

[By "SNYDER."] *SNYDER*

MAKE A COMMENCEMENT.—MY FIRST ENGAGEMENT ON A NEWSPAPER.—I REPORT A MEETING.—MY SUCCESS.—MY CHARACTER IS ASSAILED, AND A JUST RETRIBUTION FOLLOWS.

I HAVE for some time past had it on my mind to write of scenes and events which I have either witnessed or taken part in during my career as a colonial journalist, which at this time dates back to within a few months of thirty years.

I do not say that throughout the whole of this term my sole occupation has been that of a journalist; but this pursuit runs through all others I may have entered upon, like a leading pattern through a piece of embroidery, albeit there may be many other patterns subordinate to it.

I think I may say there is not a department of a newspaper to which I have not served an apprenticeship, whether as contributor, reporter (general or special), correspondent, sub-editor, sole editor, co-editor, proprietor, part proprietor, shareholder, collector, business manager, canvasser—all of these separately, and sometimes all of them together. These matters, however, will all come to light in due course.

It was in 1843, or the beginning of 1844, when I arrived at Hobart Town from the coast of Brazil, where I had lived for some time. I left Bahia (the part I sojourned in) to escape an Italian woman who wanted to marry me, and who it is possible I might have married had I not learned upon undoubted authority that it was well known that she had poisoned her first husband, while there was a strong suspicion that she had despatched a second by the same process. I saw her myself brand one of her women slaves with a very hot flat-iron because she had singed a white shirt in the making up. My beloved kept a laundry, and washed for the captains and officers of the ships which sailed into or out of the Bay of San Salvador. Of a somewhat timid disposition, I took my departure in a barque sailing for Hobart Town, without intimating any such intention to my Borgias.

A few days after landing, I learned that the proprietor of a newspaper in Launceston wanted the services of a clerk. I made application by post, and received an answer by return offering me the appointment.

Launceston is 120 miles from Hobart Town, straight across the island, and was travelled in those days by four-horse coaches; and it was in making this journey I obtained my first experience of convict life in a convict settlement. The coach for which I had engaged myself started from a hotel, then—and, I believe, still—known as the Ship. The hour of departure was four o'clock in the morning. I had booked for an inside passage, and when I took my seat it was quite dark. There was, however, an occasional flash from the guard's lantern while he was stowing away parcels, packages, boxes, and those articles which are generally sent by stage coaches, to be dropped on the line of road at the gates of country residences, or placed in charge of the landlords of hotels; and this flashing of the guard's lamp enabled me, though somewhat indistinctly, to ascertain that there was a lady on the opposite seat to me as a fellow passenger. As a perfect stranger I could not address my conversation to her, and so there being no other inside passenger we travelled on in silence until we reached the first stage, fourteen miles distant, which was a settlement called Bridgewater.

Here the waiter came out of the hotel and informed passengers there was hot coffee inside ready for any one who liked to order it. I leapt from the coach, and with that politeness which is an inheritance bequeathed to myself and the family from which I spring, I asked the lady whether she would permit me to have the extreme pleasure of bringing her a cup of coffee; to which the lady made answer and said, if it was no difference to me she would much rather have a glass of RUM. Slightly taken aback, but too well bred to express my feelings by language or gesture, I asked for the rum decanter, and filled a half-pint tumbler three parts to the brim, which the lady partook of raw and without winking. She had evidently too much respect for the liquor to damage it with water. I don't know now what I ordered for myself, but it was not raw rum. The coach remaining twenty minutes, I filled my meerschaum, and lighting it, I paced up and down near to the coach waiting for the start and indulged in wonder. I wondered why the lady inside should prefer rum to coffee, and the only conclusion I could come to was that she had consumed something on the overnight which had disagreed with her, and that possibly rum was the particular tonic which had been recommended by her medical adviser. My wondering was suddenly cut short by an order from the guard for "All on board." Extinguishing my pipe, I got inside, and could then see, as the day dawned, that the lady, who would have turned the beam at eighteen stone, was dressed in a very plain serge gown of a dark-grey color; that a

white pocket-handkerchief, folded triangularly, was placed across her shoulders and pinned to her breast; a mob cap with no bonnet completed her simple toilet. The whole exterior of her dress was simplicity itself, and if nature when unadorned is adorned the most, my companion came out in perfection. I had not travelled more than ten minutes of the second stage, when the lady, touching me gently on the arm with the forefinger, asked me did I mind to let her have a whiff of my pipe, as she had not had a draw since she left the factory. Then, I wondered more than ever; but at the same time informed her I should have the greatest satisfaction in complying with so innocent a request. By the time the lady had concluded her smoke, we arrived at the next stage, where she partook of a second glass of rum, this time infusing it in a glass of beer. During the third stage she unfolded to my confidence her history. She was "in," she said, for fourteen years, which I understood meant that she had been under sentence of penal servitude for that somewhat lengthened period of time. Three times had the earth in its annual orbit revolved round the sun, and this term out of the fourteen years had she "put in."

She was now, she went on to say, going to service as an assigned servant to a man and a woman keeping a farm, who had in their time also been assigned servants, but had now got their liberty. At the end of the third stage my interesting companion expressed a sort of incoherent desire to mount the box alongside of the driver, and she had her desire gratified, as also in the matter of more rum and tobacco. At the end of the fourth stage the lady had come to her destination. I have a distinct recollection that she was very tipsy indeed, and required to be lifted down from the box and accommodated with a seat on the ground, which she used after the manner of using a couch. My memory is somewhat of a fleeting nature, but it is impressed on me that it was found necessary by a resident constable (who had also been an assigned servant) to convey her for safety to the lock-up, after having encompassed her wrists with a pair of handcuffs, in consequence of her having without any apparent reason bitten his right forefinger and thumb through to the bone. I have been reminded of the circumstance connected with this matter from the fact that nine months after the occurrence, being then on the staff of a newspaper, I reported the trial of the same lady, who stood charged with chopping off the head of the baby of the woman to whom she had been assigned, with a squaring axe, because, as it transpired, her mistress had accused her of stealing a bottle of rum. It came out in evidence that the woman was innocent—not of the murder, for that was admitted,—but of stealing the bottle of rum, which her mistress, subsequent to the transaction with respect to the squaring axe, found concealed in one of her husband's boots. The man had hidden it for conversion to his own uses. I recollect at the trial the Government doctor having been called in to give evidence on the prisoner's behalf, when he deposed that the act was due to nervous excitement, owing to the woman having been subjected to a false charge. She was found "Not guilty," and the remainder of her 14 years' sentence remitted; I never heard upon what grounds. Subsequently she received an appointment to the female wards of the lunatic asylum, where she acquired great celebrity for quieting refractory mad women by knocking them over the head with a towel-roller.

In due time I arrived at my journey's end, when I lost no time in introducing myself to head-quarters; obtained my engagement first, and afterwards enquired what my duties were likely to consist of. Then I learned that I was to keep the books, canvass for advertisements, and I might be asked upon occasion to use the ink-roller at press (when not otherwise engaged), to collect all moneys due and owing (no matter how I might be engaged). I was to work up advertisements, to see to the town delivery of newspapers, which I discovered meant running round with the greater number of them myself. When not otherwise engaged I was to make myself generally useful.

It was however so ordered that I was never to fill this department in the working machinery of a newspaper. It was the afternoon following my engagement, and at the time I was receiving instructions for my next day's duties, that a very diminutive, exceedingly deformed man, with a face very much scarred and boots very much out of repair at the toes (the same also being observable at the heels), staggered into the office very drunk, where helping himself to a corner of the editor's table and resting his right boot on his left thigh, he told the editor he was not going to stand it any longer. "Here," he said, "is 'Old Nick' at it again to-night, and I won't do it; therefore, will you lend me eighteen pence?" I may here mention that the "Old Nick" spoken of in such disparaging terms and coupled with a demand for an eighteenpenny loan, was no less a personage than Dr. Nixon, Bishop of Tasmania, eminent for his piety and devotion to the cause he was at the head of. "But," asked the editor, "why should you refuse

to report the Bishop's speech at the meeting to-night? Our readers must have it, you know."

"I don't care," said the Quilp-looking individual, "I have had to report five religious meetings within the last fortnight, and I am (here he hiccupped)—I really am going religiously mad."

I cannot say that I should have taken the gentleman from his style and manner to have been affected with any mania having a religious tendency, but he declared several times that such was the case; but I felt religiously sure that he had a great deal more liquor on him than he could carry with any ease or comfort to himself. After remaining in deep meditation, he removed himself from the table, and making an effort to shake hands with the editor, he declared he wouldn't, and he couldn't, and he didn't mean to report the meeting, but repeated his request as to the loan of eighteenpence to stop the insatiable cravings of his landlord.

"Lend me," he said, "or give me, which in such cases are interchangeable terms, the sum of one and sixpence, that I may go in peace and quiet to my lodgings, and bless you evermore." Then he meditated awhile, and again he spoke.

Looking at me very hard and going extensively into hiccups, he said, "Turn this recruit to account. Send him for the business; he will do it beautifully. He's not been driven religiously and melancholy raving mad like me, you know."

Receiving no reply, neither obtaining the eighteenpence, Quilp hiccupped himself out of the office.

It was then the editor asked me whether I thought myself equal to furnish a report of the meeting, as he considered it rather more than probable that the eccentricities of the gentleman who had just retired would prevent him being present at the Bishop's address. In those days, knowing very little of anything in general, and certainly nothing of any consequence in particular, there was only my own conceit to buoy me up. I was very confident of my powers, so I replied at once that I felt myself quite equal to reporting whatever the Bishop might say. I believe I should have made the same sort of affirmative answer had I been asked whether I was equal to building the cathedral he preached in. So, in reporters' language, I was told off for the work.

Taking with me something like a ream of paper and a half-crown's worth of leopards pencils with the finest of points, I went to the meeting, and sat down at a table specially set apart for the reporters.

The Bishop commenced his address. It advocated the necessity for obtaining increased means for educating the youth of the colony; for procuring the assistance of more clergymen, and seeking the aid of a number of lay teachers. His Lordship spoke for two hours, and I had covered the whole area occupied in about a hundred and thirty slips of post paper.

I knew nothing of shorthand, and not being quick at long-hand, I found when I got to my lodgings that I was unable to read half of what I had written, while the other half I could make neither head nor tail of. I had omitted to number my slips, which had got about as mixed up as a well-shuffled pack of cards. I was in about as thick a fog as sometimes prevails in the town of Launceston. I saw it was no use in making any attempt to bring my notes to bear on writing out a report; but with that presence of mind which augured for my future usefulness as a member of the fourth estate, I sat down, and partly from what I had written I could make out, partly from memory, and the balance from a vivid imagination, I wrote a two-column report. Fortunately, the next morning was not publishing day for the newspaper. I had twenty-four hours to put things to rights, so gathering up my slips and placing them in order, I waited until 11 o'clock the next day, when calling at the house at which the Bishop was stopping, I, in the most humble manner, explained the difficulty I was in. I told his Lordship how I had tried to report him, how I had feared I had failed, and how my situation was at stake. Would he, I asked, be good enough to look at my report, and where he saw any slight errors, would he be so kindly of heart as to correct them. His Lordship gave me a most benignant look, and with a seraphic smile told me not to feel at all uneasy. Then he gave me port wine and sweet biscuits. After this he sat down to read my manuscript. He smiled whole rows of sweet smiles as he perused slip after slip, and laid each beside him on the table. When he had done he turned to me in a way a cherub might be supposed to be equal to, and said, "My dear young gentleman, I have a most wretched memory. I really don't recollect saying last night ten words of what you have here set down. Perhaps I did, but indeed I am unable to recall them to my mind, although I feel quite sure that there is very much in these pages which I might have said with great propriety, and to the benefit of my hearers. Now let me give you another glass of wine, and then if you will call again in two hours hence I shall have had sufficient time to revise your manuscript. He was a true Christian, was that reverend

gentleman. When I called at the appointed hour he had got his address written out *in extenso*, and with many thanks (in another glass of port wine and more sweet biscuits) I acknowledged my obligations to His Lordship. I went to my lodgings, where I copied out in my own handwriting what he had handed to me, and then I gave my report in to the editor, saying never a word, as I knew from His Lordship's kindly manner that he was not the man to split

upon me. The reporter of the rival paper was very jealous of my work, and in the next issue it was darkly hinted that on the last newspaper I had been employed upon I had been found guilty of writing blasphemy, for which I had been adjudged to a long term of imprisonment, and that my original occupation was that of selling black lead pencils through the streets of London, not having sufficient ability to pursue the trade of a labourer, to which I had been apprenticed.

For all this I cared little. My reputation as a press-hand was established, and my whole efforts were now directed in maintaining it. The old reporter, Quilp, went over to the opposition paper, which then boasted of two reporters. They were, however, considered as only equivalent to one. There was an arrangement entered into by the editor that, under forfeiture of wages, both of them were not to be the worse for liquor at the same time. The two reporters acted honourably. For some months they took it turn and turn about to get drunk, and neither infringed upon the rights of the other. The reporter I succeeded—who, I may mention, was the brother of an eminent English authoress, long since gone to her last account,—was in 1859, drawn out of a shaft at Ballarat, some 150 feet deep. He was quite dead, and held firmly grasped in his right hand a ginger-beer bottle half full of brandy—an interesting exemplification of the ruling passion strong in death.

REMINISCENCES IN THE LIFE OF A
COLONIAL JOURNALIST. 2.

MY CONTINUED SUCCESS AS A MEMBER OF THE FOURTH ESTATE.—MY PAPER COMES INTO PROMINENT NOTICE.—THE CONVICT POLICY.—THE NEWSPAPER LITERATURE OF THE TIME.

I HAVE told of the success which attended my opening career as a journalist. It was nothing compared to what followed. I had made such a decided hit that henceforth my duties were limited to one sphere, and I went forth proud and elated to be pointed out in thoroughfares and public places as a member of the Fourth Estate.

The season of religious meetings had passed away when I was directed to write matter for the local columns of the paper. It was here I exhibited a precocity so unique and so profound that I even astonished myself. In the particular line I had entered upon there was nothing ever equalled me before nor do I think ever will in all time to come.

At the outset, just, I may say, as I entered on the threshold of a reporter's life, I was all abroad. The first day of my instalment I paced through the highways and the by-ways of the town, dropping in at one place and listening to the current topics of the day. Speaking to this one and the other, making enquiries, calling upon the police, visiting the public courts, entering the bars, parlors, and taps of hotels; but it was all to no purpose. I had not scraped so much together as would furnish half a dozen paragraphs for the local columns of the paper.

I made confession of this at night to the editor. I told him how despondent I felt; how that I thought I had not the material in me which went to make up an efficient representative of the Fourth Estate, and I asked him whether he thought I could be made useful in folding newspapers, and making them ready for the post, and for the general delivery after they had been printed off.

Then did the editor soothe and comfort me. He told me I was not to distrust my own powers. He divulged to me that he had been informed (in confidence) how I had managed to get a correct report of the Bishop's address; and that so far from thinking any the worse of me he considered it was a stroke of journalistic genius which augured well for a brilliant career in the future.

Then, making me come closer to him, he said, "Mr. Snyder, do you possess imagination? What you have not seen can you conceive? Things which you know nothing of can you relate in minute and succinct detail? Do you think that any appreciable amount of what you read of in the various newspapers which have come under your notice has been related by those who were eye witnesses or listeners? Not a bit of it. Go forth again on the morrow, and give me a better account of yourself. I felt relieved at once from the pressure of a great weight which had borne me down. I was once more elastic and light of heart.

And I went forth. The trees that afterwards fell down in the forest and crushed men, the sticking up of bushrangers, the escaped convicts who were drowned in crossing rivers, the number of