

My back with flogging is lacerated
 and often painted with my crimson gore. 20
 And many a man from downright starvation
 lies mouldering now underneath the clay;
 And Captain Logan he had us mangled
 at the triangles of Moreton Bay.

'Like the Egyptians and ancient Hebrews 25
 we were oppressed under Logan's yoke,
 Till a native black lying there in ambush
 did give our tyrant his mortal stroke.

My fellow prisoners, be exhilarated
 that all such monsters such a death may find! 30
 And when from bondage we are liberated
 our former sufferings shall fade from mind.'

(?1830s)

Marcus Clarke
 HIS NATURAL LIFE

BOOK 4

from CHAPTER 7

BREAKING A MAN'S SPIRIT

The insubordination of which Rufus Dawes had been guilty was, in this instance, insignificant. It was the custom of the newly-fledged constables of Captain Frere to enter the wards at night, armed with cutlasses, tramping about, and making a great noise. Mindful of the report of Pounce, they pulled the men roughly from their hammocks, examined their persons for concealed tobacco, and compelled them to open their mouths to see if any was inside. The men in Dawes's gang—to which Mr Troke had an especial objection—were often searched more than once in a night, searched going to work, searched at meals, searched going to prayers, searched coming out, and this in the roughest manner. Their sleep broken, and what little self-respect they might yet presume to retain harried out of them, the objects of this incessant persecution were ready to turn upon and kill their tormentors.

The great aim of Troke was to catch Dawes tripping, but the leader of the 'Ring' was too wary. In vain had Troke, eager to sustain his reputation for sharpness, burst in upon the convict at all times and seasons. He had found nothing. In vain had he laid traps for him; in vain had he 'planted' figs of tobacco, and attaching long threads to them, waited in a bush hard by, until the pluck at the end of his line should give token that the fish had bitten. The experienced 'old hand' was too acute for him. Filled with disgust and ambition, he determined upon an ingenious little trick. He was certain that Dawes possessed tobacco; the thing was to find it upon him. Now, Rufus Dawes, holding aloof, as was his custom, from the majority of his companions, had made one friend—if so mindless and battered an old wreck could be called a friend—Blind Mooney. Perhaps this oddly-

assorted friendship was brought about by two causes—one, that Mooney was the only man on the island who knew more of the horrors of convictism than the leader of the Ring; the other, that Mooney was blind, and, to a moody, sullen man, subject to violent fits of passion and a constant suspicion of all his fellow-creatures, a blind companion was more congenial than a sharp-eyed one.

Mooney was one of the 'First Fleeters'. He had arrived in Sydney fifty-seven years before, in the year 1789, and when he was transported he was fourteen years old. He had been through the whole round of servitude, had worked as a bondsman, had married, and been 'up country', had been again sentenced, and was a sort of dismal patriarch of Norfolk Island, having been there at its former settlement. He had no friends. His wife was long since dead, and he stated, without contradiction, that his master, having taken a fancy to her, had despatched the uncomplaisant husband to imprisonment. Such cases were not uncommon.

One of the many ways in which Rufus Dawes had obtained the affection of the old blind man was the gift of such fragments of tobacco as he had himself from time to time secured. Troke knew this; and on the evening in question hit upon an excellent plan. Admitting himself noiselessly into the boat-shed, where the gang slept, he crept close to the sleeping Dawes, and counterfeiting Mooney's mumbling utterance, asked for 'some tobacco'. Rufus Dawes was but half awake, and on repeating his request, Troke felt something put into his hand. He grasped Dawes's arm, and struck a light. He had got his man this time: Dawes had conveyed to his fancied friend a piece of tobacco almost as big as the top joint of his little finger.

One can understand the feelings of a man entrapped by such base means. Rufus Dawes no sooner saw the hated face of Warder Troke peering over his hammock, than he sprang out, and exerting to the utmost his powerful muscles, knocked Mr Troke fairly off his legs into the arms of the in-coming constables. A desperate struggle took place, at the end of which, the convict, overpowered by numbers, was borne senseless to the cells, gagged, and chained to the ring-bolt on the bare flags. While in this condition he was savagely beaten by five or six constables.

To this maimed and manacled rebel was the Commandant ushered by Troke the next morning.

'Ha! ha! my man,' said the Commandant. 'Here you are again, you see. How do you like this sort of thing?'

Dawes, glaring, makes no answer.

'You shall have fifty lashes, my man,' said Frere. 'We'll see how you'll feel then!'

The fifty were duly administered, and the Commandant called the next day. The rebel was still mute.

'Give him fifty more, Mr Troke. We'll see what he's made of.'

One hundred and twenty lashes were inflicted in the course of the morning, but still the sullen convict refused to speak. He was then treated to fourteen days' solitary confinement in one of the new cells. On being brought out and confronted with his tormentor, he merely laughed. For this he was sent back for another fourteen days; and still remaining obdurate, was flogged again, and got fourteen days more. Had the chaplain then visited him, he might have found him open to consolation, but the chaplain—so it was stated—was sick. When brought out at the con-

clusion of his third confinement, he was found to be in so exhausted a condition, that the doctor ordered him to hospital. As soon as he was sufficiently recovered, Frere visited him, and finding his 'spirit' not yet 'broken', ordered that he should be put to grind maize. Dawes declined to work. So they chained his hand to one arm of the grindstone, and placed another prisoner at the other arm. As the second prisoner turned, the hand of Dawes of course revolved.

'You're not such a pebble as folks seemed to think,' grinned Frere, pointing to the turning wheel.

Upon which the indomitable poor devil straightened his sorely-trying muscles, and prevented the wheel from turning at all. Frere gave him fifty more lashes, and sent him the next day to grind cayenne pepper. This was a punishment more dreaded by the convicts than any other. The pungent dust filled their eyes and lungs, causing them the most excruciating torments. For a man with a raw back the work was one continued agony. In four days, Rufus Dawes, emaciated, blistered, blinded, broke down.

'For God's sake, Captain Frere, kill me at once!' he said.

'No fear,' said the other, rejoiced at this proof of his power. 'You've given in; that's all I wanted. Troke, take him to the hospital.'

When he was in hospital, North visited him.

'I would have come to see you before,' said the clergyman, 'but I have been very ill.'

In truth he looked so. He had had a fever, it seemed, and they had shaved his beard, and cropped his hair. Dawes could see that the haggard, wasted man had passed through some agony almost as great as his own. The next day Frere visited him, complimented him on his courage, and offered to make him a constable. Dawes turned his scarred back to his torturer, and resolutely declined to answer.

'I am afraid you have made an enemy of the Commandant,' said North, the next day. 'Why not accept his offer?'

Dawes cast on him a glance of quiet scorn. 'And betray my mates? I'm not one of that sort.'

The clergyman spoke to him of hope, of release, of repentance, and redemption. The prisoner laughed. 'Who's to redeem me?' he said, expressing his thoughts in phraseology that to ordinary folks might seem blasphemous. 'It would take a Christ to die again to save such as I.'

North spoke to him of immortality. 'There is another life,' said he. 'Do not risk your chance of happiness in it. You have a future to live for, man.'

'I hope not,' said the victim of the 'system'. 'I want to rest—to rest, and never to be disturbed again.'

His 'spirit' was broken enough by this time. Yet he had resolution enough to refuse Frere's repeated offers. 'I'll never "jump" it,' he said to North, 'if they cut me in half first.'

North pityingly implored the stubborn mind to have mercy on the lacerated body, but without effect. His own wayward heart gave him the key to read the cipher of this man's life. 'A noble nature ruined,' said he to himself. 'What is the secret of his history?'

Dawes, on his part, seeing how different from other black coats was this priest—at once so ardent and so gloomy, so stern and so tender—began to speculate on the cause of his monitor's sunken cheeks, fiery eyes, and pre-occupied manner, to wonder what grief inspired those agonized prayers, those eloquent and daring supplications, which were daily poured

out over his rude bed. So between these two—the priest and the sinner—was a sort of sympathetic bond.

(1870–74)

'Tasma' (Jessie Couvreur)
AN OLD-TIME EPISODE IN TASMANIA

The gig was waiting upon the narrow gravel drive in front of the fuchsia-wreathed porch of Cowa Cottage. Perched upon the seat, holding the whip in two small, plump, ungloved hands, sat Trucaninny, Mr Paton's youngest daughter, whose straw-coloured, sun-steeped hair, and clear, sky-reflecting eyes, seemed to protest against the name of a black gin that some 'clay-brained cleric' had bestowed upon her irresponsible little person at the baptismal font some eight or nine years ago. The scene of this outrage was Old St David's Cathedral, Hobart,—or, as it was then called, *Hobart Town*,—chief city of the Arcadian island of Tasmania; and just at this moment, eight o'clock on a November morning, the said cathedral tower, round and ungainly, coated with a surface of dingy white plaster, reflected back the purest, brightest light in the world. From Trucaninny's perch—she had taken the driver's seat—she could see, not only the cathedral, but a considerable portion of the town, which took the form of a capital S as it followed the windings of the coast. Beyond the wharves, against which a few whalers and fishing-boats were lying idle, the middle distance was represented by the broad waters of the Derwent, radiantly blue, and glittering with silver sparkles; while the far-off background showed a long stretch of yellow sand, and the hazy, undulating outline of low-lying purple hills. Behind her the aspect was different. Tiers of hills rose one above the other in grand confusion, until they culminated in the towering height of Mount Wellington, keeping guard in majestic silence over the lonely little city that encircled its base. This portion of the view, however, was hidden from Trucaninny's gaze by the weatherboard cottage in front of which the gig was standing,—though I doubt whether in any case she would have turned her head to look at it; the faculty of enjoying a beautiful landscapé being an acquisition of later years than she had attained since the perpetration of the afore-mentioned outrage of her christening. Conversely, as Herbert Spencer says, the young man who was holding the horse's head until such time as the owner of the gig should emerge from the fuchsia-wreathed porch, fastened his eyes upon the beautiful scene before him with more than an artist's appreciation in their gaze. He was dressed in the rough clothes of a working gardener, and so much of his head as could be seen beneath the old felt wide-awake that covered it, bore ominous evidence of having been recently shaved. I use the word ominous advisedly, for a shaven head in connection with a working suit had nothing priestly in its suggestion, and could bear, indeed, only one interpretation in the wicked old times in Tasmania. The young man keeping watch over the gig had clearly come into that fair scene for his country's good; and the explanation of the absence of a prison suit was doubtless due to the fact he was out on a ticket-of-leave. What the landscape had to say to him under these circumstances was not precisely