

Reminiscences of a Sojourn
in the Falkland Islands

FRANCES J. HOWE-HENNIS

1910-1914

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Hawkins Maiden Land
 "Les Malouines" (Bougainville's expedition
 Sailed from St Malo 1763)
 My Native Land.

Weird, wild primal beauty,
 Unsullied, virginal, free!
 Rocky Isles of Antarctic,
 Far flung on a stormy sea!

No peaceful smiling country -
 From Nature's throes came thou -
 Offspring of Titan passions,
 Mysterious is thy brow.

The wild freshness of thy morning
 Was smirched by man's assail;
 In thy untrod hazy hollows
 Sounded the hum of toil.

Weird, wild primal beauty
 Unsullied, virginal, free!
 Rocky Isles of Antarctic
 Far flung on a stormy sea!

Mabel Clement.
 1909.



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I. FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

As we approached the shores of the Falkland Islands many rumours were rife concerning the place of our destination. The Captain informed us that the seasons consisted of nine months winter and three months bad weather. The chief engineer said that two missionaries had been eaten by cannibals! These, however were exaggerations.



It was night when we arrived outside Stanley Harbour, so we had to anchor till morning, in order to have light to pass through the Narrows, already described by its name. It was in this sheltered harbour that the British men o' war awaited the German Fleet before the famous battle of 1914.

I shall never forget my first impression of the Islands. I was expecting something sombre and gloomy, but instead of that, on going on deck next morning, a most

picturesque scene met my eye. We were passing through the Narrows and soon reached Port Stanley. All was bathed in sunlight, the atmosphere was clear and the sky a beautiful blue. Rows and rows of little white wooden houses with red roofs gave the whole the appearance of a French fishing village. Behind these rose the mountains and hills, majestic in their barrenness. Owing to the stormy climate, there are no trees, but Nature so adjusts herself to the wants of her children that we did not need them.



There was no lack of beauty, strange as it may seem. The ruggedness of the scenery had a charm of its own. It was nature in her wild state, yet beautiful and so free.

Port Stanley is on East Falkland Island, but I was going to the West Island. The difficulty was to get there, the only means of transport being either by whaler or by schooner. Both the schooners which plied between the Islands were at that time disabled, so I had no choice but to take the whaler.

That trip is vivid in my memory still. The Captain, a kind-hearted Norwegian, invited us to stay on the bridge for a while, as the decks were under water most of the time owing to the heavy seas. On going below, we found ourselves in a tiny three-cornered saloon, with a three-cornered table to match, round which were couches with bunks above them. A stove burned in one corner, and the heat and smell of oil were indescribable, to say nothing of the violent vibration from the engines. The engines



on these boats have to be very powerful in order to combat the enormous strength of the whale when harpooned. As soon as the whale is struck, the engines are reversed, but even so, the whale pulls the vessel in the opposite direction at the rate of 12 knots an hour.

Even then we could not be taken directly west, but were dumped on a station further down the East Island with the promise of being picked up in a few days. Here we arrived without invitation, vaguely wondering how we

should be received.

People from the Motherland can hardly realize the hospitality of the Colonies. We arrived without notice, and yet we were received with as much warmth and welcome as if we had been long-expected guests. Everything was done for our comfort, and the greatest trouble was taken to make our visit enjoyable. Horses were placed at our disposal, and we were shown all the beauty spots of the surrounding country.



Again we found ourselves in the whaler, plying west, and as we worked our way up the winding creek, the beauties of the scenery struck us even more. The West Island is certainly the place for nature lovers. Here the mountain peaks run in chains, behind which other peaks rise and fade away, and the "distance lends enchantment to the view".

It was evening time, and the setting sun tinted all with the softest and most mellow shades, ranging from

purple to the palest rose. One peak, Mt. Adam, higher than all the rest was tipped with snow.

It was spring time, but there were no budding trees to tell us so. "We have no Spring or Autumn here" they told us. No autumn tints or falling leaves to mark the passing of the summer, and no green buds to herald in the spring! How sad, and yet they do not miss it.

All the year the same short white grass covers the rocky hill side, and patches of the Diddle-dee bush grows



in heather-like fashion close to the ground. Sheep nibble contentedly, and here and there flocks of wild geese may be seen feeding.

A brown bird perches on the fence close by about the size of a starling, with a red breast. He is their "robin" though he has no voice to tell them that the sun will shine again, as does our little weather-prophet at home.

The flowers too are different. At our feet the "Pale Maiden" with its white yet almost transparent cup-shaped

blossoms, waves in the breeze on its tall and slender stem. It is well called the Falkland Snowdrop as it is the first flower to appear after the winter. Later, we found many other different kinds, but what struck me most was the fact that there were no bright colours, all were either white or yellow, except a few mauve-tinted ones. Great was our surprise when we discovered the first violet! It was yellow, and had no perfume. The "Vanilla daises" flourished amongst the taller tufts of the white grass.



These were white, and smelt strongly of vanilla. When cultivated they thrive surprisingly, and throw out quantities of lovely blossoms. I must not forget the "Oxalis", a dainty little flower like a convolvulus, pinkish-white in colour, and perched on a slender red stem. The clover shaped leaves grow in little rosettes on a similar stem. I remember reading in the "Daily Mail" about a plant of it that had been brought home and exhibited in London. Our late King greatly admired it and asked where it came from. It

seems to thrive well in England, as several plants that I sent to a friend flowered in the second year. It is edible, and its leaves taste like sorrel. Many people pour boiling water on the leaves and stalks, sweeten it, and it then make a drink something like raspberry vinegar. It is commonly called the "scurvy grass," and was used in olden days as a cure for scurvy.

There are three or four kinds of berries, the Diddle-dee being the favourite and most useful. Its berries are



bright red and of a peculiar bitter-sweet flavour. They contain much quinine and are very wholesome. Certainly the children eat them all day long, and have never been known to suffer from doing so. They are good stewed and make excellent jam. The Malvins berry is white, with a blush of rose, and may be found close to the ground, and often hidden by tufts of grass. It is also good to eat, but owing to its scented and rather sickly flavour, it is not much used. It is sometimes called the "tea berry",

and one time, many years ago when stores ran short, and tea was not available, the leaves of this plant were said to have made an excellent substitute. As summer advances the Christmas bush blossoms, and the little creamy balls become masses of silky fluff as they turn into seed. In this condition it is used to decorate the houses at Christmas time; hence its name.



II.

A TYPICAL SETTLEMENT.

A settlement is generally found in a valley, or spot sheltered by surrounding hills. It consists of a house occupied by the owner or manager of the settlement with the numerous workshops connected with it.

Each house has a garden, also sheltered as much as possible. Gorse, which is found to thrive well is



Roy Cooe

generally planted round about, while wooden fences as breakwinds are placed at intervals across the garden. All vegetables sufficiently sheltered flourish, and low-growing fruit trees, such as gooseberries and raspberries are successfully grown.

The Corral is an important feature of these settlements as each one has its own troop of horses. Some of these are kept for dragging the heavy peat carts. It takes three horses to pull these carts, on account of the

rough tracks, there being no made roads. One horse is placed between the shafts and one on either side, each side one carrying a rider.

The life indoors is a busy and strenuous one. All butter making, bread baking, and laundry work must be done on the premises, yet without these humdrum duties, the life would be indeed a lonely one for those at home. Of course there is always the recreation of riding, but many prefer to stay at home on account of the severe winds.



Fires are kept going nearly all the year round. Even in summer the evenings become chilly and all are glad of the cheerful warmth of the peat fire. Coal is obtainable from the coast, but at such a high price that it is not much used.

The outside or business life of the settlement consists of sheep-farming, and all the summer months, the "hum of toil" goes on. There is the gathering in of the sheep and lambs, and then the dipping and shearing seasons.

All is done by hand, and the speed that these men attain in their work is quite wonderful. The farms are large, and contain on an average about 20,000 sheep. The wool is pressed into bales and sent to the English market.

Then comes the killing season. Alas! hundreds of poor harmless sheep have to be slaughtered, just because the stock must be kept young. Their carcasses are boiled down to make tallow, which is also exported to England.

The winter is a slack time as regards farm work and



Roy Cove. Old Bertrand house in foreground
"New" house in background built
for Howard Clement & Nathaniel Bertrand
1897/98

is generally employed in building and fencing, etc.

So this common place yet happy life goes on from year to year in Britains most southern colony.



III.

THE KELPERS.

The Kelpers, as those born within these kelp surrounded islands are called, are in reality a side branch of our British race, being descendants of early settlers. They are an innately musical people, though some have failed to develop that talent owing to lack of opportunity. Those who can are always most anxious to sing on all festive



occasions the curious part being that their sense of humour is sadly deficient, and the songs generally chosen are of a most doleful and pathetic character.

Another feature I noticed was, that though most of them belong to rifle clubs and generally shoot well, they do not care for games. They prefer to sit round the peat fire in the evenings smoking and gossiping. There are some who do read a good deal but alas! there are some who cannot even do that. This is owing to the system of edu-

cation. An itinerant schoolmaster visits the huts, and spends a fortnight once a year with each family, examining them and giving work to be done in his absence.

The spiritual welfare of these people is dealt with in much the same manner. The clergyman makes a tour of the islands once and, if possible, twice a year. He visits each settlement, holding services at the Manager's house. In the meantime the people are left much to themselves, and any services, such as marriages and burials are per-



Howard Clement

formed by the Doctor, who holds an important position in the colony.

He is generally a man with various resources, and does much for the welfare of the people. His headquarters are at Fox Bay on the West Island, and from there he rides long distances to attend his scattered patients, often remaining in a ^{house} hut for weeks at a time, and putting up with many discomforts in his efforts to fight the battle of life and death.

Sunday is usually kept in a quiet and peaceful manner, no unnecessary work being done. The shepherds are passionately fond of singing and when I was there, pleasant little gatherings were often arranged in the evenings. These were much appreciated, and some had to ride long distances to be present. The men used to arrive all spick and span, and were so keen on the singing that they made copies of several of the hymns to supplement our small stock of books. One evening I was asked if I knew the



hymn "Juanita" and would play it for them!

The favourite attitude on these occasions was to stand in a semicircle, each with an arm round his neighbour's neck. These Kelpers always seem to seek support. They also give the impression that time is no object to them, and one always associates the Spanish work "Manana" with them. It was nice to see their self-respect with regard to personal appearance. As soon as the day's work was over, their working clothes were cast aside, and they

tidied themselves, as they called it, for the evening.

The women appealed to my sympathy most; they lead such lonely lives. Their little huts are scattered over the "camp" miles and miles apart. Their husbands are away all day and sometimes in the summer, they do not see them for weeks together, as during the shearing season, all the shepherds are called in to the settlement. They very rarely have another woman to talk to, and yet they are bright and happy, and take great pride in their little



homes. Even the smallest hut ^x has its porch, or conservatory as they call it. They all love flowers.

Most of their shopping has to be done by post, many of them sending "home" as they call England, for articles of wearing apparel. Food stuffs can be obtained from a special store organised by the manager of the station, for the needs of his family and the settlement in general.

The shepherds are comfortably off for men in their position. The average married man can earn about £6 a

^x The houses used by a shepherd & his family are 8 roomed, the expression "hanty" is used of a single man's house containing 2 or 3 rooms. The expression hut is never used! It is evidently Irish! M.C.

month, and has a hut, peat and mutton free. They generally keep a cow for milking, so have milk and butter free also.

The unmarried men, both shepherds and navvies, live in the "cook-house" close to the settlement. This building is looked after by a "cook", as the man in charge is called. He caters and cooks for the men.

The chief employment in the winter evenings is gear making, and in some cases it is carried to a very fine art. Sometimes they introduce fancy plaiting, and for the



handles of whips they use horse-hair, thus turning out very handsome pieces of work. This gear is one of the few remnants of Spanish influence left in the islands. The various pieces retain the Spanish names. For instance, our halter is their "bousaille", and our leading rein their "cabaresta". The horses too, keep their Spanish names - our chestnut is their "roselia". They are brought from the coast, often in a wild state, and are broken in by one or two skilled shepherds, the method being quicker and more

strenuous than our English way.



To you (My sister)
 A land far South,
 Sky azure blue,
 Italian Sea,
 Remember do!
 It mused us both -
 Historic? no!
 The brown peat streams
 Still onward flow.
 Its freshness brings
 My dawn to me
 And mem'ry clings
 Dear land to thee!

Nabel Clement
 1917.

Roy Cove
 West Jalkland

IV.

MY FIRST CHRISTMAS.

Somehow it did not seem like Christmas, without the frost and snow, and the long winter evenings at home when we watch the yule log burning.

The house was decorated with the Christmas bush, and all the usual preparations were made the week beforehand, such as cooking gosling pies, etc., which would enable the



season to be a holiday time for everybody. Unexpected friends often arrived and all was merriment and jollity.

A dance was got up on one of the settlements and everybody flocked to the scene, including masters, mistresses, servants and children. Even the babies were brought and put to sleep in a quiet corner, while their mothers joined in the song and dance. Races and sports were arranged for the occasion, and the Christmas season was quite a strenuous one while it lasted. It was so seldom that many of

these people met that they made the most of the occasion. All the available houses and sheds were commandeered, everyone helped and all thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Social distinctions were flung to the winds for the time, and all were just human beings bent on enjoying themselves and making others happy.

At this time picnics were often indulged in, and one bright sunny day we arranged one. We could never make plans for any length of time beforehand on account



Tom
element
"Wien"
element
"Horn"
element
children

of the sudden changes in the weather. One day would be a typical summer's day and then perhaps the next would plunge us into the very heart of winter. At all times we had to combat with the wind as we were never without it. It usually went down about 6 p.m. so that the evening was always the most peaceful time of the day.

To get on with our picnic, the first thing to do was to make preparations. We cut sandwiches and packed all the good things as well as the crockery, kettles, etc.

into maletas (saddle bags) and set out on horseback for a sheltered nook in a valley near the sand beach. Here we unloaded and prepared to make the fire. This was built with stones and filled with Diddle-dee, which made excellent fuel and even though green blazed up at once, owing to the amount of natural oil it contains. Plenty of clear spring water was obtainable from a running stream close by, and though the tea had a slightly smokey flavour we declared it never tasted better.



Howard Clement Sur.

Gladys Bostward
"Muzzie"Wickham
Bostward?

The horses grazed peacefully near by "manared" (hobbled) as they were to keep them from straying.

The next item on the programme was a "clam" hunt. This sounds rather like a wild beast chase, but in reality it consisted of grubbing in the sand for a species of shell fish called clams, the South American oyster. We found them in great quantities, tracing them by little holes in the sand and digging down for them. We filled some empty maletas brought for the purpose, and after a very

enjoyable day, returned to the settlement laden with our spoils. This picnic was only one of many.

Sometimes we went Diddle-dee picking, other times fishing - catching such quaint creatures, such as the "Mouth Almighty" a little fish mostly head and mouth. Sometimes it was quite a difficult feat to land the big mullet that clung to the bait of raw meat, and often when first landed, they would escape. On one occasion I was nearly dragged off the rock from which I was fishing and had to call for assistance as I was determined not to lose my prize.

Such were the simple amusements and recreations of dwellers in these Antarctic Isles.



Clement Cariduen with Frances House Harris
Joyce. Twins "Wick" & "Molly" Tom.
Howard Wickham Gladys Bostward

V.

MY VISIT TO WEST POINT ISLAND.

This small island is connected in my mind with many pleasant recollections. It lies to the west of West Falkland Island and contains only one settlement. Though isolated and lonely, it has many charms of its own. Even the "getting there" was unique. We had to ride for about four hours over the usual rough "camp", distances being always measured by time instead of by miles in that part of the world. We obtained rest and refreshment at a shepherd's hut en route, and at last arrived at the point and sighted our destination.

The sea lay between, so our first efforts were to signal for the cutter. This was done by lighting two fires of Diddle-dee and then awaiting the reply. Soon a column of smoke rose up from the other side and we knew that assistance would shortly arrive. The two fires signified that visitors were awaiting the cutter. One fire would signify that the mail had arrived and was placed in rude wooden letter box on the beach, and could be sent for when convenient. This simple code of signalling adopted by these South Sea Islanders was most effective.

Presently the little cutter reached us and we were transported to the other side after a pleasant sail of half an hour, the wind being favourable.

The Settlement with its peat stack and corral, was very similar to those on the main island, the difference

being in the natural structure and especially in the animal and bird life.

Here we are brought in contact with some of nature's marvels! First of all the discovery of some buried wood in its different stages, leading up to shale, gives one the idea of a buried forest and that at some remote period trees must have grown on the island. Very probably all these islands were connected with the mainland in far gone ages.

Minerals were scanty, though sometimes we picked up magnesia crystals, and iron ore might be seen running through the rocks, giving a reddish appearance. This gave rise to certain Cliffs being called the Red Cliffs.

The animal and bird life here was most interesting. From tiny tussack-covered islands close by could be heard the mighty and monotonous roar of the sea-lions. Occasionally a solitary member of this community would favour us with his presence and we would meet him unexpectedly among the rocks or lurking between the clumps of tussac grass. Men have been said to have been chased by them but I have never had that experience. The rate at which these clumsy creatures can flop along is quite marvellous. A sea-leopard, a motley looking creature about 15 ft. long also favoured us with a visit, and on one occasion a dead sea-elephant was washed up on the beach. His hide made a good winter covering for the roof and walls of a fowl house.

The penguins interested me most of all. They are such quaint pretty creatures and especially the little Rockies. These were only 18 inches high and lived in rookeries among the rocks. They get quite tame once they discern a friend from a foe, and with a little coaxing allow themselves to be stroked. It is one of the prettiest sights to watch them going down to the sea for their daily ablutions. They always march along in an upright position, and in the distance they look like a double white line winding down the mountain side.

The Gentoos are something like the Rockies, but are about 3 ft. high. Then come the Jackass penguins, so called because their voice resembles that of a donkey braying. These are ugly birds in comparison with the others, but their life is mostly spent underground, so their appearance does not signify. They burrow in tunnels in the peaty soil round the roots of the tussac grass. Their beaks are very strong and they seem to derive great pleasure from nipping the ankles of an unwary intruder. They build their nests or rather burrow out their tunnels in quite a scientific manner, working backwards, digging up the soil with their beaks and shovelling it out with their flippers.

VI.

A FEW MORE OF NATURE'S MARVELS.

The stone rivers are one of the most curious and interesting features of the islands. They wind down the mountain side just as a running river would but the stones are stationary, just as if they had been arrested in the act of being swept along by some powerful current. Evidently some mountain torrent poured in wrathful energy down those very mountain sides in ages beyond the ken of man where now we see this strange sight.

The Balsom bog is another interesting feature which must not be passed over. It is supposed to be the remains of the Antarctic tree and grows in a green mound. Its peculiar shape arises from the constant pressure of the wind which will not allow it to grow upward. A white sticky substance appears on its surface at certain times of the year. This has a remarkable healing effect, and is often put on sheep which have been hurt by the shears. It is a curious plant, and if prodded with a stick the whole plant gradually dies. The older bogs which were about 2 or 3 ft. high were very useful as mounts when riding.











Grinchium filifolium Gand.

Pale Maiden



Viola maculata Cav

Portulacaceae

Violet



Leucerinia pappina
H. & A.

Vanilla Gouan



Apparently *Nassauvia fruticosa* Cass.

French Lavender



Senecio littoralis Gaed.

Marsh Daisy



perhaps a form of
Senecio falklandicus Hook. fil.

Mugwort



Erigeron alpinus L. var. *myosotifolius* Hook. & Pl.



Aster Vahlia Hook. & Arn.



Ranunculus magellanicus Lam.

Pig. vni

Male & Female Blossom



Gunnera napellanica Lam.

Pig Vine
(Fruit-)



Gnaphalium purpureum L.



Hieracium antarcticum D'Urv.



Macrorhynchus pumilus HB.



Taraxacum vulgare Linn.



Pink Mudwort
Anagallis alternifolia



Maue Mudwort

Pratia repens Gand.



Primula frimosa β *magellanicum*



Calceolaria Fothergillii Soland.

L
Lady's Slipper or
Calceolaria



Rubus geoides Sm.

Wild Strawberry, bloss



Rubus geoides Sm.

Dec. under rocks

Wild Strawberry



Myrtus nummularia Poir.

Malvina or tea Berry



Mertensia depressa Sol.

Pinion Leary



Armeria Macloviana Boiss.



Luzuriaga marginata Benth.

Almond Blossom

Found under rock



Empetrum rubrum Sol., - ex Hook. fl. Antart.

Diddle Lee (blossom)



Pernettya pumila Hook.

Little Tree Berry



Perrettia pumila Hook

Mountain Berry
(blossom)



Penstemon pumila A. R.

Mountain berry



Cerastium arvense L.

van Oudenhout Houttuin

Bartholomew's Buttonhole



Oxalis enneaphylla Cav.

Oct. to Feb. even where snow is long

Coccoloba or Lemnaceae



Cardamine hirsuta L.

Cress

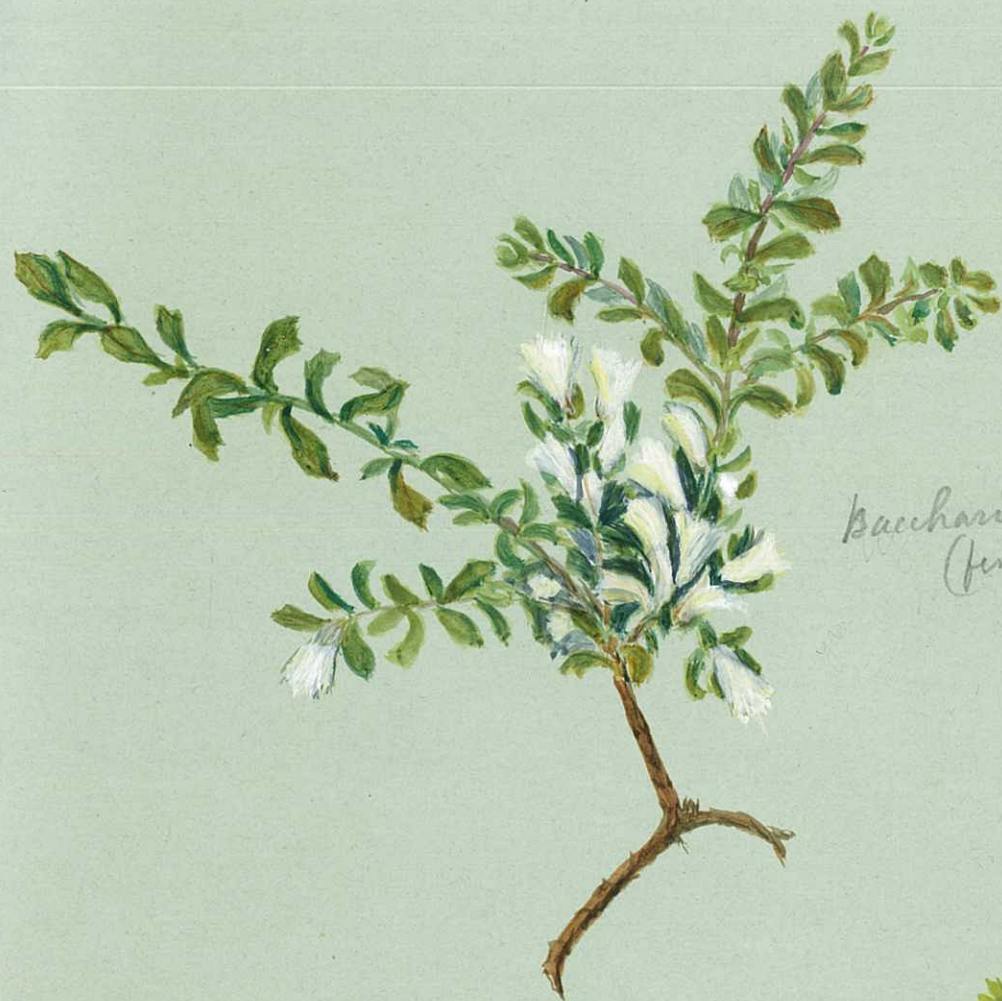
52



perhaps *Isleia muschata* L.

Doc

Urena erecta



Baccharis myrtilloides Des.
(female plant)



Des. *Baccharis myrtilloides* Des.
(male plant)

Christmas Bush



Draba
funicularis Hook. & G.



Lam

Oct 800



Gnaphalium purpureum L



Arabis

macdoniana Hook.



Rumex acetosella

torrel



Acaena laevigata Ayauca

Large Bears



Acaena lucida Vahl.

Burr

40



Asa

Celery



perhaps *Chilodactylon amellinicum*, Cass.

Facine Bush



Nassauvia serpens D'Urv.

Lory

43



Veronica elliptica Forst.

Box



Hamadryas argentea Hook. & Ar.,



Ranunculus
maculatus D'Uv.



Ranunculus liliifolius Smith.

Buttercup fr.



Seymouria



Azorella?
(*ho eximii i bark*)



young Balsam plant

Dec. 1910
Bamboo on hard camp.



Azorella calophylla Cav.





Dee yan



Chloraea Gandichandii Pring.

Orchid



Chloraea

Chloraea Henningsii

O. rubra



Pogonia tetraphylla Poepp.

Spotted Bay Weevil

Dec.

Among long white grass



Male



Female



Nest

Thimble Shaped



Nest open
containing a
ball of yellow eggs