

THE CONVICT.

Mr. C. W. ... and gentle words of the man who was ...

MOONDYNE I

The Valley of the Vase.

BY JOHN DOYLE O'REILLY.

CHAPTER IV.—(CONTINUED)

'We have been discussing public virtues,' said the governor to Mr. Wyville, who now joined the group.

'English virtues,' I think so, Mr. Wyville smiled as he gave the answer.

'But are they virtues in the abstract?' asked Hamerton.

'No, I think not—I am sure they are not.'

'There was a movement of surprise in the company. The answer, given in a grave voice, was utterly unexpected.

'Patriotism not a virtue?' at length exclaimed one of the ladies. 'Pray Mr. Wyville, what is it, then?'

'There were ten families living on a beautiful island, and owning the whole of it. They might have lived together in fraternal peace and love; but each family preferred to keep to themselves, neither feeling pride nor pleasure in the good of their neighbors, nor caring about the general welfare of the whole number.

'Well, if patriotism is to be condemned, shall we not still reverence Law?' asked some one. 'Have you another allegory, Mr. Wyville?'

'Again he thought a moment, before his reply came.

'There was a lake, from which two streams flowed to the sea. One river wound itself around the feet of the hills, taking a long course, but watering the fields as it ran, and smiling back at the sun. Its flood was filled with daffodils, and its banks fringed with rich grass and bright flowers. The other stream ran into a great earthen pipe, and rolled along in the dark. It reached the sea first, but it had no fish in its water, except blind eels, and no flowers on its banks. This stream had run so long in the tunnel without its own will that it preferred this way to the winding course of its natural bed; and at last it boasted of its reverence for the earthen pipe that held it together and guided its blind way to the sea.'

'The earthen pipe is Law, I suppose,' said Mr. Little, 'what come in time to love.'

shape of a horse-shoe. From the sea, at a distance, it seemed a verdant of delicious coolness and retreat. The mountains were wooded high up both sides, and the trees were so close together that they formed a valley. The broad, and bright yellow stream, which tumbled from the hills at the head of the valley, wound through the rich plain and finally merged in the ocean.

Exclamations of wonder and delight were on every lip as the surprising beauties of the scene came one after another into view.

The end of the ridge on the southern side was flat, and here, under Mr. Wyville's directions, a strong mahogany pier had been erected, which made a safe landing place for even great ships.

A raised platform ran round the foot of the hills, and brought the passengers to a road shaded by majestic trees that swept toward the farther end of the valley.

Awaiting their arrival, were easy open carriages, evidently of European make, in which the distinguished party seated themselves. The drivers were some black, some white, but they were all at home in their places.

The scene was like a field from fairyland. No sign of a human being, save the driver, was to be seen. The air was fresh and bracing, and the climate congenial to the glory of a well watered Australian vale. The carriages rolled under trees of splendid fern from fifteen to twenty feet in height; the cliffs were clothed with rich color in flower and herbage, spreading palms of every variety filled the eye with beauty of form; the green and crimson and yellow parrots and paroquets rose in flocks as the carriages passed, and high over all the beautiful life of the underwood rose the grand mahogany ash and gum trees of the forest.

They passed cottages bordered in flowers, and ringed by tall bedegonns composed wholly of gorgeous garlands. The strangers, who looked on these changing revelations of loveliness with silent, and almost tearful, eyes, those long accustomed to Australian scenery were amazed at the beauty of the valley.

Mr. Wyville and Mr. Sheridan had ridden steadily on before the others, and stood unmoved and hostile on the verandah of the house where the drive ended.

Alice Wainwright sat in the foremost carriage, and was the first to alight, with Sheridan's hand-holding hers. Their eyes met as she stepped to his side. His lips formed one short word, of which only her eye and ear were conscious.

'Henceforth,' said Alice, 'I shall be a widow. My husband is dead. I have no more to expect from him.'

Exclamations of wonder came from all the party at the peerless beauty of her surroundings. The house was wholly built of bright red mahogany beams, perfectly fitted, with rich woodwork and paneling, and grew then, like those of a person who had suffered in sickness.

'Come,' he said, unable to conceal an unusual affectionate earnestness, 'let us ride to Perth, and rest there; you need rest.'

'Why, I never felt better,' answered Mr. Wyville, lightly; 'and rest is not to me. I never rest unless I am ill.'

'You will soon be ill if this continues,' said Mr. Wyville, as he asked the question, Hamerton saw a strange light in his eye.

'Yes, I think you have overtaken yourself lately. You are in danger of breaking down—so you ought to rest.'

'I have no objection to your shaking my head, but the old game smile. I have not even time to wait one day.'

He was smiling as he spoke, evidently enjoying Hamerton's astonishment.

'I am not the grandfather of Koro, of whom she often spoke to me.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Wyville, smiling; 'and also of Teparui. This property will descend to them.'

'Are they with the chief now?' 'No; by this time they have reached the Shan's happy valley, where it is probable they will remain. You see, it is possible to step from the bush into civilization; but it is not quiet so pleasant to step back into the bush—especially for girls.'

'Mr. Wyville examined the papers, and thought of the subject, but was a speck against the sunset he landed.'

The ride to Perth was pleasantly passed in conversation; and, on their arrival, they ordered dinner to be served on the cool verandah.

While waiting there a rough-looking man approached and touched his hat to Mr. Wyville.

'Be you the Controller-General?' he asked.

'Well, sir, here you see my ticket, and here's my full discharge, and I want to leave the colony; and I want a pass to King George's Sound, where I can find a ship going to Melbourne.'

'Mr. Wyville examined the papers, and thought of the subject, but was a speck against the sunset he landed.'

'You're not going to keep them papers, sir, by you?' asked the man, in evident alarm.

'Well, sir, you shall have them,' said Mr. Wyville, rather surprised at the fellow's manner. He entered the hotel and wrote the pass.

But, as the hand wrote, the mind turned to the man's words, dwell on his last expression that would rather have his ticket-of-leave than take a pass from the colony; and yet, in any other country, it was a proof of shame, not a safeguard. The man did not look stupid, though his words were so. As Mr. Wyville finished writing, he raised his head and saw Ngara ji watching him as usual. He raised his finger slightly—Ngara ji was beside him.

'A few words in the native tongue spoken in a low tone, sent Ngara ji back to his bench, where he sat like an ebony figure till he saw Mr. Wyville return to the verandah. He then rose and went out by another door.'

Mr. Wyville called the controller toward him till he stood in the strong lamplight. He spoke a few words to him, and gave him the papers and the pass. The man clumsily thanked him and vanished.

'That's an ugly customer,' said Hamerton, 'I suppose you know it from his papers. He was strangely restless while you were writing his pass.'

Mr. Wyville did not answer, but he took up Hamerton's arm, and pointed to a corner of the street where at the moment a man was passing under a lamp, walking hurriedly. Following him closely and silently strode a tall native with a spear.

'Mr. Wyville smiled and nodded. 'I thought it just as well to know where the man had passed the night, he said.'

A few minutes later, Ngara ji came to the verandah, and spoke to his own language to Mr. Wyville, who was much disturbed by the message. He wrote a letter, and sent it instantly to the post-office.

'The cautious wretch' he said, 'usually moved. He had just learned that the man had gone straight to Draper, by whom he had been hired to get the pass. Draper's purpose was plain. He intended to leave the colony, and desert again his wife and children, with whose money he could return comfortably to England.'

'What will you do with the man?' 'I shall let him go, and let him go with his wife and children. He can take care of himself. He is a free man. Can you later with his movements?'

'No man is allowed to desert his wife, stealing her property. He can have a pass by asking; but he does not know how to ask for it. I fear to keep him by me by force. If he will change for the better, I shall hasten his departure and allow, on his return from the Vase.'

TO BE CONTINUED.

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