

Transcript of : Life of a convict named "Isaacs" a Jew in Van Diemen's Land, written down by Thomas Scott, 1821 (B 41)

Life of a convict named "Isaacs" a Jew In Van Dieman's Land taken down from his own dictation - in the year 1821 at Elizabeth river where he then was - Servant to Govr. Sorell as his Stock Keeper.

I was born in the city of Lond. and was reared by my parents tenderly being their youngr Son they took great pains with me till I was 13 yrs old. My Mother died when I was young. My Father gave me good advise; but I did not take it. I began to know myself pick up with bad compns

The first of my transactions was I robbed my father of £75 - I being so young I did not what to do with such a great sum of money but I soon found some of my companions who soon learnt me how to make away with it, and then the way to get more elsewhere - then soon began to be very knowing, as good as themselves. I never met with my Fr not for 12 mths After when he heard what a pretty game his son was carryg wd soon bring him to the gallows he fetched me home and told me if I wd leave off this time of life he wd bind me apprentice to a respectable tradesman I told him I would and making faithful promises he bd me appce to an upholsterer -- with him I did not stop very long my fingers wd itching to be at my old game.

One day my Master sent me to a Gentleman's house with some furniture where I was to draw the money and bring it to him, he putting a deal of trust in me I drew this my I kept it and ran away with it

I wnt to my compns who I picked up with at first till my money was gone - one day as I was wkg the street I met with my Br again he told me I had been playg a pretty game with my master after faithful promises I had made to him but my master declared when he saw me He wd put me in Goal I then said to me Fr I did not care what he said for I wanted none of his advise and I woud take good care he wd not put me in Goal and on the same night I went out with two of my compns where we broke open a house wh we cleared off everything to the value of [£90?] we directly went and sold our swag for fear of being found out - I received my share of 27£ & then went down to the country - one of my compns being taken for the same robbery got transported for life.

I went to Worcester and for fear of being apprehended myself I enlisted for a soldier; I was then 15 yrs old. That time of life seemed very strange to me -- when the Sergeant took me down as far as Gloucester where I secd. 8 Gun; then 1/2 of my bounty which seemed very little in my hands after what I had been lately used to that I very soon spent about 2 mths after I went to join the Regt then lying in Jersey where I soon became acquainted with new compns with two of my comrades and myself was on guard one night together we laid our heads together to break open the Gr. Mastrs stores that same night at 12 o'clock when we completed our business we planted the swag down by the sea side - on the next night we took the greatest part of it and sold it -- consisting of shovels pickaxes blankets sheets etc, to the amount of £550 - 2 weeks after as we were coming home from the country from the people to whom we had sold it, being half past 8 - we met the Corpl of the picket he asked us where we had been I told him we were going home I had some tea and sugar for my own use I had got from the people we had sold the property to, which tea and sugar was off a great value

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and I was determined to get it by some means or other The Corpl put us all in the Gd House & there we remd till next mornng when the Adjutant came down

& said we were the 3 who had robbed the Gr. Mastsr. Stores he said to me, what the other two did not know I learnt them, and d----d the sergt that ever enlisted such as scoundr. brought as disgrace upon the Regt he told me he woud flog me about all the rest if I did not tell him where the property was - at the same time he might as well have asked the stones where it was for I shod never have told him he then related the circumstances to the Colonel who the next day tried us by court martial for the robbery and then we were sent to the Guard house again we remd there 2 days & then upon solitary confinemt upon bread and water
Then began to be very well pleased think I it wd. be all that I wd. receive - we remd there 30 days in that condition one morning & previously unknown to us we were suddenly taken out and received 300 lashes apiece by the tap of the drum I then began to feel very sorry off not takg my Frs advice when I was at home - but all this I did not mind - I then got well and remaining a few mths in the Cour. to whc. I belonged steady a yr 2 gentlemen lately come into the Regt as an officer picked me out to be his servt I thought to myself he could not pick out a worse - he used to put very gt trust in me till one day I took the liberty of going to his desk where his money was and took out 5 dollars – he did not miss this small sum I continued this very often thinkg he wd not miss such small sums till one day he hapd to miss 15£ he called me to an acct I told him I knew nothing about it he said he wd not report it to the Coln. or he wd get me a good flogging if I wd not tell him whether I took the money or not - I told him I knew nothing about it he might do as he liked - he sent me to my duty again - a few months after our regt was ordered to Spain we set sail from Jersey & in 7 weeks we arrived at Lisbon where being formerly used to pilfering I still carried it on but fortune favrd me here so that I was never found out

Sometimes there when I was short of money I would take my blanket & sell it to a Spanh woman and get sometimes 5 or 6 dollars for it, when I had sold it I wd go and put 2 stripes upon my arm as a corpl and go to the person I sold the blanket to and demand it back again I soon found that this was a good way of doing here, I sometimes sold it to 5 or 6 people in a night, and always got it back again.

I then found out another scheme that when the army wd be engaged I wd always be in the rear robbing & plundering their dead but one day I was picked up at that by an officer who asked me what I was about I mad him no answer, but he told me to go with him he then ordered his drummer to tye me up to the Ast tree and gave me 5 dozen this was at the battle of Salamanca and sent me by a corpl to me regt when I joined my

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Regt they were ordered then for to march farther up the country After arriving in the Camp I fell in with a Corpl belong to another regt he said ne knew me very well, & if I would go with him he cd take me to a Spanh womans house where we could get something worth - I told him I did not care much when we came to the house it seemed a poor place - we went in & found very little money only about £5; that I took & shared it wh him - I soon found out he was no judge of houses; I wd have nothg to do with him any more.

2 nights before the Action of Toulouse we lay in a village where I saw the door of a house open I went in and found an old woman who asked me in Spanh what I wanted I wanted money she went to the cupbd & brought me to the amount of 9 1/2d and said it was all she had, & then I stamped on the floor & as much as to say it was not enough & I wd have more till I searched the house all over I could find nothing but a pair of sheets of any value them I took & the 9 1/2d - the sheets I sold to a woman in the Regt

she gave me only 4/6 for them

When the Action commenced at sunrise in the morning I was at my old trade the same as at Salamanca I was very fortunate in the midst of the battle I fell in with an officer who was killed - I searched his pockets - I took his purse & watch & epulets - in the purse was 10 guineas in gold 5 dols 2 Crowns, then I thought for fear of being caught it was time for me to leave off

I went up and joined my regt one or 2 of my comrades asked me where I had been - but I made them no answer and the action was then very near upon a closure - after the action we advanced into France and were quartered in the country villages - I was quartered in a house by myself, where there was an old woman with 2 daughters & 1 son - the one daughter was 22 & the other 19 both unmarried the boy 16 - when they asked me what religion I was I told them I was a Catholic as I understood they liked all to be of their own religion - the soon learnt me to talk French - I was 2 months with them before I did anything amiss until I found out all corners - The first that I took from them was 7 francs out of a basin in the cupboard they did not blame me for it - but I heard them breiding a disturbance with the son about it - one day I was watching the oldest daughter as she was counting out some money & saw her tye it up in a piece of cloth and hide it underneath the cupboard -- at night when they were all gone to bed I got up softly and took the bag. And in the morning the young girl went to look for it - I heard her tell her

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Mother in French that the money was gone, although she had done as she desired her with it - She told her daughter to ask me if I knew anything of it. I told her I did not and wondered how she could ask me any such thing, and asked her if they thought I had robd them - She said it was all that She & her Mother Sister & Br were worth and she did not wish to make any more complaint about it so that she got it again for no stranger cd come into the house to take it - she then made a complaint to the offr who told me if I did not bring the money to light, that he wd flog me I made him no answer. He went & ordered a serjent to confine me I still had this money concealed. I was brought before the Coln. he told me if he cd prove it agt me he wd hang me.

But fortune was in my favour, so that they cd not bring it agt me -- & they shifted my quarters; and put me in another house under the eye of a sergeant - where I had but little opportunity of getting anything - One day as I was walking in a field by myself about a mile from the town I overhauled my former deposit, and found it to consist of 7 louis d'ors 65 dols 5 half dols & 27 francs.

I then thought I might rest myself a while, & I could make a very good shift without doing anything for some time. In a short time after we got roud for England - we shipped at Bordeaux and in 16 days arrived at Plymouth marched to Portsmouth 4 days after arrival I got short of money & said to one of my comrades I will go out tonight and try what luck. He was agreeable to what I said, we went together & in the street fell in with a drunken Gentln I said now is our time to see what he has.

Whilst he was looking in at a cooks window I served his pocket and found 2 1/2d I then went round to the other side of him whilst my comrade was looking over his shoulder I went to the other side and got his handkerchief which only brought 1/7d I said to my comrade this is a very poor nights work & as we were going to the barracks we fell in with a drunken whore we asked her where she was going she told us tonak her a---e I gave her a push & knocked her down & searched her all over as she lay and only found 7 1/2d & a little snuff box with a silver sixpence in it I says then we will go home

taking our way thro the Market Place I saw a drunken sailor he said he had been robbed of all the money he had I said to him it was a pity that he shd be servd in that manner & told him to go sleep till he got sober

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We left him & he went to sleep. We came back to him again when I found he had a good pair of shoes on and a handker which we took and went home. On the next day we got the route for America the night before we ~~marched~~ sailed I took the liberty to stop out all night & sold all my necessaries In the morning I was taken, & brought into barracks where the Adjutant asked me where my necessaries were I told him I knew nothing about them he said he wd get me a good flogging - I was tried by a [drum?] head Crt Martial and sentenced 200 lashes & got it upon the spot. The next morning we embkd at Portsmth on board the Ceylon E.Im [?] for America in May 1814. After a long passage of 3 mths we arrived near the town of N. Orleans on the banks of the Mississippi to the east of the town we landed upon the Tuesday and marched up to 5 miles to the Camp before the City, & on the Sunday following the 8th Sept in the morning we engaged after a long & bloody engagmt of 24 hours we began to cease firing a little while, & every man felt very fatigued & hungry.

I then says to my comrade I must go out and see what I can find - I then came to a black man laying on his belly I kicked his hat off & I thought I had found a prize for that hat was full of biscuit & beef I then went a little farther among the wounded I then came to an officer belonging to one of the W. India Regt with part of his skull shot off.

I searched his haversack & there I found a pair of fine roast duck and some white biscuit - then thot within myself I had my good luck - I found besides in his haversack a shirt & pair of stockings & a purse with 5 dollars. But before I could get cleverly back to my own Regt the Americans were beginning to fire harder than they had done before from the walls at us I then met my comrade (who had been out upon the same game as myself, just as I came into the ranks he says comrade what luck I told him very indifferent, he says its not so with me for I have fd a small box of dollars, very good says I, that will do well, we were the ordered to retreat out of the field, that night we went back for 2 miles & then halted - I on that same night was put on the outline picket. I about 1/2 hour after I was stationed the Indian Squaws came from the army without provisions there were no distinctions, the Officers getting the same as the men - The Captain of our Compy cried who will roast me a piece of my beef I will cried I - I roasted him his meat & gave him a piece of biscuit & then I saw his canteen full of rum laying by his side - Ah says I to myself I must have this

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I immedtly went & filed my own canteen with water placed it in the place where his was full of rum and took his away. I and two 3 more of us went & enjoyed ourselves - In 1/2 hour after the Captain called out where is my rum he finding the canteen full of water standing by his side - he called for me as I had cooked his supper, & asked if I had seen the rum I said no sir and then I changed the canteen again leaving his own empty & took mine away with the water - he then said he could find neither the Rum nor Canteen - I then turns round & said Sir here is your Canteen standing here but no rum in it - he said he wd give £5 to know the man who took it, I told him I wd try to find him out -

At about 2 in the mg the Americans began to fire again which caused all the pickets to be engaged & brought the whole body of the army down & there we semd firing till daylight - At 8 in the morning we sent a flag of truce to them for 12 hours, to by the dead - at 12 next night we were forced to retreat

off the field altogether for 6 miles - In 2 days after we were forced to take refuge on board the ships where we came from - being only 10 days ashore - We were landed upon an island called Dolphin Id - the whole army 2 Compys from each Regt were drafted to go & storm the Fort of Mobile about 12 ms from the Island - we went in flat bottomed boats & landed at 12 at night and at daylight we had everything ready for storming the fort

We were commd by Major Monroe of the Artillery - we sent them word whether they intended to surrender or not - they sent that if they got until 12 noon they wd surrender - they were allowed to march out with the honors of war - 350 fine young men - We immdly took position We began to look about the place & cd find nothing in it but sand bags, it being built of wood & mtd 26 guns -- we were in the fort 15 days and were very badly off for want of provisions -- they at one time gave us pork that we refused - they buried it in the sand it was so bad; in about 10 days after there being no provisions they dug the stinking pork up & served it out to us & said we must take it or want - In about 5 days after we were embarked on board the fleet & (in conseqce of peace being proclaimed) embarked

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For Engd - I have to mention a circumstance that hapd in their fort - when we first came into it we began to pull up the sand bags that wee heaped one above the other I struck something with my bayt and pulling up some more boards & bags found a small box full of dollars about 360, which we spent aftwds. Some of the ships went one way & some another - Our ship met with a contrary wind so that we could get with much ado into Halifax - before we arrived we were short of water & had no bread bur flour aboard we were for 6 weeks upon 1 pint of water & a quarter pound of flour a day - till we got in sight of Halifax harbour - we were 10 weeks from Dolphin Id to Halifax

When we arrived there we got ashore & remained there a month till the ship got victualled & then imbkd for Engd and took an agent who had been left there on board our ship - one day as I was walking the dock the Agent came to the forecle for something that was the matter ~~for~~ with the sailors - I turned round not thinking he was coming having a large quid of tobacco in my mouth I threw away the quid and as bad luck wd have it, it fell upon his epaulette he turned round & said who was that d---d rascal & one of the sailors told him it was me, he went & lodged a complaint to our officer aboard & insisted on my being punished for it, & I was tied up to the gratings & got 75 lashes

We were a month on our passage till we anchored at Spithead we had scarcely droped before we got orders to go round to the Downs & there we were ordered to be in readiness to go over to Ostend - when we were fitted out in 7 days we landed at Ostend & to my joy I hd that the Battle of W'loo was over. We were then put in boats & went up the Canals as far as Ghent being 4 days on our way - when we arrived there we were all billeted in different houses in the town. During our stay here every man got a weeks liberty to go about the town & no duty to do - I was quartered upon a baker who kept a shop; every time I used to go into the house for my meals I used to take a silver spoon &/or fork, with me which I put in a secret place till I went away - The night before we went away I went down at midnight to the shop where I began to search for their money, but I found it all gone - I then went up the stairs & thought a pair of sheets & boots were the only thing I

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Could take away with me - At 4 oclock in the morning we got the rout & marched 7 leagues that day upon the road to Paris - when I came into my

quarters at night I sold the sheets - boots & silver forks & spoons for 3
luis dors to the people I slept with - Next day we went for 5 leagues Me &
my comrades were quartered up on a poor man & woman In the town - we took
from them a pair of trousers & sheet & blanket & 6 small cheeses - which was
all we cud fd worth taking we making it a rule to rob every house as we went
along - we were 10 days in going from Ghent to Neully Camp within 3 miles of
Paris & 2 from St Dennis - the last night but one of our journey me & my
comrades were quartered at a shoemakers house - before we came away in the
morning very soon eer they were up we stole 4 hides of red morocco leather
but before we could get all the parties together we were fd out by the
shoemks wife who missed her leather, she found it upon my comrade & went &
reported it to the Captain of the party - he was tried by a drum head crt
martial & gave him 150 lashes & then made him march on -

After I had been a month at Neuilly Camp as I was one day on guard I fell in
with an Irishman belonging to the Regt. he says to me d---m my eyes if I don't
desert & says I d---m my eyes if I don't too & in the morning at 6 oclock
happening to be both on sentry together we thought it the best time to go
off - and we went in full marching order with our arms & accoutrements - we
travelled the first day all the way through the camps of the Camps of the
Allied Army without being known - at night we found ourselves within 3 miles
of the village we left in the morning - I was jarring [?] upon this & did
not like what I had done - but I thought as I had begun I might as well go
through it - I then took fresh courage & went into a wine shop & laid myself
down upon a from close by the fireplace the woman asking me in French if I
was unwell I told her I was & she took me backwards up some stone steps &

Life of a Convict

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