

## EXCITING INCIDENT IN THE HISTORY OF WEST AUSTRALIA

### PERSONAL RECOLLECTION BY AN OLD PERTH PRESSMAN

(BY RALPH TINDERWOOD.)

The following New York cable, which appeared the other day in the daily press of Australia, recalls an exciting incident in the early history of West Australia: 'A sensational incident in connection with the old-time penal colony in West Australia is recalled by the announcement of the death of Captain George Anthony. Among the prisoners at Fremantle in 1876 were a number of Fenians, who had been convicted in Great Britain and sent out to West Australia. On April 17, 1876, six of these men escaped from the colony. It was afterwards ascertained that the men had been carried off by Captain Anthony in the American whaler *Catalpa*. The *Catalpa* arrived in New York on August 19 of the same year, and the Fenians landed there.' The following particulars are supplied to us, from personal recollection, by an old Perth pressman, now resident in the Auckland province:—

The reference in the columns of the press recently to the demise of Captain George Anthony, the master of the whaling barque *Catalpa*, and his exploits re the escape of the six Fenian prisoners from West Australia is as the Auckland informant of the *Herald* puts it—a trifle 'off the track.' In 1868 the free people of the West, reckoned they had about enough of penal establishments, and, being a Crown Colony, memorialised the Colonial Secretary (Lord Knutsford) for the abolition of the West as a dumping ground for convicts. The revenue from the Imperial Exchequer meant a big loss for the up-keep of convicts, but the colony was self-supporting, and under that able administrator, Sir Frederick A. Weld, soon placed things on a better footing. The change from the administration of John Stephen Hampton, of Norfolk Island fame, was very marked. The citizens of those days had to be in doors by 9 o'clock at night, and, in the event of no lawful excuse, were liable to be arrested and sentenced to three months' imprisonment without the option of a fine, whilst a penalty of £5 was inflicted in the event of a person refusing to give his name, or to answer the question whether he was 'bond' or 'free.' Such was the colony at that date. The ship *Naval Brigade* brought to the colony in 1872 the Fenian political prisoners—John Shine, Kiely, Power, Cranston, Darragh, Hogan, Cavanagh, and two others whose names I forget. Kiely died of consumption in 1873, and Shine and Power were let out on ticket-of-leave in 1875. Cranston, Darragh, Hogan, and three others were kept in close confinement for a time, and then let out as special constables about the town of Fremantle for orders for the things necessary for the great penal establishment at North Fremantle. About 1874, two gentlemen arrived in West Australia. One, named McDermott, was a good carriage-builder, and was engaged in Sloan's carriage factory. McDermott had a peculiar Yankee drawl, and a fund of boisterous humor. The other,

Mr. Collins, Was a Gentleman of Means, and lived at the Emerald Isle Hotel. He was suave, reserved, and kind. He was looking for investments, so he said. He was soon hob-nobbing with all the elite; he attended two or three Governor's levees, and several State balls given by his Excellency. He was a great friend of Governor Dolan of the jail, and he took a great interest in the poor Fenian prisoners. Dolan showed him through the convict establishment, and pointed out the political prisoners who were undergoing a sentence of fourteen years. He was allowed to interview Cranston, late sergeant in the British Army, for a few minutes alone, and whatever passed no one knows. About a week later he met Darragh and Hogan in Cliff street, Fremantle, and everything was arranged,

but the means of escape did not offer themselves until nearly 18 months later. Meanwhile the *Catalpa* went on a whaling cruise until matters were considered favorable. McDermott, as regular as clockwork, hired a buggy and pair, and, with the writer and Hugh Sloan, went for a drive to Davey's Half-way House, about six miles from Perth. There were no railways in those days in West Australia. Sometimes McDermott would take us to North Fremantle, and most of the time would stop at the Half-way House. On Easter Sunday, 1876, McDermott took us to the Half-way House, and then said he was going to Fremantle, and probably not returning for some days. This meant that Sloan and I would have a tramp of six miles before us to get back to Perth. Sloan elected to tramp it, but I asked McDermott for a ride to Fremantle. He demurred at first, but, after reflecting for a few moments, said—'All right, jump in.' The next day, Easter Monday, was the date of the Perth annual regatta. The populace from Fremantle journeyed to Perth by steamer up the Swan River, and this was the date chosen for the escape. The *Catalpa* was cruising about fifteen miles from Fremantle, where a few sawmills were erected for the cutting of jarrah. Mr. Collins, the engineer of the escape, then dealt his cards, which were all trumps. Collins and McDermott met Cranston and Darragh at half-past eight o'clock near the Anglican Church in Cliff street, and handed them an order to the chief-warder Olliver regarding the other four Fenians, who were working in a quarry on the Perth Road, to go to the marine residence of his Excellency the Governor, and remove some furniture. The bait took. Arriving there, they found two horses and the double-seated buggy belonging to Mr. John Summers, of Perth, in which McDermott and the writer arrived in Fremantle. Arriving at the Governor's house, the prisoners exchanged their convict garb for civilians' clothing. Six carbines were in the buggy, and McDermott jumped on a saddle-horse and drew a colt revolver. Collins did likewise,

#### And Away They Went at a Great Rate.

Arriving at Rockingham, the party drove to the beach. About two miles from the shore was a whale-boat manned by some of the *Catalpa* crew. Two or three sightseers came up, among them a Mr. Bell, who wanted to know what was going on. The boat having approached the shore, Collins, addressing the escapees, said: 'Come, boys, wade and get into the boat,' which they promptly did. Cranston, standing up in the boat, said: 'Good-bye.' Bell, recognising the voice, exclaimed: 'The Fenian prisoners; they have got away!' Seizing one of the horses, he went to the telegraph office and gave the alarm. The water police boat was promptly launched from the Fremantle boatshed, and sailed away in pursuit, the distance by water being about eight miles. The *Catalpa* cruised under the lee of Garden Island, tacking backwards about three miles from the shore. The police had started before the *Catalpa's* boat had left the shore, and a fairly fresh northerly drove her at the rate of 12 knots. The whale-boat with the escapees pulled away in a leisurely manner. The police boat was soon bearing down on the prisoners, but Captain Anthony, to avoid the danger of a conflict which would be one-sided, bore down on the port tack, sailed in between the two boats, and

#### Promptly Picked Up His Own Boat.

The police, baffled, started back for Fremantle, and the *Catalpa*, with the Fenians aboard, stood out to sea. As the news leaked out there was great excitement in Perth and Fremantle, and the authorities, to save their face, promptly locked up the two ticket-of-leave men—John Shine and Edward Power, and called out the two hundred pensioners who were doing garrison duty, and fifty volunteers. They also fitted out as an armed cruiser the *Georgette* of 300 tons' burden. This was the only sea-going steamer on the coast, and had been formerly on the Geelong trade. The 'cruiser,' with two twelve-pound field guns slung on the gangway, and with the force aforesaid under the command of Colonel Finnerty, went out to arrest the bold Yankee. The 'cruiser' came up with the *Catalpa* about twelve miles from Garden Island, and fired a shot across the

**R. V. C. Harris**

SURGEON DENTIST

Moderate Charges.

Painless Extractions.

'PHONE 486.

HASTINGS STREET, NAPIER.