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## **STIRRING CAREER OF AN OLD COLONIST.**

**I HAVE to chronicle (writes a correspondent at Awanui North) the death of Mr. Richard Matthews in his 82nd year, after a lingering illness of about 16 months, at his widowed daughter's residence, Mrs. Rose, with whom he had resided for the last 12 or 14 years on a portion of the estate formerly owned by him. His career has been a very eventful one. He left England when quite a young man—about 20 years of age—on board H.M.S. Beagle, commanded by Captain Fitzroy, R.N., afterwards Governor of New Zealand, on a Christian mission to the Terra-del-Fuegians, under the patronage of Dr. Wilson, Vicar of Walthamstow. He was also accompanied by three native Fuegians, namely, Yorkminster about 30, Gimmy Button about 16, and Fuega Basket, also about 16, whom Captain Fitzroy had previously brought to England for benevolent purposes, and from whom young Matthews gained an elementary vocabulary of words in the Fuegean language, thus fitting him in some degree to begin his calling in the now sphere of life to which he was devoted. He and the three natives named above, were duly**

landed at Terra del Fuego about the end of 1831, after an uneventful voyage, when he soon commenced operations in his new position, by clearing a piece of ground and planting potatoes, and sowing various sorts of vegetable seeds brought out with him for the purpose. He soon, however, discovered that there was little prospect of doing any good in this respect, as the curiosity of the natives led them to pull up all the plants soon after making their appearance above ground. This seems to have been the commencement of his troubles. In the meantime, the Beagle had weighed her anchor, spread her canvas, and resumed her journey. What a chill and lonely feeling he must have experienced, being thus left without a friend, surrounded by savages of the most vicious type in the known world. His hopes must surely have been dismal and forlorn under the circumstances. But this was far from being the only cause that he had for feeling lonely and deserted. The novelty of the position was soon obliterated from the minds of the natives, when their savage instinct returned with full force, and holding a consultation they decided to sacrifice the life of the young missionary, and this was only averted by the earnest pleading on his behalf of his three shipmates with their countrymen. But although

trades with their countrymen. But although he got off with his life they carried away all his stores, and robbed him completely of his wardrobe, which proved to be the means of saving his life afterwards, for Captain Fitzroy seeing a lot of the natives dressed up in European clothing along the coast, about 150 miles away from where he had placed young Matthews, hastened back with all speed, apprehensive of foul play, and just reached the place in time to save his life, as they had again decided to kill him, and no doubt would have executed their designs on this occasion but for the timely arrival of the Beagle. Although Mr. Matthews had no desire to shrink from the self-imposed duty, Captain Fitzroy would not permit him to remain any longer, and took him on board again, where he remained till the Beagle reached the Bay of Islands, in December, 1835, having been on board for a period of about four years, during which time he assisted the celebrated naturalist, C. Darwin, in collecting specimens of natural history, who honourably acknowledged the able assistance that Mr. Matthews had rendered him. As an instance of his intrepidity I may mention that he captured, at considerable risk to himself, a specimen of a serpent belonging to the most venomous species.

After landing at the Bay of Islands he

was again employed in mission work under the Church Missionary Society, and was stationed at Wanganui, with the Rev. Mr. Mason where he built a house costing him about £200, and which he thought the society ought to have borne the cost of; but as their agent had not been first consulted and his authority procured, they repudiated any liability, leading to some friction between them, and causing a severance of his connection with the society. He again returned to the North (Kaitaia) overland, where he remained for some years following various occupations as offered. He built the first weatherboard house in this district, sawing the timber, doing the carpenter-work, and even making the window sashes himself. He also made the bricks for the first brick house built North of Auckland, if not the first in the colony. Possessing as he did a constitution of iron, great energy, and an aptitude for overcoming difficulties appearing almost insurmountable to others, qualified him in a remarkable degree for the duties of a pioneer colonist.

Making a second trip to Wellington overland and returning North again by the same way in the early days of New Zealand's history, that is during the 30's, will give but a faint idea of his energy and persever-



ance, especially when we bear in mind the absence of made roads or tracks, the innumerable rivers and creeks to cross, the immense forests to traverse, besides many other difficulties that we can form no conception of, would alone indicate his indomitable courage. I believe I am right in saying that he was the only European who witnessed a feast made on human flesh in New Zealand, and this occurred somewhere in the Waikato as he was travelling North on one of the journeys alluded to. The Rev. Mr. Taylor, I think, gives the particulars of this sickening sight in his writings on New Zealand. Mr. Matthews saved on this occasion the lives of two natives, who were just on the point of being killed for a similar purpose. Being a good Maori linguist, he was enabled to prevail with the chief of the *kainga* to let him (Mr. Matthews) have them. A tomahawk for each was given in return. He brought these two men with him to the Awanui, and they have remained here since. One of them died very recently, and the other is still living here. Although his connection with the C.E.M.S. was severed, his interest in the welfare of the natives was nothing abated. He continued to exercise a benign influence over them till within a short time of his death, and, as might be

expected, was very much respected by them.

As previously stated, he died in his 82nd year, after a lingering illness of about sixteen months. His death was simply the result of senile decay. An inquest under the circumstances would have been a farce, and the fact that he spent over 57 years of his life in New Zealand, subjected to all the hardships and anxieties incidental to the early history of a colony, would indicate a strong and vigorous constitution. He leaves three married and two widowed daughters, and one son to mourn their loss. His remains were followed to their last resting-place at Kaitaia by most of the settlers in the district, and the burial service was conducted in a very solemn and impressive manner by the Rev. Henry Young, of Ahipara.