jealous. It is a fact that when he landed in Sydney he parted from his wife, whom he never saw again.

He remained only a few days in Sydney, and then went "up country," to the bush, where he devoted himself for a time to sheep raising. In the course of a flying visit to Sydney, in the autumn of the same year, he was induced to play the violin at a private gathering.

Admission: 100 Sheep

Wallace was a more than ordinarily good player. The fame of Paganini, and the furor created by his appearance in Dublin in 1831, fired Wallace with the ambition to become a good violinist. At this first private recital in Sydney his astonishing performance was so well received that Sir Richard Bourke, the Irish Governor of the Colony, prevailed on him to give a public concert, the Governor paying an admission fee of one hundred sheep.

On this visit to Sydney Wallace joined an amateur string quartet, and his musical influence upon the young community began at once to be felt. Two further concerts (one in aid of St. Mary's Cathedral) brought in £1,000 each. He was also for a time tutor to the families of Sir Alfred Stephen and Judge Josephson.

Testimony of Berlioz

Another reference to his stay in New Zealand occurs in a book called "Evenings in the Orchestra," written by Berlioz—in the opinion of Ernest Newman, "the greatest musical journalist who ever lived." Lively indeed is what Newman calls "the rollicking fantasia on the theme of Vincent Wallace."

The French composer and the Irish composer spent together, in London, many half-nights over a bowl of punch, Wallace narrating his strange adventures, Berlioz listening eagerly. In his account of his six months stay in New Zealand, Wallace said his opportunity to make the trip came through an officer of a British frigate about to sail from Sydney on a punitive expedition, which he fully described to Berlioz. He was able, he said, to make friends with the Maoris, who quickly forgot the unpleasant purpose of the expedition. So he remained in New Zealand with the

frigate's surgeon, who desired to study the New Zealand flora.

The arrangement was that the commander of the frigate should pick up the "tourists" on his return from Sydney. While the doctor made an exhaustive study of New Zealand's flowers and plants, the musician busied himself with excursions into the bush game shooting. On these trips he had the company of two Maori girls, one of whom carried his gunpowder and bag of bullets, while the other carried the game. The daughter of a Maori chief became, in fact, his loving slave when she was offered the keg of tobacco that was always strapped to his back.

"Marriage" to Maori Girl

The pair were duly "married," the wedding feast being supper composed of fern roots, kumeras, a magnificent fish, a large lizard, and three wild ducks. This repast was baked in traditional Maori fashion, and washed down with a few glasses of brandy.

The brandy was apparently potent, if we may accept what Wallace told Berlioz: "Had it been proposed to me on that evening to transport me to China into the Emperor's porcelain palace and to give me the celestial princess, his daughter, as wife, with a hundred mandarins decorated with the crystal button to wait upon me, I should have refused."

Days, weeks, and at last months passed, and then one day the frigate showed up again in the bay, and the parting between Wallace and his little Maori "wife" had to be faced. But the sight of the English flag flying at the mainmast produced in Wallace the effect of a diamond shield in "Rinaldo," and it now seemed possible to tear himself from the arms of his beloved.

"Oh, Walla, Walla!"

Tatea, the chief's daughter, demanded proof of Wallace's love—a strange proof. The Irishman consented to her slashing him twice, making a cross-shaped incision on his breast. "Immediately," said Wallace, "the poor child flung herself on my chest, which was streaming with blood, laid against it her lips, cheeks, neck, bosom and hair, and drank my blood, which mingled with her tears; she screamed, she sobbed. Oh, old England, I proved to you that day that I loved you!" To the sound of wailing voices calling "Oh, Walla! Walla!" the musician climbed the ship's ladder with a heavy heart.

When Wallace finally returned to London, Edward Fitzball asked him to compose an opera, and supplied him with the libretto of "Maritana." Within six months, the work was completed and produced at Drury Lane Theatre, on November 15, 1845.

But the claims of Australians, Tasmanians, or New Zealanders, that the opera or parts of it were composed in their respective countries cannot be sustained. Whether Wallace ever in fact visited New Zealand is doubtful, but those who believe that he did, will be able to start the argument over again after listening to "Maritana" on Sunday, September 15.

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