

IN A GERMAN SETTLEMENT.

THE WALLA WALLA DISTRICT.

Half a century ago, a few German farmers pioneered their way into Upper Riverina, and took up farms in various parts of the Albury district. Their descendants and successors of to-day represent a considerable proportion of the agrarian population of that part of the State, and are rendering a valuable contribution to its development and progress. Walla Walla district may be taken as a specimen - a centre typical of at least a dozen others within a radius of 40 or 50 miles of Albury.

Walla Walla lies west of the main Southern Railway line, and is traversed by the branch line from Culcairn to Corowa. A small township has sprung up around the railway station, and is steadily growing into a place of considerable local importance. Three churches to one public-house is not a bad showing for a Riverina township, and speaks volumes for the sobriety of the neighbourhood and the general decorum of the village. The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney evidently believes in the soundness of the district, as is testified by the erection of commodious and substantial premises for the transaction of banking business and the accommodation of the manager. A doctor's residence is

provided by an association of settlers and others, and the latest sign of progress is the acceptance of a tender for the erection of a school of arts. As an object-lesson in the value of closer settlement, Walla Walla may be quoted approvingly. An area of 51,750 acres was subdivided a few years ago into 121 farms. All of these have been taken up, and are being more or less vigorously cultivated. A good many have fallen into the hands of young men already in the district, consequently the increase of settlers is not nearly as great as would otherwise have been the case. Nearly another 50,000 acres were previously under settlement, making, in all, about 100,000, of which 20,000 acres were under wheat last season. The yield runs up to 400,000 bushels, and it is anticipated that the crop will this year be equal to anything previously garnered. Early rains promoted a healthy and general growth of stalk and blade in October, and opportune showers in November filled out the grain. Harvesting weather has, on the whole, been all that could be desired, with possibly a little damage here and there to the crops that were cut for hay. But smiling faces are the rule just now in this part of Riverina, and proprietor and share farmer alike are congratulating themselves upon one of the best years they have ever had.

Among the settlers who have succeeded in establishing themselves in this favoured part of the country, the German

3.

24

element is largely in evidence. Prominent among these are the Wenke Brothers, who claim now to rank as the oldest residents in the district. Their father was one of the first of the sons of the Fatherland to "free select" in Riverina, and the fruits of his enterprise and industry are being enjoyed by a considerable family of sons and daughters now established in houses of their own, and each rearing a family to perpetuate the domestic virtues and industrial vigour of the best type of German settlers. Mr. A.J.Wenke - usually known as Jacob Wenke - is the most prominent of a trio of sons, all well established, and yet working away as if everything depended upon their present-day effort. Mr. John Wenke is an active shire councillor, and a man of considerable public spirit. He claims to be the oldest settler now resident in the district. Mr. E.G.Wenke has also a considerable holding a few miles distant from the township. All three brothers are successful agriculturists. They hold between them an area of approximately 4500 acres, the quality and productivity of which it would be hard to surpass in any part of New South Wales. Lightly-timbered country, with gentle slopes, of a loamy soil, and with a good average rainfall, it is just the sort of land anyone might covet if he did not possess it, or be proud of if he happened to be its fortunate owner. For several years these brothers followed mixed farming, with a preference for sheep. But of late, improved

methods and better returns have encouraged them to go in for more intense cultivation. The wheat area has been enlarged. Other lines of production have also been introduced. Sheep have been continued more with a view to keeping the land clean, eating off the stubble, and adding their quota of manure; while at the same time, the returns from their wool and meat have comfortably swollen the receipts for the year. So far as the wheat crop is concerned, the average for several years past has been about 15 bushels per acre. This season, it is estimated, the yield will be fully 18 bushels. Fallowing for a year, and the use of superphosphates, has had not a little to do with this satisfactory result, and serves to show that it pays to study the science of agriculture. "To tickle the soil with a hoe" is not the way to permanently cause it to "laugh with a harvest." There must be deeper probing and more effective stimulation if the agricultural merriment is to be continued. The Walla Walla farmers have found that out, and are turning their knowledge to good account.

But not satisfied with the customary rotation of sheep and wheat, Mr. Jacob Wenke has demonstrated that there are other lines of cultivation to which attention may be profitably turned. Surrounding his homestead is a vineyard of 15 acres, planted chiefly with wine-producing grapes, and yielding usually three tons of grapes to the acre. As

Mr. Wenke has no difficulty in selling his grapes at £7 10s. per ton, it will be seen how profitable a line the vineyard represents. It means labour, and labour costs. But it pays, and pays especially well when a large share of the work is done by the family itself. In addition, Mr. Wenke affects currant culture. Five acres are under currants, and for these there is an excellent market in Albury and Sydney. They are dried by the grower, and then bring up to £45 or £50 per ton. The yield is at the rate of one ton per acre, and again the grower finds it worth while. But Mr. Wenke believes in the combination of brain and muscle as an industrial asset, and tells the story of the German father whose sons were disposed to rely on the old man's money rather than on their own industry. To teach them a lesson he left to them under his will nothing but an area of land to each, with an intimation, however, that there was treasure hidden under the soil. To discover the treasure they dug it up thoroughly, and thus learned the character of the treasure that was in it. "Dig it up," says Mr. Wenke, "and dig it deeply." His latest enterprise is in having a water service installed both for household and irrigation purposes. A divining-rod expert aided him to the discovery of a plentiful underground supply, upon which the bottomed at a depth of 212 ft. A powerful windmill draws up the water, and by a system of reticulation it is carried into the house and into all parts of the extensive garden. By

6. 87  
these means the enterprising Teuton has not only deserved success - he has commanded it.

Among other of the industrious German community. in the district may be mentioned Mr. F. Schmidt, with a holding of over 1500 acres, about one-third of which is annually put under wheat or oats - the portion cultivated one year being usually left to fallow the next; Mr. F. E. Habermann with an acreage of about 1100; Mr. A. Mickan, who owns 1500 acres; and Mr. W. M. Odewahn, with 1300 acres. In all there are about 50 German households in the immediate neighbourhood. A few years ago the community was almost entirely of the "mann, spricht Deutsch" order, but the throwing open of the Walla Walla and adjoining estates had encouraged the settlement of English speaking families. The Germans are, however, deeply rooted to the soil, and with the growth of their families they will still continue to count as an important element in the population. As it happens, also, they are nearly all of the Lutheran persuasion. They have their own pastors at Walla Walla and Burumbattock. At each of these centres they have their churches and manses, and German Churches are also to be found in several other places, served by one or other of the pastors referred to. They are said to be generous in their financial support. Accustomed to taxation for church purposes in their fatherland, they voluntarily agree to tax themselves for the maintenance of

their clergy. Every family is assessed according to its financial strength. This assessment is made by the Church committee, and is accepted by the head of the family after consultation with the committee. Hence, bazaars and balls and that kind of thing for church purposes are not known among them, and their pastors enjoy that respect which comes from undistracted attention to their purely pastoral duties.

*Some articles  
originally published in  
newspapers pre 1922*