

cases of *delirium tremens*, the men who were lost and perished in the bush, the narrow escapes from violent deaths, attempted outrages frustrated, or outrages in a complete state of accomplishment; cruel desertions, acts of bravery, daring rescues, women pursued by bulls, the discovery of a new animal of enormous dimensions, seen by a stock- rider to emerge from a lake on a moonlight night, which appeared to be something between a hippopotamus and a whale, were all the emanations of my prolific pen. I was the reporter who ascertained the existence of a wild boy of the woods, who, upon the appearance of a human being, ran up the trunks of trees and concealed himself in the foliage. I afterwards discovered that near to the spot had been also seen a wild girl of the wood, who lived in the holes of rocks near to the sea shore, and who was presumed to be the orphan sister of the wild boy. Upon this I founded a beautiful and touching legend. I told how many years ago a gentleman of high birth and parentage, living upon his own estate in a sequestered vale near to the lovely and picturesque Lake Windermere, had shot a ruffian for making improper overtures to his wife, which she indignantly refused to listen to. Finding that she could not release herself from the scoundrel's importunities, she informed her husband, who she loved with a devotion unparalleled in the history of conjugal life. The blood boiled in the husband's veins, his eyes almost started from his head, due to suppressed passion; and so, giving out that he had gone upon a journey to a distant part of the country, he concealed himself in a back parlour, and awaited the coming of the wily would-be seducer. It was just as the sun had descended below the horizon, and the tips of the distant hills shone like burnished gold, making the eastern twilight refulgent with beauty, when the footstep of the villain was heard on the verandah where the fond wife who was giving suck at the fountains of life to her innocent babe was still plying her busy needle. With oily tongue and glib words the man renewed his importunities. At that instant the sound of a gunshot penetrated the evening air, and a corpse fell within a few feet of the young mother and her insulted husband. There was an inquest, a committal, and a trial, and the husband was sentenced to be transported to Tasmania for a term of fourteen years. He went out, branded as a felon, in a convict ship. A parting interview between the prisoner and his wife was allowed by the authorities. The husband's grief was indescribable. The wife was not so. She smiled upon him, and pressing his two hands between her own she said, "It is only for a few months, dear husband, when, with our darling babe, we shall meet again." With these mysterious words—words of mysterious comfort—the wife departed, and the convict, heavily ironed and manacled, was conveyed away and placed on board a common prison ship, to be taken across the "hering pond." Such were the coarse and brutal words of a hardened criminal (to whom the husband was chained) as he bid good-by to his paramour, telling her, in words of levity, to take care of herself, and keep her weather eye open against bobbies and beaks.

Then, I went on to relate how eight months after this event a ship arrived in Hobart Town, having a lady passenger on board, with a lady's maid in attendance on her, besides a page in silver buttons. I told how the ship contained many tons measurement of elegant furniture, and trunks upon trunks enclosing rich wardrobes belonging to the lady passenger. When she landed she was rowed on shore in the captain's gig, sitting in the stern sheets upon the British ensign, and protected from the cold breeze by being enveloped in a complete set of Marryatt's signals. She put up at the best hotel in the town. On the next day she engaged the services of a house agent, who rented for her a mansion which had formerly been occupied by a judge, now retired from judicial life. This she furnished magnificently in the Elizabethan style. The drawing-room was draped with rich tapestry, while to tread the carpets was like unto walking on feather beds. The dining-rooms were in keeping. The chief bed room was the dream of a fairy. The description I gave of that lady's mansion far surpassed anything to be found in the most efflorescent of James's or Bulwer's novels. In no long time all the officials left their cards at the strange lady's door, which were received by the page in a skeleton suit, with gold stripes down his trousers. Then the officials' wives left their cards, and in due course an intimacy was opened up. The lady was as lovely as anything to be found out of a "Book of Beauty." Women envied her; men paid their devoirs to her; but only upon one did she appear to bestow her favours. This was an officer at the head of the department of convicts. After giving him many gracious receptions, she, one night, while the twain were standing within an embrasure of the drawing-room window, gently touched him on the shoulder with the tip of her fan, which was composed of the feathers of birds of the rarest plumage, and asked in tremulous accents, "Have you a

convict under your charge of the name of Edward Smith." Upon this the head of the department thought for a while, and then said, "I think we have. He is No. 7498 on the prison books."

"Why do you, dearest, and most adorable madam, ask me a question so beside the inspiring surroundings of the present moment?"

"Because," said the lady, "I desire to have him in my service as my assigned servant. His mother was my washerwoman, and for his mother's sake I feel an interest in getting him out of his present trouble."

"Madam," was the reply, "your slightest wish is unto me as a law. The sun shall not have risen upon the landscape an hour and a half to-morrow morning when No. 7498 will be in your kitchen awaiting your commands. Should he prove disobedient to your orders you have but to report him to me, and he shall taste of the cat of many tails."

A shudder passed across the lady's face. But she spoke not a word in answer to the cold-blooded proposal.

Then on the next morning the lady clasped her convict husband to her bosom.

Time passed, and the head of the department found himself slighted—snubbed, in fact, and he sought about for an explanation of the change. Whispers were bruited abroad that the lady had taken an extraordinary fancy for No. 7498. It was even reported that she allowed him to invade the privacy of her sleeping apartment during unseemly hours of the night.

In a fortnight from this, No. 7498 found himself in a felon's cell laden with heavy irons. This was done at the command of the head of the department. Three months after this event the head of the department reported to his Government that No. 7498 had escaped from jail. A woman had bribed one of the wardens to allow her to enter his cell, where she had filed off his irons, and, changing dresses, he had left the prison, being mistaken for the female who had entered it. She was brought before a magistrate, and being closely questioned stated that it was her husband she had helped to escape. She knew not where he had departed for, and if she knew they could draw her life's blood from her ere she would divulge the secret. After a time, public sympathy being strong in her favour, she was liberated, and was never more seen alive. Three years had elapsed when two skeletons were discovered in a cavern near the sea foam which lashes the eastern side of the island. One was that of a male, the other a female. The skeletons were locked in each other's embrace. It was the escaped convict and his faithful wife. How or by what means they came by such a terrible death, never was ascertained. In weaving the story into such a romantic web, I know I brought it about that the wild boy and girl of the woods were the offspring of that devoted wife and her husband. I narrated in nine columns of long primer that which is here condensed into a few brief lines, and there was such an immense demand for the paper for weeks after that no less than three editions had to be printed off for sale. There were people who said the whole affair was one of my concoctions, and even went so far as to assert that the wild boy and girl of the woods had never yet been beheld by any credible witness. These people I despised in my heart.

This was an achievement which for the time placed me at the top of my profession. But it was really nothing, a mere flea bite, so to speak, to what in this particular line I subsequently accomplished.

I know I created a great sensation by the discovery of a gigantic cavern, which could only be entered by a small opening through the hollow trunk of a tree, and which it was ascertained had been the retreat of the most notorious bushrangers. It was found to contain the skeletons of numerous women, which had been forcibly abducted, carried away to the cavern, and then compelled to submit to their ruin, and afterwards murdered.

It was I who discovered the finding of an immense meteoric magnetic stone, the equal of which the British Museum could not boast of as having in its possession. The precise locality of the cavern and the meteoric stone was afterwards found so difficult to discover that all search was given up for them, and people once more doubted the accuracy of the newspaper reports.

The discovery of a white woman living nude with a tribe of blacks, and who was unable to speak her own language, was made by me. These and other startling items of intelligence brought the paper I represented under the most prominent notice—almost too prominent, I may say. Several of the events placed on record were reproduced in the London journals, besides being translated into several languages for Continental publications.

Sometime between the third and fourth month after I had regularly commenced my duties, the editor hinted to me that if I allowed many more prisoners to escape there would be an enquiry by the Government into the commissariat department, to ascertain why there had been no reduction in

the number of rations served out; and as he was directly on his own part, and indirectly on the part of friends and relatives, concerned in supplying the commissariat, he thought I had better drop the subject. But I did not drop the subject. In less than three weeks "by the indefatigable exertions of the members of the constabulary, aided by the sagacity of the detectives," I caused it to be generally known that, with the exception of two, the whole of the runaway prisoners had been captured. I looked upon this as a master-stroke of making things run smooth, uniform, and level. My employer, however, cautioned me not to meddle with prisoner questions. Without prisoners the community who lived upon them must perish. Without prisoners the Government staff of officials must be reduced by nine-tenths. That if every abuse was to be put down, what would become of those who received Government pay to perpetrate them? And when I came to think of this I could not help saying—What, indeed? I was instructed to let prisoners alone. Prisoners were to be looked upon as sacred. If it was found necessary to say anything about prisoners, the policy was to advocate sending more of them out, so that the income of the colony might be increased, the official staff enlarged, and the commissariat department extended. Things have changed now in this fair garden.

REMINISCENCES IN THE LIFE OF A COLONIAL JOURNALIST.*

MORE ABOUT COLONIAL NEWS-PAPERS. 3.

No. III.

At the time of which I have been writing there were three newspapers in full bloom in Launceston. The *Advertiser*, the *Examiner*, and the *Chronicle*. The *Advertiser* was a "high-toned" paper, and never descended to personalities, and served as a contrast to the *Chronicle*, which did. The editor of the latter was an old sea captain, of the rough-and-tumble school (he went aloft many years ago). He was a man who had no difficulty in giving expression to his feelings towards those with whom he might differ. As captain of a ship he had never failed to speak his mind to those he had to deal with; and as having the command of a newspaper he walked the deck of it, so to speak, and he swore, and ordered, and bullied as he had been wont to do of yore, when he was ordering his vessel to be put about, or while reefing sail in a squall, or keeping his vessel off a lee-shore. And those who remember, or have read in olden times how captains of merchant ships, or indeed captains of men-of-war, did swear, may be able to form some idea of the style of the old skipper's leading articles when an opposition newspaper attempted to cross his bows and round up under his stern. The *Launceston Examiner* was a pious publication. If either of the other papers dickered from it on a purely social or political question, it replied by hinting that the editors would find it all out in the next world.

It may be as well, in order to throw some small light upon the early days of colonial journalism, to go back a few years previous to, and for this information I am in part indebted to a work by Mr. James Borwick and to contemporary writers.

The *Launceston Advertiser* was begun by Mr. John Fawcner, a publican, who was afterwards known as the celebrated John Pascoe Fawcner, of Victoria. He was a remarkable instance of what may be accomplished by energy in the colonies; rising, as is well known to all old Tasmanians and Victorians, from an illiterate, ill-trained lad to become a very influential member of the Upper Parliament of Victoria. The *Advertiser* was born some time in February, 1829. Mr. Fawcner was editor and proprietor. He was also a publican and storekeeper, and it was at his hostelry the newspaper was published. The first issue opened with an advertisement of the editor and proprietor's own house of business, announcing the excellent things that were to be obtained at "Fawcner's Hotel, Cameron-street."

The publican-editor and the editor-proprietor followed up this by a second, informing the public that his hotel comprised in it a circulating library, which was referred to in conjunction with a choice supply of wines, ales, and spirits. The library, as catalogued, consisted of "The Dance of Death," "Newgate Calendar," "Moll Flanders," "History of England," "Pameder on Virtue Rewarded," "Lives of Celebrated Pirates," "Watts on the Mind," "The History of Tom and Jerry," Opie's and Mrs. Radcliffe's Novels, "The Art of Pugilism," "The Pilgrim's Progress," "Blossom of Anecdote," and "Soott's Reference Bible." It will be seen by this there was no lack of intellectual variety in Mr. Fawcner's library, which included books suited to all classes of readers who resided on the island of Van Diemen in those days.

The difficulties attending upon a free expression of opinion through the Press led to some contrivances of the Roman Pasquin kind. An old stump of a gum-tree had been left in the middle of Elizabeth-street, Hobart Town. All sorts of advertisements were attached to this lounge of the townspeople. This was the place selected for criticisms upon the conduct of Government officials, and the early visitants at the stump were often edified by the details of some tyrannical act of a Government official. One poor fellow was caught in the act of affixing a placard of this character, for which he received three hundred lashes.

The *Hobart Town Times* was the first who fought the battle for the freedom of the Press. When a Stamp Act was brought into operation imposing a shilling duty on each newspaper printed, the *Times* appeared without a stamp, but without public news. Mr. Bent was the first sufferer. The next proprietor, Mr. Henry Melville, sustained the struggle. Repeatedly and heavily fined, repeatedly and roughly imprisoned, Mr. Melville lived to see the emancipation of the Colonial Press and the liberty of the subject. But his contest ruined a fine fortune. Though he lost all, and is now a dependent old man in London, he deserves to be acknowledged and honoured as the true defender of the colonial newspaper Press. With no free Press to overawe the tyrannical rulers the state of the colonies can be imagined. Even free persons were subjected to the lash for very trivial offences, and women were flogged through the streets of Hobart Town for using abusive language towards Government officers. The supposed slandering of a school girl caused the offender to receive 150 lashes. Witnesses who gave evidence unsatisfactory to the magistrate were ordered to the triangles, and on one occasion a judge directed a witness to be taken out of Court, and to receive 100 lashes in order to get more satisfactory evidence from him. We read of men being ordered 25 lashes every morning for eight days in succession to induce them to make confession. But when at last through the protracted struggles of Mr. Bent and Mr. Melville, the right of the newspaper Press to give freedom of expression was vindicated, these horrible cruelties and many terrible abuses ceased to be perpetrated.

Before a free Press tyranny halts, turns back, and conceals itself within the folds of its own ugly mantle. The names of Bent and Melville are always to be associated with the freedom of the colonial Press, and so I say, and let all say, God bless these two brave but unhappy and ruined men.

Young colonists know nothing, and can feel nothing of the immense boon, and the manifold blessings in living in an atmosphere of freely expressed public opinion; but those dwelling in the early days of the colonies know how to estimate it at its true worth. Better, I think, a scurrilous Press, a libellous Press, a venal Press, than that there should be no Press at all. Scurrility and venality in the lower class of newspaper writers will be always kept in check by an intelligent people, and by that noble community of press-writers who would not soil the paper they put their thoughts on by writing what is neither fit for men nor women to read. For many years after the time I am speaking of a very large section of the Press was very demoralised. There were men to be found—and men, too, possessing the very highest order of talents—who prostituted their powers; who indulged in the most vindictive personalities; who, in ribald language, exposed the affairs of private life; who robbed women of their fair fame and men of their well-earned honours; who wrote blasphemy, and whose lives were as soiled and filthy as their writings. Thank God, these evils have been blotted out of the newspaper literature of later years. The colonial Press, whatever its many faults may be, is now as pure in its tone and as temperate in its language as in any other part of the world where the fourth estate lives in all the full strength of a wholesome vitality.

To form some conception of the immense power the newspaper Press now holds at its command for good, we have only to imagine that some arbitrary order has gone forth forbidding the printing and circulating in the colony of any newspaper for just no more than one year. Then proceed to imagine in that one year what abuses would spring into life; what cruel acts would be perpetrated. How the liberty of the subject would be trampled on. The rich grinding down the poor—the poor, lawless and derided. Government corrupt. Officials rrogant. Life and property insecure. Vice rampant everywhere. Who that thinks at the period of which I have been referring does not feel this would be as is said of

It is not so much the actual and positive good the Press accomplishes, as the many wrongs it keeps in check, which without such a suppressing power would spring upon the land as poisonous fungi upon unwholesome ground. There is, however, one great evil which saps and undermines the independence of a large portion of the colonial Press. This is the power which Colonial and Provincial Governments possess,

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