

A TOPOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SKETCH

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*published in three instalments in the HOBART MERCURY on Friday 2nd April 1880,
Thursday 8th April 1880 and Friday 9th April 1880*

If I were desired by any summer visitor to Tasmania, but delighting in crowded thoroughfares, to name a district near Hobart Town where he might enjoy a quiet ride or all day stroll at this season without meeting picnic parties every half mile or mischief-loving youngsters out for a holiday, I should be inclined to ask him to take his choice between the contiguous districts of Clarence Plains and Cambridge, neither of which by being familiar to our summer immigrants are widely known excepting to their indwellers and therefore to borrow the phraseology of travellers, not yet overdone by this class of excursionists like Mount Nelson, or the everlasting "Bower" or even Mount Wellington itself are.

In the districts that I have named, the traveller will have the advantage of fair roads under his foot, and pretty generally, though not uniformly, sufficient cultivated land of high fertility around him to destroy the sameness of bush travel which so oppresses one not having actual business on hand when passing through the open woodlands of the colony, such as are used exclusively for pasture. The highways of an undulating country, however, are not always the places from whence good views are to be had; but there are exceptions even to this, and I claim both for Clarence and Cambridge, a large immunity from this general and deserved censure.

Many a year has run off the reel of time since I wandered through the district of Clarence Plains, and nothing but a general recollection of it remains; but I fancy I can still see, through the gathering mists and obscurities of four or five vanished decades of years, some very pleasant and cheery places within it, that cannot have passed away with one's own youth, but must still exist, for nature changes but little.

"Art, Glory, Freedom, fail but Nature still is fair". These pleasant spots first flash upon you when - after leaving the landing at Kangaroo Bay, and the estate, called in my younger days, Claremont, behind you - you descend towards the vale and village of Rokeby. Further on, also, where the highway approaches pretty closely to the sea margin, the landscape is still very attractive; for the southern shores of Tasmania, with their wide-spreading bays are never otherwise; and here, if I remember rightly, a handsome lake-like bay lay before you forming an agreeable counterpoise to the woody heights on the land. From here, after passing Stanfield's windmill, I should recommend the traveller to cross the isthmus called Muddy Plains Neck and, after a ride or stroll along the sandy beach and a long look over the glorious expanse of Norfolk Bay, to retrace his steps homewards and I think he will hardly account the day to have been misspent. The distance out is about 8 miles.

For a trip to Cambridge you take the Richmond road from Kangaroo Bay; but as there are two roads leading away from near the landing place (as I ought to have explained before), the one leading to Clarence Plains and the other to Cambridge, the traveller, if a stranger, should make inquiry at starting that he does not take the wrong one. That leading to the left, and for some distance along the shore, is the proper one.

About forty years ago I was pretty well acquainted with Cambridge, but have not frequented it much since. I, however, travelled along the first nine miles of the Richmond road a few

days ago, on business to be presently explained, which as usual refreshed my recollection of this quarter, which had fallen greatly into decay.

It is astonishing how, after years of absence from once familiar scenes, a visit to them recalls them all to recollection. Objects that you thought had quite died out of memory are again presented to the mind, and look as fresh as though you had never lost sight of them. Single objects, as well as the general landscape, all return again. A tree, for example, under which you may have camped for the night, a water hole at which you may have rested, you then find had left their impressions though unthought of by you, ineffaceably on the mind. And so again it was, for the hundredth time in my bush experiences, that things unheeded for a generation once more presented themselves to memory, as old and welcome acquaintances.

For some weeks past I had contemplated paying a visit to one of Tasmania's oldest colonists, Mr James **BELBIN**, a resident in the district of Cambridge, who was described to me by his friends in Hobart Town as "a living almanac" as indeed I found him to be; and whom I wanted to consult, to enable me to clear up some doubtful points in the history of the first years of settlement.

I suppose there are not many who would take a twenty mile journey for the purpose named above and under a sun hot enough to scorch the skin off you. But every man to his taste, and - so I started.

It was 4 o'clock of the afternoon of the 16th inst that I took passage to Kangaroo Bay in the steam ferry boat Success, where, after landing, I went on in one of the public conveyances to the Horse-shoe Inn, which is nearly five miles from the landing place, and here I remained for the night.

In looking round me, as we rattled along, and summoning up old recollections that came at my call, the belief soon grew upon me that most of the cultivated lands we were passing through, that lay within a couple of miles, or less, of the bay, were familiar to me; and that not much clearing had been done here for at least an average lifetime, which I believe medical statistics fix at about five and thirty years. The crops hereabouts did not seem to be heavy, though growing on soil derived from the basaltic rocks, which is generally a good yielding earth. But a change takes place when about half way to the Horse-shoe, or a little more, where claystone predominates and a thin stratum of inferior, whitish earth, the resulting product of its own decomposition is spread over the surface. Cultivation now becomes more and more scant, and for some considerable distance disappears altogether. The bush grasses, or rather the herbage, here is dry and innutritious and for nearly a couple of miles the forest - for all is woodland now - has almost no product, but what indicates sterility. Once is always glad to escape from such scenes of barrenness; and they, happily, begin to disappear as you approach the Horse-shoe Inn; and some space before you land on the beautiful estate of Uplands they are where one always wishes them to be, that is, absent.

With plenty of daylight still before me, after bespeaking quarters for the night at the inn, I strolled out as far as a newly-erected stone building that I had spied out soon after alighting from the conveyance I had travelled by. It stands at the junction of the Sorell and Richmond roads; and on enquiring of a man, who was doing something there, which the extremely good-natured and forbearing might call "work", I learned that it was intended for the public school of the district. The temperature of the day was almost tropical, which even the approach of evening did not moderate very perceptibly and the air, as the poets say, "was at

rest", a combination of things which, on many accounts, is most inimical to personal comfort, and was especially so as day declined by calling into a state of most mischievous activity an army of mosquitoes almost as countless as the leaves of the forest around me, which never for a moment intermitted their attacks until the lights were put out for the night.

During many years of bush travel, it has ever been my practice to start on a journey with what the poet Campbell calls the "level sun" and whilst the atmosphere is still cool. If you are riding, this may make no difference to you whatever it may to your horse; but the foot traveller will always do well to get over all the ground he can in the early hours of the day when one is most certainly more capable of endurance than at any other time, and when you seem - so to speak - to have the world all to yourself, which, to say the least of it, is a very pleasant sort of illusion. I was therefore early astir, and on the road whilst the district was still in its first sleep; for I am bound to say that the people here seems to take life very easily; but then my acquaintance with them is but slight, and I may be mistaken. The walk along that portion of the highway that leads through the beautiful undulating fields of Uplands was very pleasant, but I could see very little change in the condition of the grounds since I last passed through them two score years ago. A few acres, say fifteen or twenty, in a hollow as you enter on the estate, have indeed been added to the clearings of the farm. The ancient barn that stood here, as I believe, in the days of Colonel Davey - "Mad Tom, the Governor" as he was called by his compotators - has been replaced by a better one; the open space in front of the house enclosed, and the garden gone to the devil, are all the changes of forty years, that I could see.

The view from the road itself, as you turn your head in the direction of the "seven" and "five mile beaches" and the hills of Sorell on the other side of Pittwater, is very agreeable; but the same expanses of land and water, as seen from the higher parts of the fields where the landscape is necessarily more enlarged, are magnificent; but this height is fenced off, and therefore unapproachable, except under permission, but which, I presume a traveller, if unaccompanied by dogs, would have no difficulty in obtaining and which I should probably have asked had I never been there, or had I seen anyone about like establishment at this early hour to have addressed myself to; but neither sound nor movement of any kind could I observe, and so I passed on.

A walk of a mile and a half from Uplands House brings the traveller to the residence of a family name Evans, where I was so fortunate as to find a young woman awake and up - the first person whom I had seen this morning. I now enquired the way to Mr **BELBIN**'s residence, which she pointed to, for it was within sight, about a mile off to the right, and which I quickly reached.

Mr **BELBIN**'s residence stands on gently rising ground, and is as prettily situated as any homestead that I have seen. The trees hereabouts are the she-oak and late-flowering nimosa, the latter just now in bloom, and producing such a profusion of flowers that I feel pretty sure some of the trees would have yielded enough of these golden garlands to have gone far towards filling a cart.

I carried an introductory letter to the proprietor from his brother in Hobart Town, and was received with much kindness. He is one of Tasmania's early pioneers, and came hither with his father, at the time of the first breaking up of Norfolk Island and the dispersion of its free settlers, in 1808. He was born at Norfolk Island, on the 29th of August 1803.

I was not slow in acquainting Mr **BELBIN** of my business, namely to obtain information on some questionable points to Tasmania's early history, which he alone, of living colonists, could satisfactorily clear up.

I remained with him until noon; and during my stay he dictated to me the particulars that are embodied in the following paper, which I wrote down as he spoke. I have this day made a second visit to him, to hand him the MS in its present form for his perusal with which he expressed his satisfaction and afterwards handed me a note avouching its fidelity, and consenting to its publication.

I remain, sir,
Your very obedient servant,
December 31, 1879 J.E. CALDER

The following narrative embodies the particulars of Mr James **BELBIN**'s father's first troubles in Tasmania.

It will not be out of place to begin this paper by saying that the family is of German origin, but he himself was a native of London, where his father was a brewer; the son was born on the 11th February 1771 and emigrated to New South Wales in the early years of its settlement, and removed from thence to Norfolk Island as a settler, where a fair sized farm was given him, as was customary to free persons at that time.

On the compulsory evacuation of that island, about the year 1807, he again emigrated and came down to Tasmania with his family.

It is known that the forced removal of this people from their happy island home and pleasant little homesteads to commence life anew in a land of convicts and savages, was most displeasing to them; and some of them even ventured to resist or rather to evade the Imperial mandate for their expulsion. Of these recusants the only two whose names have reached me are, firstly, the plucky old fellow whom I am writing about and Mr Robert Nash, who took the bush for it sooner than be evicted from their lands. But according to the practices of the good old times, they were hunted down by the crew of the boat employed to take them on board the vessel, the *Estramina*, or *City of Edinburgh*, that was sent thither to remove them, on to the decks of which they were finally pitched like a couple of dogs; and in this manner it was they were embarked on the 3rd of September 1808 reaching Sullivan's Cove on the 2nd of the following month.

Mr Nash became in the end one of the most useful of the pioneers of the colony, so much so, indeed, that even Colonel Collins, who was at all times a much stricter economist of praise than punishment, acknowledges his great merits as a settler in a letter of his that I have preserved, which he wrote exactly a couple of months before his own death. It was Mr Nash who constructed the first flour-mill in the colony, which he planted on the New Town Rivulet, where it was demolished by the terrible floods of 1809. Directly after this loss, the brave old settler built the one still in operation on the Hobart Town Rivulet that stands about 150 yards above Mollestreet. This one he put up in 1810 and though it has been repaired since then, in consequence of a fire, much of the first structure still remains as well as the ancient mill-face, to repay antiquarian research.

This fine old settler afterwards pitched his tents in the noble district of Sorell, where he became wealthy; and where, after a life passed in useful occupation, he died on the 19th March 1819 before he had well passed middle life, for he was only 48 years old.

From this digression, if such it be, I take up the narrative of the early misfortunes of the **BELBIN** family and which commenced a few months after the debarkation of the founder of this old Tasmanian family from the *Estramina*.

They began with what at first may be thought a very trivial circumstance, namely, his meeting a bullock-cart proceeding along the street that I am now writing from, but which was then undistinguished by any name and it so continued until the 1st of December 1811 when Governor Macquarie who was then in this colony, called it after himself.

Trivial however this circumstance was not, for a temporary prominence was given to it by the dreadful spectacle of a half-naked woman being attached to the back of the lumbering vehicle and enduring the merciless infliction of a public flogging in the usual manner of the Government of the time, that is by the drummers of the detachment.

The offence for which she was undergoing this shameful indignity was just as slight a one as could have been, a mere quarrel with the favourite of an officer of the garrison who, in the wordy battle that took place between them, got a good deal the worst of the argument.

This siren was under the protection of a Lieutenant Lord who, like a good many of the military then in these colonies, combined the trade of a shopkeeper with the profession of arms. The lady herself was one of many acquirements but the most serviceable of all was her capacity for business, and aptitude for driving hard bargains, and thus almost perforce she became the manager of the lieutenant's huckstering establishment, which was all it was at this period of his colonial life. The victim of the cruelty now enacting was a Mrs Roberts, who dealt at the shop of the merchant militant, where it was the wordy encounter between the ladies took place. Both of them were eloquent at all times but especially so when put on their mettle, and such a row took place over the counter as was heard half way down the street. But Mrs Roberts, who was one of those who thought everything fair in a fight, annoyed the enemy most effectually by ripping up a lot of old stories,, of which she kept up such a fusillade across the counter, that the shop-keeping lady was at last fain to fly to cover into some distant recess of the residence, into which even Mrs Roberts vociferation's could not penetrate.

The swell that always follows the storm was still running high when the lieutenant returned to his quarters from abroad, and heard with much concern the details of the uproar of the morning, and the defeat of his mistress. In the heat of his passion, a file of soldiers was dispatched to the humble domicile of the victor, with orders to bring her before him (he being a man of many occupations and a magistrate amongst the number), and a mockery of justice ensued, in which Mr Lord composed the court; his wife (by courtesy), the prosecuting attorney, the victor of the fight, the defendant, and the military piquet the audience.

The principal items of the proceedings of this prejudged case were the accusation and sentence; the defence, though listened to with a great show of attention, going for nothing, of course. It is unnecessary to repeat the result of this enquiry.

The old Norfolk Island settler, like his son James, from whom I received these particulars, was a person whose habits were too retired to be a frequenter of public places, and thus it was that he had never seen a woman thus punished before. Indeed this sort of spectacle was never very common here, not that the authorities cared much about what they did, but people would talk about it afterwards, and sometimes a little too outspokenly so, as a rule, it was generally abstained from, though not always.

On witnessing the scandalous scene spoken of above, **BELBIN**'s feelings got the better of him entirely and his blood being up, he shouted "Shame, shame" on all who took part in it, and then added a remark still more offensive by asking "Can this be a land of Christians, or one of savages only, where such an exhibition is permitted?" The ice being thus broken through, some others took up the matter, especially a prominent officer of the Government, Mr. George Prideaux Harris, who declared that he would report the occurrence to head quarters, meaning Governor Bligh at Sydney.

The indignation of a mere cockatoo settler like **BELBIN** went for nothing, of course but not so the public declaration of the other; for Harris was a person of influence here, and not unknown at Sydney, whose threat was not to be disregarded, so it became necessary to appease him, which, though not easily done, was managed at last, by the process of "talking one over". In the end he became the panegyrist of the Lieutenant-Governor, for he it was who delivered his funeral oration, or in other words, who wrote the seventh number of the *Derwent Star* newspaper, 3rd of April 1810, which, while it records his death, extols every act of his life.

From this moment **BELBIN** was a man marked out for official persecution; one who, at any cost, was to be sacrificed to the hatred of the Governor, and of Lord also, who was the next to himself in military rank, either by annoying him into some punishable indiscretion, or luring him into some snare, of which the old police force of the colony, even so recently as forty years ago, had generally one or two set in the paths of the unwary and offending of which the most ingenious one in use in Collins' day, was what was called the "Sundown Bell", the revival of an old device first introduced into England about eight centuries ago after the overthrow at Hastings (a sort of curfew arrangement), on the ringing of which all persons, but a privileged few, who were not off to their quarters for the night were snapped up by the night-patrol, clapped into the guard-house, and next morning introduced to some such discriminating and merciful magistrate as Parson Knopwood. But **BELBIN** knew what they were after, and kept out of their reach for a long time, but it was impossible for so impulsive and outspoken a man as he, to steer clear of the rocks altogether, in a place where some act of official cruelty was ever in perpetration to arouse him; so the persevering scoundrels caught him at last.

It was not long after the flogging of the woman that Governor Bligh, who had just been deposed from his command at Sydney by a rebellious military, arrived in these waters, not a passenger, but the captain of a man-of-war, the *Porpoise*, which post he had assumed in virtue of his superior rank, which could not be disputed, any more than his strict legal right to the Government of New South Wales could be denied. At this period, Tasmania was but a dependency of that colony, and Bligh its legitimate, if not its acknowledged ruler.

Neither Bligh nor Collins were amiable men; and as the ex-Governor more than suspected that all the military in his command were banded together against him (which indeed the other hardly concealed), their first meeting was not a cordial one; and it was soon seen that the coming together of such inflammable bodies; like the too close contact of fire and gunpowder, would end up in an explosion.

It is not easy at this time to ascertain in what way it was the misunderstanding between these two worthies originated, but where there is a mutual predisposition to take offence, a quarrel is soon got up. However one would have thought that Collins, with his long military and official experiences, would have foreseen that in the end Bligh must triumph over his enemies, and have deported himself more courteously and circumspectly towards him than he appears to have done. Bligh, it is stated, wanted to interfere in the government of the other, as I suppose was his right to do, if he chose to exercise it. But this, it is also said, was not only disallowed but insolently resented by Collins ordering him to quit the shore, failing which he would compel him to do so by force; and next, as if by way of adding indiscretion to indiscretion, and thus giving the clever but vindictive Bligh another advantage over him, he issued a proclamation forbidding every individual of the settlement to hold any intercourse

whatever with the Porpoise, on pain of receiving five hundred lashes. This rebellious act, we may be assured, would have cost him not only his government, but his commission also, had not his unexpected death saved his memory these disgraces.

There was at this time in Hobart Town an old man whose name I cannot discover, who eked out a precarious livelihood by hawking vegetables and other small wares about The Camp, as this town was then called. He was past ordinary work, being nearly seventy years old; and now either in ignorance of the order, or believing it to be a mere threat, he visited the proscribed ship in prosecution of his humble calling.

Such a delinquency as this was soon discovered by the lynx-eyed police, who, in their overstrained zeal for the good government of the colony, lost no time in confronting the old pauper with His Honor, who soon gave him practical proof of the pretty notorious fact, that what he threatened he very generally executed. His Honor was an economist of time, and in cases like the present none of it was ever thrown away in empty forms; such as summoning witnesses, hearing defences, or other trifles of that sort, but came to the point at once, and sentenced him off-hand to the full punishment threatened in the proclamation.

Directly afterwards, or nearly so, the old culprit was removed by the patrol and committed to the merciful charge of a couple of stalwart drummers, to undergo such an infliction as these professional torturers well knew how to administer.

Colonel Collins, as I am assured by more than one of his contemporaries, still living, was seldom absent from the infernal spectacle that followed a sentence; in which, indeed, he seems to have taken much the same kind of pleasure that Sixtus Quintus is said to have found in signing death-warrants; and in the present instance, he stood by the sufferer from first to last. Whether the old hawker took his punishment all at once, or by instalments only, I have no information but that none of it was remitted is quite certain.

I may add that the story of this flogging, now first told me by **BELBIN**, I have, since my last week's interview with him, read in Bonwick's "Curious Facts of Old Colonial Days" p.216, but in less detail than in **BELBIN**'s relation of it. Bonwick says "Lieutenant Governor Collins urged Captain Bligh to put to sea, and to proceed to Europe as he had engaged to do. This the other would not consent to. Then all communication was stopped between the ship and the shore. Captain Bligh told the Court Martial in 1811, that rations were refused, and that even a man was flogged for selling fowls to him. It was in an order dated December 7, 1809, that Collins expressed surprise, that some were so "infatuated as to consider Captain Bligh the Governor still" ".

In a community where such barbarities as the one described above were not uncommon, compassion for the sufferer is not easily aroused. But it has ever been observed that when the sympathies of a generally apathetic people are once kindled into activity, they become forcible in the proportion of their former inertness. And so it was in the present instance, and old **BELBIN** was amongst the first to take fire at this fresh example of violence; the more especially so, as it was committed on a man whose age he considered should have shielded him from any such excess; and who, moreover, had done so little, according to his plain manner of thinking to deserve it; and it was soon afterwards made apparent that there were some others in the camp besides **BELBIN** who greatly disapproved of Collins' conduct in this last severity.

Despotic and practically irresponsible to official authority as Governors then were, public opinion was not so completely crushed down as to be quite powerless, and many began to think the time was at hand when some check should be imposed on the extravagances of the local authorities, and whose cruelties of which they were the almost daily witnesses, should not be inflicted as they were; that is, according to the mere will of the Governor, the magistrates, or military officers, all of whom did pretty nearly as they liked, even with those who, like **BELBIN**, were just as free as themselves. In fine, that sentence should be preceded by judicial enquiry, and not administered, as it too frequently was, either vindictively or from caprice.

I believe that never yet was there assembled together a community of British in which the stiff-necked element was not represented; that is, where men were not to be found ready at any moment to make large personal sacrifices in resistance of overstrained authority; and so it was here, where the people - heartily sick of military domination - wanted only leaders to direct them, to raise the standard, not of rebellion, but of opposition to the despotism of their Governor.

They who were ready to risk their safeties in disarming him of his assumed power were, primarily, **BELBIN** and a fine old man-of-war's man, Mr James Dodding, whose name, it may be, still lives in the recollections of about a score of old people; and they laying their heads together, drew up a memorial to Captain Bligh (whom they still acknowledged as the legitimate Governor of both colonies), who was then on board the Porpoise, laying at anchor, off that point of North Bruny Island, that still bears the old tiger's name (Bligh's Point) to interpose his power between them and their immediate chief.

I pause here for a moment to say that the late Mrs Ferguson, who passed most of her life at Tinder-box Bay, opposite Bligh's Point, once told me that the ex-Governor and future admiral all but lost his life here. He was rambling unattended on the narrow point, where a detachment of the tribe of Bruny natives "formed line" across it, and thus cut off his retreat and that he had much difficulty to reach the Porpoise.

That the unscrupulous Bligh would have sailed to their relief had the petition reached him, there can be little doubt of; for that petition would have showed him that he had a party here - just, indeed, as he had in New South Wales - a circumstance that might have told in his favour at home, whenever a day of reckoning came round. His own inclinations too, were in favour of resuming his government, if only in a dependent province like this was; while his personal feelings were most unfavourable to Collins, on account of the hostile action of the latter towards him, on his arrival in Sullivan's Cove. But Collins, thanks to the report of a spy, knew what was going on in the camp, and determined to thwart the machinations, as he styled them, of those who desired to see his protracted misrule abated.

After the removal of the Norfolk Islanders from their old homes, they were furnished with house accommodation by the Government; and in most instances two families were billeted in one residence. A person named Ankers shared a cottage along with **BELBIN**'s family and thus became acquainted with what was going on in the quarters of the latter, of which he carried intelligence to the police. Collins therefore (as Arthur's agents once did at a future time) took immediate steps to get the petition into his own hands, and thus defeat the action of the seditious amongst his subjects, and, if successful in this, to "sheet it home" as he styled it, to the originators of the movement.

An officer of the little garrison, a man of some assurance and bluster, was therefore instructed to proceed to the residence of the offending settler, **BELBIN**, where it was known that the petition was deposited; and "in the King's Name" to demand its immediate surrender for delivery to His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor, and a lot more such staff; or, failing of success by these gentle means, then to take it by force.

But the more to impress the malcontents with the majesty of the Governor's Envoy, and to overawe them into submission, he was directed to make his appearance at the wigwam of the chief offender, not in the dilapidated mud-stained suit that he wore customarily about *the camp* but in the full costume of a second lieutenant of His Majesty's Marine Forces, which I can assure my readers was funny enough even less than seventy years ago.

It is recorded that the rainfall in Tasmania of 1809 was an unusually heavy one; but it was pretty fine on the morning of this impressive visit, though, as it has been raining cats and dogs nearly all of the three preceding days, the camp was literally a field of sludge and puddle, so that by the time the officer had finished his outward-bound jaunt, what with jumping into a couple of the many waterholes he had come to cross, for every one that he got safely over his scarlet coat and white spatter-dashes were so begrimed with the mud of the narrow paths of the camp, as to detract very largely from the dapper figure it was expected he would make, when vis-à-vis with the rough and ready settler, but who, to say truth, looked rather the smarter fellow of the two.

It was only the day before this that Mr **BELBIN** had received from the Commissariat depot the weekly dole of "corn" customarily meted out to every settler, whose family was "on the store", as it was styled; corn, that is either wheat or barley being served out in the place of flour, of which latter article there was usually none in the camp, until manufactured by the settlers themselves, out of their weekly allowance of grain, for which purpose hand mills were lent them; and in this patriarchal employment it was, that Mr **BELBIN** was engaged at the time of the arrival of the military ambassador at his house.

Having reached the humble tenement of the enemy, he enquired of his son, the present Mr James **BELBIN**, of Cambridge, then about six years old, if his father was within and if so to tell him he wanted to see him directly, and then marched himself in without more ceremony, and immediately commenced a hasty but general rummage amongst a number of books and private papers that lay on a shelf of a kind of open cupboard, and, as ill-luck would have it, he lighted on the offensive document almost directly.

BELBIN was not very much pleased with the curt style of address used by this officer to his child, which he had overheard, though not indoors at the moment; he was therefore in no haste to attend upon him. This delay was, however, unfortunate as it gave the visitor time enough to make a hasty inspection of the obnoxious paper, which he found to contain a long string of complaints against his chief, and conveyed in such positive language as drove every drop of blood from the cheek of the military magnifico.

BELBIN entered whilst the intrusive visitor was still poring over the offensive petition which, to speak truth, read more like a "Bill of Rights" and demands than a respectful request, and of course only added fuel to the burning indignation of the ceremonious lieutenant.

There is nothing in this world more catching than ill-humour and **BELBIN**, though he could not have given any reason for it, was in a temper directly. At this moment he did not know

what the officer wanted with him, or what it was that he was reading, and no doubt would have kept a civil tongue in his head but for the solemn air and scowling look of the other, which put his back up in a moment and he commenced the quarrel that followed, by abruptly enquiring "What are you doing there?" Now this was too much for the martial visitor, and on an embassy of importance too, to bear with and he treated the enquiry as anyone else would have done whose dignity was thus trifled with - that is, with a solemn wave of the hand expressive of contempt for the querist, and a look that would have gone through the armour of a cuirassier.

But he was obliged to say something, lest **BELBIN**, whose looks were getting unpleasant, might resort to something harder than words. Still he did not deign a direct reply, but merely held out the letter, and enquired, "Pray, sir, did you write this?" and then "paused for a reply", as the newspaper people say.

It was not long coming, for **BELBIN** was one of those who always went straight to the point at once, and was not likely to equivocate, now that he recognised the paper, and answered off-hand, "Yes, I did".

"So I thought", said the lieutenant, with a more satisfied look than he had hitherto worn, adding, "and I shall now take it away with me for the perusal, consideration, and decision of His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor", speaking slowly, and emphasising every syllable as if to give weight to his words.

"But not without my leave", said **BELBIN** hastily and next followed up his words by making a snatch at the precious document, too sudden for the other to withdraw it, so between them it got torn in two, each retaining what he had got hold of. A sharp scuffle for possession now took place, and, after shoving and knocking each other round the room about a dozen times, they rolled out of the house together and down they came to the ground, the half liquefied mud displaced by their fall descending on them in a shower, and so completely disfiguring both of them as to require some discrimination for any one to tell which was the soldier or which the civilian.

BELBIN, being rather the stronger man of the two, and less encumbered than the other, fell uppermost; but the conditions of the ground preventing him rising at first, gave time for the ever-prowling patrol, which the lieutenant now called loudly for, to come to his relief, and they were separated.

Many angry things were now addressed to **BELBIN**, quite enough to raise the bile of a quieter man than he, but as the odds were so much against him, he held his peace; but not, by way of putting an end to the unseemly *fracas* he had been dragged into, he threw over his part of the paper which they had been scuffling about, to his antagonist, saying, "He made him a present of it, and that he might use it as he saw fit". He next turned to enter his dwelling, but this was not permitted, for the soldiers of the patrol, enraged at the defeat of their officer, seized on his victor, and carried him off to the guardhouse.

At this time the military guard of Hobart Town mounted at a small cottage that served both for guard-house and gaol, and stood just outside the present bonding warehouse, and on that front of it facing Macquarie Street. This venerable building was removed only a few years since, when the warehouse underwent external renovation that may have improved its

appearance, but which by sweeping away what old Cobbett calls "the hoar of antiquity" has divested it of all antiquarian interest.

As soon as possible after exchanging his mud-besprinkled regimentals for his ordinary suit, our officer presented himself to the Governor in his office: and after explaining the cause of his appearance in his present guise, he handed the document he had secured to his superior, who, having put the pieces together as well as he could, read it from beginning to end, with a look, the sourness of which was somewhat softened down by one of satisfaction at having got the disparaging missive into his possession.

Collins, having mastered the contents of the paper, next proceeded to instruct his auditor to summon a bench of magistrates for the morrow, to try, or more properly punish, **BELBIN** and Dodding for their officiousness.

But, fortunately for Dodding, a murder, or some such trifle of the time had been committed in the settlement a little before this, and he was absent at Sydney, in attendance on the Court of Criminal Jurisdiction as a witness against the offender; so one of the two birds whose wings he meant to have clipped had made its escape.

The "Bench" consisting of two as pleasant fellows as you could find to try an offender, namely Mr Adolarus William Henry Humphrey and the Reverend Robert Knopwood, assembled at the police office to hear and decide the case of *Rex -v- BELBIN*, and though I believe that the offence which the latter was charged with had no place in the Statute book, that did not signify in the least, and the enquiry went on. The trial was, of course, nothing but a repetition of the old farce we read of in *Æsop* of the wolf and some other flesh-loving beast sitting in judgement on their destined prey. This solemn mockery ended, the two magistrates pretended to confer together in whispers for about a minute, when the senior one proceeded to deliver the sentence of the Court, which he prefaced by about a quarter of an hour's harangue on the subject of his great respect for the prisoner and all his family (of whom, by the way, he knew almost nothing), his general good conduct in the past, the position to which he had now descended through his disloyalty to our Sovereign Lord, etc. etc. but that, in consideration of his former respectability and its being a first offence (which was not true), the Bench was disposed to deal leniently with him; and therefore only ordered him to receive - at such time and place as His Honor might be pleased to appoint - the mitigated punishment of *five hundred lashes*, which he hoped would be a warning to him for the future, as no doubt it was.

That there may be amongst the readers of *The Mercury* some who will receive the account of his sentence as an exaggerated one, or even dismiss it as altogether fabulous is very possible; but they may rest assured of its truth; or, if still sceptical, let them enquire about it of any of the immediate descendants of the late Mr **BELBIN**, and hear what they say about it, for by them the abominable outrage committed on the founder of their family is made no secret of.

But that such excesses as the above were common enough in the past in Hobart Town is easily proved, more particularly by an old Garrison Order Book of 1810-12, now at my hand, wherein many Courts Martial are ordered, and the particulars of some of them reported in full. As it may be that some of your subscribers have never read the details of any such remarkable trials as these, I will take leave to copy one of them out for their satisfaction.

Justice, though as blind as ever in 1812, never faltered in her paces in administering the law, but got on with the work of a rapidity hardly credible now. Instead of taking entire days to decide a case, as her servants the judges do now, the judges of old got to the bottom of a dozen of them in an hour. Addressing juries, examining and cross-examining witnesses, summing up and all minor matters of this nature went with a run then. Indeed, when we cast a glance backwards at the glorious speed of the judges of yore - Captain Murray, Lieutenants Gunning, Breedon, Campbell and Ensign Greenshields - it makes one blush scarlet for the Smiths and Dobsons of our own day, who, in a contest of speed with any of the brave old fellows just named, would be left out of sight in a twinkling.

The case which I shall copy, exactly as it stands in the Order Book, is that of a soldier, charged with getting drunk, damning the Commandant, and fighting with the patrol.

Garrison Orders
Government House, Hobart Town

24th March 1812

Patrol Oxley - C. Sign Oakhampton
Detail of the guard, 73rd Regt 1s.4c.29p

Proceedings of a Garrison Court-martial, held by order of Major Geils, 73rd Regt. Commandant, etc. etc. At Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land, this 23rd day of March 1812, for the trial of such persons as may be brought before it.

President - Captain Murray, 73rd Regt

<i>Lieut Gunning</i>	)		(	<i>Lieut Campbell</i>
<i>73rd Regt</i>	)	<i>Members</i>	(	<i>73rd Regt</i>
<i>Lieut Breedon</i>	)		(	<i>Ensign Greenshields</i>
<i>Royal Marines</i>	)		(	<i>73rd Regt</i>

JAMES DEVAN, private in 73rd Regiment, brought before the Court on a charge of appearing very much intoxicated on parade on Friday, the 20th instant, bidding defiance to the guard when taken to the guard house using insulting gestures, and abusive and mutinous language, towards the Commandant and other officers in the execution of their duty

Evidence: - Sergeant McClure being duly sworn: That on Friday, the 20th instant, Devan was brought to the guard house. He was very abusive and riotous, and also very drunk.

James Devan, being put on his defence: - I was so intoxicated that I do not know what I did. I have been five years in this regiment, and eleven years a soldier, and have never been brought before a Court-martial and beg to throw myself on the clemency of the Commandant.

The Court, having considered the evidence for and against the prisoner, are of the opinion that he is guilty of the crime laid to his charge, and sentence him to receive nine hundred lashes, when and where the Commanding Officer may think proper.

"Signed" J MURRAY, Capt 73rd Regiment, President, Approved A GEILS, Major and Commandant.

On the same day, a couple of other gallant fellows were brought before the same merciful tribunal for breaking into the guard house - liberating a woman confined therein, and half killing the constable in charge of her; but as this was a case of assaulting "only a civilian" - to use military phraseology - the Court, in its clemency, let them down light, with only 1,200 lashes between them.

To return to the case of the prisoner **BELBIN**. He was removed after sentence to another apartment of the little cottage in Macquarie Street, mentioned foregoingly, which then had as many uses as the cobbler's stall, mentioned in the old song, being the Police Office, Guard House and Gaol of the Colony of the time, and more remotely the Hospital also.

After reading the accounts that have reached us about the placable character of Collins, as sketched by his panegyrists and writers who have copied them, it is with a feeling of reluctance approaching to diffidence that I reveal what I have learned of it from the oral relations of very irreproachable witnesses, who had abundant *personal* opportunities of knowing it; by several of these, I have been assured that he was a man of obtuse sensibilities and cruel practices - that many of the punishments inflicted during his government were ordered by himself, and that he was always present at the time of their execution, at the place where they were being inflicted.

His demeanour on the occasion of Mr **BELBIN**'s sufferings, as it was described to me, was most unpardonable. Whether, in delaying the execution of the torture he was to undergo (for he lay in gaol for ten weeks, in hourly expectation of being led out to receive it), he meant to increase the anguish of the prisoner, by exciting false hopes of pardon, could be known to none but himself. But if so, he cruelly undeceived his victim at the end of that time, by suddenly handing him over to the executive servants of the Provost Marshal, namely, the drummers of the garrison.

Young **BELBIN** stayed with his father throughout his imprisonment, and was with him on the day when the fatal order arrived for his removal to the place of punishment. He was, of course, too young to know how to act on so trying an occasion, and perhaps, but for the intervention of others, might have followed his father. But the soldiers of the guard commiserated his situation, and with more humanity and kindly feeling than the Governor had shown, separated them and afterwards took him home.

The details of the punishment are too horrible for relation; but there are one or two incidents connected with it that cannot be suppressed, and must therefore be faintly touched upon.

The spirit of **BELBIN** rebelled against the order of the Provost Marshall to prepare for punishment and he sternly refused. He was therefore stripped and tied up by force, and the terrible process commenced. But the conflicting passions of the man, more than his corporeal sufferings, produced an unexpected interruption that grievously disappointed the Governor, who, throughout stood by his victim almost as closely as the medical men in official attendance.

The executioners had scarcely got through a tenth part of their task, when the pulse of the patient grew feeble for he had suddenly fainted. The surgeons, I'Anson and Bowden, instantly interfered and ordered him to be taken down. But at this stage Collins himself interposed and ordered the drummers to go on. Here, however, he found that even his tyranny had its limits, for the surgeons were inflexible. "At your peril" shouted one of them, but which, is not now remembered. "At your own peril, sir, be it that he receives another stroke. You have done too much already". But however incredible it may appear the Governor's hardihood did not leave him and he still insisted on being obeyed, but to no purpose, for the doctors were firmer than he, and he at last retired, but was heard to mutter as he went away, "He shall have the rest another day", and so the savage scene ended.

What were the motives that weighed with the Colonel to order, or at least connive at, the remission of the rest of the sentence can only be conjectured. It may have been that the private expostulations of the surgeons had their weight, or more probably still, the open and menacing demonstrations of Bligh who now lay in the stream, and who favoured **BELBIN** and his party, had a deterrent effect on him; or some forewarnings of the consequences certain to follow the official enquiry into the expulsion of his superior officer from New South Wales, into which that vindictive spirit would be sure to introduce the story of the inhuman act related just above, may all have concurred to turn his thoughts, however unwillingly, to mercy, and **BELBIN** was soon afterwards liberated.

I have mentioned Bligh above, and may here say that it had become known to him some weeks before, that he had a party in the settlement who looked to him for support against the misrule of their immediate chief.

The Porpoise had at this time quitted her anchorage at Bligh's Point and was not in Sullivan's Cove, where her impatient commander lay, watching the progress of events of the settlement which no doubt he had hoped might yet take such a turn as to justify his landing, and under pretext of restoring order, or some such excuse, of dealing Collins a blow for his unjustifiable conduct to him as already related.

He was now in constant correspondence with the discontented, and having an armed ship under his foot, and plenty of willing fellows at his back, he offered to liberate **BELBIN** from gaol by force, keep him on board the Porpoise, and give him a passage to England, where he thought his presence might be useful to his own cause, as a witness at the Court-martial, which Collins, like Major Johnstone, McArthur, and others in New South Wales were not to escape from.

As well as I can make it out, Bligh remained in the Australian seas for about fourteen months after his deposition and finally left for Europe on the 4th May 1810. **BELBIN** did not accompany him. But as he and his son, James, were accommodated with passages in another ship, The Friends, through the influence of Bligh's future son-in-law, Colonel O'Connell, it seems not unlikely that this arrangement was made from some motive of policy. It may have looked better that Bligh should seem to have held no communication with a witness.

BELBIN remained ten months in London, I believe, seeking redress for his sufferings. But, as a rule, our experiences scarcely justify the belief that the Colonial Office is the place where a colonist, having *real* grievances to redress, make look to, too hopefully for justice; but his case was too grave - too exceptional - an one, to be passed over, and he received at least some reward for his loyalty and humanity. He then turned his face homewards, via

Sydney, where he was detained another nine months. Thus was his separation from his friends extended over a period of much more than two years.

West, in his History of Tasmania, has something to say about **BELBIN** - of the conduct of Collins towards him - and the effect that conduct had on the future life of the latter, which was suddenly cut short on 24th March 1810* as it was and still is, believed, by the agitations and forewarnings of conscience, which must have presented to his mind a gloomy picture of the future; but death surprised him suddenly, and thus relieved him of his anxieties and the disgrace of an enquiry from which he could not have anticipated escape. I quote as follows from West (pp43-46):- *"Bligh arrived at Hobart Town. Collins, Bligh stated, intended to arrest him; at all events he re-embarked, and the settlers were interdicted from holding communication. A free man, Mr BELBIN, was flogged for the infraction of this order, but afterwards received a grant from the Crown for his loyalty". Again - "The share he (Collins) accepted in the responsibility of the deposition of Bligh disturbed his tranquillity, and, it was thought, hastened his end"*.

BELBIN, who had nothing to suffer from the upbraidings of a guilty conscience, survived his persecutor for the long period of thirty-eight years, as I gather from the inscription on his monument in the untidy cemetery of St David's, Hobart Town. This inscription is as follows:-

IN MEMORY OF JAMES **BELBIN**, SENR
CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT AND INSPECTOR OF STOCK
OF TASMANIA
DIED 8TH OF MAY 1848, AGED 77 YEARS

The remains of this worthy gentleman have been recently removed, with those of some of his descendants, to another cemetery.

Religion and patriotism have had their martyrs, who may be counted up by tens of thousands, but Humanity has scarcely a score on its rolls. Of such men as Las Casas, our own Howard and Wilberforce, they of course did more to relieve human suffering than the unnoticed Tasmanian settler; but they periled nothing in the good causes they fought for. They also may be named by hundreds. But of those who have risked their personal liberties and safeties in their attempts to check the oppressor, like **BELBIN** did, hazarding everything and suffering much to arrest the brutality of the irresponsible, one could count all on his fingers and have some to spare. Of this little band of real humanitarians, **BELBIN** stands amongst the front rank, and his name should not be allowed to die, but have a place in the recollection of all who hold brutality, like that of our first Governor, in hatred. His sufferings may indeed darken the memory of Collins, but they shed no disgrace on his own; and if to the qualities that are faintly sketched out above, it be added that his private life was a blameless one, his career may be safely taken as an exemplar by which to regulate our own conduct.

APPENDIX

I have introduced into the foregoing narrative a passage from the historian of Tasmania, West, in which he says that Mr **BELBIN**, sen, was rewarded for his loyalty, etc. The following copy of a letter that I have been permitted to take from one in the possession of his son, Mr William **BELBIN**, of Hobart Town, is now given to show that even in this matter West was not misinformed.

The Government might have been more open-handed; but it was too liberal in rewarding meritorious service here. Even at a later period, 1818, and just after the close of the career of Michael Howe, it did no more than direct the issue of a few nips of spirits "free of duty" to the officers of the garrison for their share in leading a most harassing six-year chase after the most notorious of bushrangers. The letter in question issued from:

*The office of the Colonial Secretary of N S Wales
Secretary's Office, Sydney
November 20, 1813*

*Sir - I have the honour to inform you that bearer, James **BELBIN**, formerly a settler at Norfolk Island, and some time since a resident at Hobart Town, Van Die Man's Land (sic), having lately returned from England, with a recommendation from the Secretary of State to His Excellency the Governor to extend certain indulgences to him in Van Die Man's Land, in consideration of injuries and losses sustained by him there during the administrations of that Government by Colonel Collins and Lieut Hall.*

*In pursuance of this recommendation it is His Excellency's desire that you do put James **BELBIN**, his wife and child, on the King's stores for eighteen months, and give each of them one suit of slop clothing, when a fresh supply shall reach you from England.*

You will please to direct further that a location of eighty acres of land be made to him in some eligible situation at the Derwent, so soon as the Deputy Surveyor of Lands shall have arrived with you from hence.

*I have the honour to be
Your Honour's most obedient humble servant,
J .T. CAMPBELL, Secretary
His Honour Lieut-Governor DAVEY
Van Diemen's Land.*

*P.S. In reading over the foregoing I find that I have omitted one of the principal instructions of the Governor, which I have to request your attention to. Mr. **BELBIN**, as a settler of the 2nd class at Norfolk Island is entitled to the services of two Government men, to be fed and clothed, for two years, at the expense of Government; and it is His Excellency's desire that you will furnish him accordingly with two Government men, when they can be spared for that term to be fed and clothed in the usual way at the expense of the Crown.*

J.T. CAMPBELL, Secretary.

* The inscription on Collins' monument names another day as the date of his death, but that given above is correct.