

## (VIII) VAN DIEMEN'S LAND



VAN DIEMEN'S LAND, the country to which George Loveless was transported, was discovered in 1642 by the great Dutch explorer, Tasman, who named it after his patron, the Governor of the Dutch East Indies. Despite its innocent origin, the name has a somewhat sinister sound to English ears, and there is something curiously fitting in the fact that the name was changed to Tasmania in the same year, 1853, that saw the end of the landing of convicts there.

Van Diemen's Land, when George Loveless arrived, was a wild, undeveloped tract, very beautiful in its natural scenery, with picturesque mountains, densely wooded hills, noble lakes and rivers, and a very varied coast line. At that date few free settlers were attracted to the island, despite the offer of the gift of large areas of land and the free labour of convicts. Communication with the rest of the world was very infrequent, provisions were scarce, and it was only by very hard labour that a settler could maintain himself. Added to these obstacles were frequent clashes with the native population.

Whilst still on the "William Metcalfe" George Loveless was closely questioned by the examining Magistrate, Mr. T. Mason, concerning his connection with the Unions.

"What is the secret signal by which the Unions knew when to meet all over England at the same time?" demanded peremptorily the magistrate.

George Loveless was perplexed by this strange question. "I do not know what you are talking about," he replied quietly.

"You daring fellow," bawled the Magistrate. "Will you tell me so again? Do you not know that they did meet all over the kingdom at once?"

Loveless did not flinch under the menace of this bully. "I know of no such thing as their having secret signs and signals to know where to meet," he answered firmly. "I never heard of such a thing before."

The Magistrate felt himself baffled. "Where were you when they made such a noise then? Will you be so false as to tell me you know nothing about it? I am certain you know all about it. Be careful what you say," he added.

Loveless recalled the conversation he had overheard on the gun wharf at Portsmouth. He assumed that the Magistrates' question referred to the protest meetings which he had heard while on the hulk, that the Unions were organising.

A picturesque country



ABEL TASMAN

Magistrate questions Loveless

He replied accordingly. "I understand the Unions had public meetings at different places, but I was in the York Hulk, Portsmouth, at the time."

Threatened with  
punishment

"It is no matter where you were," insisted Mr. Mason. "You are one of them and you know all about it, and if you do not tell me here and now all and everything about them, I shall report you to the Governor. You shall be taken on shore and we will give you a second trial and you shall be severely punished." On Loveless still maintaining his inability to give the information, the Magistrate, after a few more questions, impatiently turned away with the threat, "I will report you to the Governor, and you shall be punished."

On Friday, September 12, the convicts were landed at daybreak from the "William Metcalfe," and conducted to the prison barracks where they were marshalled for inspection by the Governor, Colonel Arthur. He was evidently impressed by the upright and fearless bearing of Loveless, whom he questioned, for later Loveless was ordered to work on the Governor's farm.

On September 13, 1834, Loveless was again examined by Mr. Mason, the Magistrate, concerning the Unions. Loveless replied as on the former occasion. The Magistrate, unable to extract anything further from him, dismissed him with the statement, "Well, I have told you that you were ordered for severer punishment. You were to work in irons on the road, but in consequence of the conversation you had with the Governor yesterday, his mind is disposed in your favour. He won't allow you to go where you were assigned to, but intends to take you to work on his farm."

Life in the  
chain-gang



Loveless was compelled to work on the road with the chain-gang for more than a week, and slept in the barracks at night with neither bed nor covering, before being sent to the Government farm at New Town.

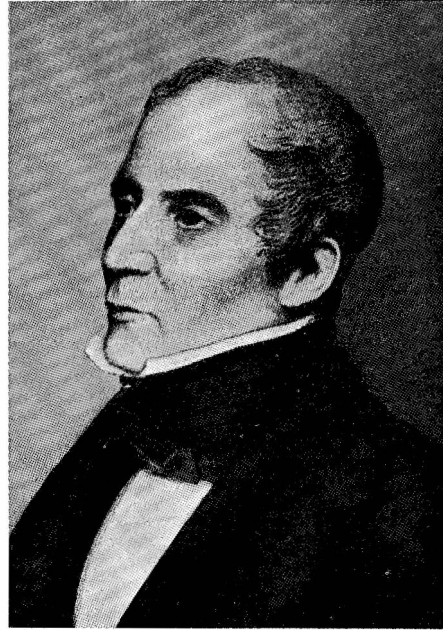
Here there were only five beds between eight men, so he had to do without a bed until some of the older hands went. The hut in which he lived was little more than a hovel. Here are his own words:—"In fine weather we could lie in bed and view the stars, in foul weather feel the wind and rain; and this added more than a little to increase those rheumatic pains which were first brought on by cold irons round the legs and the hard laying; and which, in all probability, will be my companions until I reach the tomb."

Some of the men on the road parties died from under-feeding, and at the Barracks said George Loveless, men were found cooking and eating cats.

He worked without any complaint being made against him until December, 1835, when he was charged with neglect of duty. Upon the Magistrate, Mr. W. Gunn, asking for particulars, the Overseer said that Loveless had to look after all the cattle on the farm. On the previous day, however, nine of the wild cattle had been taken to the public pound and were not missed immediately. Being asked what he had to say in reply, Loveless said: "It is true I have charge of all the cattle, and I am expected to see the wild cattle in the bush once every twenty-four hours. I rise in the morning at sunrise or before, and take the sheep to the bush to feed. I then return to the farm and milk nine cows and suckle as many calves. I am requested to follow the sheep and not lose sight of them for fear of dogs which often get among and worry them. I am ordered to search for the wild cattle to see that none of them are missing. I had just been weaning the lambs, and the ewes being very restless, I was afraid of leaving them, and this, Sir, was the reason the cattle were taken to the pound and I did not miss them."

"Neglect of  
duty"

The Magistrate asked the Overseer whether this story was true, and the Overseer replied that it was. In reply to a further question, the Magistrate was told that during nine months Loveless had never been known to neglect his duty. The Magistrate then said to the Overseer, "But do you not think that the man has more duty than he can perform? I really think it is a great pity you should have brought the man here. I shall return you to your duty," said he to Loveless. "Go to your duty, my man."



GOVERNOR ARTHUR

Soon after this Loveless was asked by another Magistrate, Mr. Spode, to send for his wife and family to join him in the Colony, but he stoutly declined as long as he was a convict. The Magistrate was much incensed. "Go instantly, or I will give you a damned good flogging," he cried angrily. Further attempts were made to persuade Loveless to bring his family over, the Governor hinting that he would receive his liberty as soon as his wife arrived.

Fearing that continued resistance would bring down upon him the savage punishments he had heard were inflicted upon other convicts, Loveless finally wrote to his wife on January 27, 1836, asking her to join him in Van Diemen's Land, the Government having offered her a free passage. On February 5, 1836, he was given a ticket exempting him from compulsory labour and giving him permission to employ himself to his own advantage.

A letter to  
his wife

Unfortunately he found it anything but easy to obtain work. He was a stranger without money, without clothes, without friends and without a home. Day after day he tramped the country, walking as much as fifty miles without a bite to eat. Disheartened with the rebuffs he received wherever he asked for a job, he finally returned to Hobart. Here he obtained temporary employment, and then advertised for a job. He obtained a situation during the spring of 1836 with a Major de Gillern, at Glenayr, near Richmond, with whom he remained during the rest of the time that he lived in Van Diemen's Land.



HOBART CHAIN GANG