

in most pathetic language that if prison punishment was intended to reform the criminal, the cruelty of keepers would not effect the desired end; the starving of prisoners would not do it; the suspending them from beams would not do it; for men under such treatment became—not reformed—but brutalised. Revenge, said Melville, was not only sweet, but it was salutary. When a gaol warden had been taught by what he had witnessed, that a prisoner, having been treated with undue severity, retaliated, by murdering a warden, or two or three, if it could be accomplished, this resulted in living warders being less unjust to those under their charge. When, said Melville, a soldier shoots his officer dead, for some piece of tyranny, that soldier is hung, as he deserves to be. But he is but a martyr after all, for the benefit of his fellow-soldiers. When an officer has learned that his tyranny may cause a bullet to be sent through his heart, or brain, without an instant of warning, he will cease to tyrannise. The killing of Mr. Price the Superintendent of Convicts, had produced a humane successor. Melville's address shewed this much: First, the incessant outbreak of human passions, on the part of gaolers and officers, towards the criminals they had charge of, under a system of discipline either very erroneous, or very badly administered; and, secondly, the unfavourable effect upon prisoners of these and other physical inflictions. The law and its agents seemed alike a ministration of pure vengeance; and this feeling, in the great majority of cases, shut out from the prisoner the consideration of his own wickedness, and impressed him only with the view that his lot was cast in a state of lifelong warfare with society and its myrmidons of justice. A most distinguished foreigner, present in Melbourne at this juncture of affairs, wrote a letter to the *Age* newspaper which at the time had a most telling effect. He asserted that the prison discipline, as adopted in Victoria, was neither more nor less than a barbarous revenge of society on its criminals, rather than a reformatory school, like as was the Prussian system. In that country the prisoner is confined by himself at first; his cell well-lighted from the roof. If he prove long refractory the light is obscured. After a time he has work given him, if he asks for it; and subsequently, on good conduct, he is allowed to work with his fellow-prisoners. No brutality—no unkindness towards him is allowed. Public indignation became at length so loud and so strong that the Government felt itself almost coerced into calling for a Commission of Enquiry as to the management and discipline of the Victorian Gaols. An enquiry was held in due course. It was shewn that Mr. Price had been a cruel tyrant; that the prisoners had been subjected to terrible ill-treatment; and the wonder expressed was that more warders and gaolers had not been massacred. A new regime was established, and shortly afterwards the gaol system of Victoria was stated to be equal to any in the world.

REMINISCENCES IN THE LIFE OF A COLONIAL JOURNALIST.

NO. XXV.

[By "SNYDER."]

THE COMING OF EVIL DAYS.

The question has over and over again been asked, what have been the accruing results to the colonies from the early discoveries of gold in Victoria, a colony I was a dweller in for so large a number of years? These, I think, I shall presently be able to shew. In 1850, Port Phillip was sparsely populated, and known to the world only as a country capable of feeding a large number of sheep and cattle, of growing cereals and but little else. In the early days people lived happily and contented. They prospered. Prospered slowly, it is true, but their prosperity was due to steady industry in legitimate pursuits. The squatter grew his wool, the merchant bought the season's clip or made advances on it. The stock-owner, unable to find a market to the extent of his increase, looked about him for new country in which to find pasture for his multiplying herds. It was only to penetrate further into the interior, and the land suitable for his purpose was found. The farmer tilled his land, then all but virgin soil, and reaped rich harvests. But the price of farm produce was low; wheat, three shillings a bushel; oats, two shillings; potatoes, fifty shillings per ton. Still, at these low rates, the farmer increased his worldly stores, for the yield of the land was abundant. Tradesmen, little by little, and month by month, increased their stocks, enlarged their shops and stores, opened banking accounts; and few there were who, when they laid their heads on the pillow at night, but could count increased gain brought by the day. The price of labour was low, while house rent and living were little more than nominal. Bushmen, when they came into the town, could obtain good, wholesome board and lodging, for from eight to ten shillings per week. Clerks could keep up a respectable household upon one-third of what he could in Auckland at the present time; while the steady,

industrious mechanic found no difficulty in being able to own his section of land and his little cottage, free of the world. Household furniture was manufactured in the towns, and very little was imported. People were content to live, if the comforts of life, without its luxuries and refinements, followed upon their toil.

In 1850, the era which preceded the gold outbreak, the pulse of the colony beat with uniform regularity. The year following was one of intense excitement, which continued throughout the two succeeding years. Men built up large fortunes with the same rapidity they laid down the foundation of a goodly-sized house this week, to occupy it within a fortnight afterwards. Mechanics, tradesmen, merchants, flockmasters, stock-owners, farmers, all made fortunes, some of which could not have been expressed in less than five or six figures. But it came to pass that in the early part of 1857, a gentleman capable of speaking with authority, from his intimate knowledge of facts, took me to the top of the clock-tower in Geelong, which commanded a view of the town and suburbs. Pointing around him to the east, to the west, and to the north and south, he said, "I cannot see a bit of property which may be called by that name, which is not mortgaged for more money than it will ever realise when the time comes to foreclose." That gentleman had made advances upon two hundred and ten separate holdings to the extent of close upon a quarter of a million of money. Enquiring about him some six months ago, I was informed that he had managed, with extreme difficulty, to save as much out of the wreck of his large wealth as brought him in annually some two hundred pounds. In that year, and the one which followed it, the colony of Victoria failed for fifteen millions sterling; and, although that colony at this day can boast of its merchant princes, and its men of enormous wealth—can boast of more rich men as against population than any other colony in the world—there is not, at this day, among all these rich men, a score which date back the accumulations of their wealth to the time of the great goldfields prosperity. It was estimated that in 1858 land which had been purchased at a cost of four millions of money was disposed of at public auction for less than three hundred thousand pounds. During these years of reverses, excitement, the greed of gain, and commercial disappointment from losses sent hundreds of men to their graves or to the lunatic asylums, who would now, it is more than probable, under different conditions of life, be the prosperous heads of happy families. I do not say that the discovery of gold has not made Victoria an immensely rich country, but I do aver that those who now live in luxury in their villa residences, and whose wives drive the "block" and Collins-street, have built up their fortunes upon the ruin of men in years which preceded their coming to the colony.

Among the treacherous times of 1853 and 1854 was the insecurity to life and property. Men dared not venture into the most public thoroughfares after dark without great danger of being waylaid, maltreated, and robbed. The escaped convicts from Tasmania infested alike the streets of the towns as the roads of the interior. Bush-ranging and murder in the country. Burglary and deeds of violence at the centres of population. Amongst the number of desperate villains was the notorious bushranger Dalton, known so well in the history of colonial crime, who was arrested by the Melbourne detectives in so extraordinary a manner that the facts appear stranger than fiction. Dalton, with a confederate named Kelly, had escaped from his confinement in Tasmania, and in a small open-boat actually succeeded, in crossing Bass's Straits, and coming through the rough sea which sweeps into and around Port Phillip Heads. Nothing more daring or perilous, or so successful had ever previously been attempted by the most desperate of convicts. Reaching Sandridge unperceived, or unnoticed, he went into a restaurant in Bourke-street late at night, in company with a boatman, and with the utmost composure of manner intimated to the keeper of the place that he intended leaving for England the next morning by the ship Northumberland. Could the restaurant-keeper change him some Tasmanian bank notes? The request was refused, when the two men turned to leave the place, but were accosted by a gentleman who happened to be present, and who said he thought that perhaps he could accommodate them. Hereupon, he took some notes from his pocket, and, looking at them, remarked that he had not enough money; but he knew a friend near at hand who would give him what he wanted to make up the amount. This gentleman was Mr. Bryce, formerly connected with the Melbourne police—a remarkably shrewd man—one who never forgot a face he had once seen, although he had not again looked upon it for ten years. A verbal description of a man,—his features described, and his general appearance fairly given,—he would, without having rested his eye on the criminal, walk through the city until he had marked and collared him. He

was not the cruel, relentless man that stamped the character of Captain Price, whose brains were afterwards battered out with a stone at Williams Town by the unhappy convict Melville, who had been goaded on to fury to murder his tormentor. Both Mr. Bryce and Captain Price were brave men. Both were wonderfully clever in tracing out the antecedents of suspected criminals, but here the likeness ended. It would be hard to say how many men rejoiced when Captain Price's death was announced, tragic and horrible as was the means by which it was compassed.

Dalton, and the boatman who was in his company, not knowing Mr. Bryce, went with him out of the restaurant for the purpose of getting the notes changed. They followed their leader, who led them up Swanston-street and right into the station-house. A little previous to this the boatman had disappeared. Dalton saw at once that he had been entrapped, and tried to

beat a retreat, but two clever and determined detectives happening to come up at the moment, were informed by Mr. Bryce of the suspicions he entertained that the fellow had come by the money which he wished to change in a dishonest manner. There, however, being no specific charge, Dalton was about being allowed to depart when one of the detectives recognised this pitiless murdering bushranger, and rushed upon him. Dalton was a powerful man, and struggled desperately to get at his pistols. Assistance was at hand, and the greatest of living villains was secured after a deadly struggle, which lasted over half an hour. He expressed his regret that he had not known the detectives' intentions a little sooner that he might have cleared the station by putting a bullet through the body of every one of them. This he would certainly have done. Dalton had been guilty of many, cold-blooded murders. He was forwarded to Tasmania, and soon afterwards was sent to the gallows, where he died as he had lived—a hardened, ruth less ruffian.

It was within forty-eight hours of Dalton's capture that the armed escort from the Mel-lyor diggings to Melbourne was attacked by a gang of escaped convicts. These had planted themselves in ambuscade near the road, and shot down the troopers, who at the time were not apprehending the slightest danger. The gold was taken from the escort and carried off into the bush. Large rewards were offered for the apprehension of this gang, but it was only by accident the chiefs of it were discovered. One of the men had taken his passage on board of the Madagascar, when just as the anchor was about to be weighed he was arrested and taken on shore, where he turned King's evidence, and shortly afterwards committed suicide. Another of the gang while under arrest succeeded in opening a vein, when he bled to death. Three others were executed. Within a month of this the Ballarat escort was robbed near Buninyong. The gang had placed a wire rope fastened to a tree on either side of the road along which it was known the escort would come at full canter. Before the rope could be discovered those men were unhorsed, two of them were killed, one escaped, three were shot, while the rest fled for life. The ruffians were subsequently hunted down, taken and hung. Some of the gold was recovered, but it was only a small proportion out of some twenty-eight thousand ounces. It had broken loose from the bags, and had got scattered in the bush. The public alarm was increased by a number of single murders, the burning of several homesteads, and the hostile attitude assumed by the diggers against Sir Charles Hotham and the Government administered under him. In the year of which I am writing, Victoria produced 173 tons, 19 cwt., 1 quarter, 12 lbs. 3 ozs. of gold, valued at 70s an ounce, and worth £14,163,364. How this enormous quantity of the precious ore was to be disposed of became a source of much anxiety and difficulty. The majority of the diggers were desirous of disposing of their treasure. Some few shipped direct for England, but the number was insignificant in comparison with those who desired to sell on the spot. The means to purchase were not at hand, and yet the banks were called upon to buy; and so extraordinary a position were they forced into that one bank, which I need not now mention, could not have paid its depositors by at least two millions had there been a run on it; true the establishment would ultimately have come out all right, but there would have been great inconvenience and damage and loss of credit. In the early part of 1851 the value of the gold had not been ascertained, and the merchants were very cautious in purchasing until a correct assay had been received from England. Gold was disposed of at Bendigo as low as fifty shillings an ounce, and in Melbourne for some time buyers would not give more than fifty-six shillings. A few months after it was ascertained that the real value of Ballarat gold was from eighty-two to eighty-four shillings an ounce, while that obtained from Mount Alexander was not worth so much by about five shillings. From that time until the present crude gold has had nearly a fixed value throughout the

colomes. At the outset the banks refused to purchase, but had no objection to advance fifty shillings an ounce, and all those who bought at the rate which prevailed in 1851, and shipped to England by means of the money of the banks, realised large fortunes. One firm in Geelong, with a branch house in Melbourne, realised over a quarter of a million of profit in the purchase of gold inside of eighteen months. The banks soon perceived the golden opportunity which they were allowing to slip through their fingers. They entered the market and from that time to the present have monopolised the gold trade. But now came the time of great outrages, riot, confusion, and disorder. The diggers had come to see they had been pillaged and downtrodden; first by the buyers of gold; again by the Government in the enormous amount of the license fee demanded, namely thirty shillings per month. For this heavy fee no protection was offered to life or property. The diggers were hunted down by the mounted constabulary, cheated by the officials and looked upon as something for the Government cormorants to feed upon. And now came the revulsion of feeling which led to the Ballarat Riots, and the burning of the Eureka hotel with all its attendant horrors.