

Anonymous Account Of A Convict Escape, Between 1840 And 1844, and Letter, 18 Aug. 1844

MLMSS 5536/ Item 1

[Page 1]

My Lord. I do not complain that a jury of my country found me guilty of a Burglary, nor do I complain of the Judge who sentenced me to be transported for that time; but before you send me back to that horrid place hear me. I was [text missing] on board the hulks, then shipped on board the convict ship secured with handcuffs between the dicks and in this way reached Sidney. Some were [text missing] to the chain gangs, the worst were sent to Norfolk Island the horror of which I will not try to relate, I was sent into the interior, in the class for the mildest punishments; but what I underwent was bad enough. Before the stars were off the shies we were driven to work at cutting wood, the least murmur brought us to the triangle and the lash, we worked under a burning sun which blistered our smarting backs

[Page 2]

at night 300 of us slept under stringy mats all secured; in this was I passed four years, when I was taken into the service of a gentleman whose I forbear to mention lest I should disgrace it by putting it forth in connection with a convicted felon; for Indeed he was a kind and generous man. His affairs obliged him to return to England; I was thrown out of employment, orders came that all unemployed convicts should leave Sidney, again I returned [text missing] wood, and to a life subject to much hardship, and cruelty that I could not bear it. I resolved to leave it. I mentioned my resolve to Mahony a fellow convict, he agreed to bear me company, we escaped in the night to a small Bay called Botany Bay, from which the colony is named, we lay concealed among the rocks. I watched for I was afraid Mahony slept, the dashing of the spray awoke him, he agreed to watch. I could scarcely sleep I awoke and found Mahony again, I thought I heard a horses step but I believe it was conscience. We saw a ship about two miles from the shore we determined

[Page 3]

to swim to her we reached her, climbed by a line to which some pork was hanging into the hold and I hid myself in a water cask; after we had lain there for some time Mahony came to me very much frightened He said they are hauling the tarpaulin over the deck and they are going to smoke the ship, we despaired for by this means they discover whether any convicts are concealed, we knew we should be smothered Mahony knew better than I did what awaited [text missing] we were caught, that we should be][text missing] to Norfolk Island to work in darkness underground in chains for life, we resolved to die. Mahony asked me if he should [text missing] anything for me if he chanced to survive and arrive in England. I said nothing I have no one living to care for [text missing] I asked him – the same question He gave me an old letter, he said take this to my poor old mother she lives in Museum Street London; If I die give her this tell her I am well and am coming back to her again it will lengthen and lighten her days. Our fears were groundless we got under weigh and for twelve days we remained in the hold with a few biscuits, we were discovered I had fainted with exhaustion and when I came to myself I found the sailors

[Page 4]

rubbing me with warm flannel. When I was strong enough recovered the captain asked me if I was not an escaped convict I denied it for I knew the risk incurred by a captain who takes away a convict I feared he would take me back. Being acquainted with naval matters I took the helm and got the favour of the sailors, at night I heard with despair the order "about ship" for I knew we were to be taken back again; I found Mahony, we were seven miles from shore, to swim it seemed impossible but anything was better than going back, we jumped overboard After we had swum for some time Mahony said I think I am sinking I said keep up your heart I see what seemed to be shoal water, I swam towards it it was a canoe upset. I righted it, I helped Mahony into it, he upset it again, again I put him into it we reached the shore in it. In the morning the natives came down to us they were completely naked, the chief pulled Mahony by the frock he resisted they dragged him off and I never again saw him alive, they wounded me in the shoulder with a poisoned spear the wound and the want of food overpowered

[Page 5]

me I fainted and on coming back to life I found a native woman with my head on her knee she was rubbing the wound with a [text faint] leaf which they use as an antidote to their poison. I recovered, the woman stayed with me, she was the sister of the chief One day here Brother came down upon me in anger and raised his tomahawk, his sister saved my life for she matched [text missing] he hand and threw it away. She took me to a grove of trees and there she showed e poor Mahonys dead body [text missing] had eaten most of the flesh from his [text missing] I buried him and felt that I was performing a good action for though I have [text missing] criminal you do not know my history. [Text missing] knew my Father, my Mother [text missing] when I was nine years old, I was [text missing] a helpless child into the middle [text missing] the temptations of the se London I had no education till I became the inmate of a gaol. To return I was informed by the woman by signs that her tribe would kill me for I had buried Mahony on ground consecrated to their chiefs H-fle We fled together in a canoe and reached another Island, where she used to visit me with fish, sometimes she left me for 2 or 3 days when my hunger has been so great that I have torn the flesh from my arms, and have kept a pebble in my mouth

[Page 6]

to allay my burning thirst. One morning she came running to me and shewed me what she called a large canoe I looked out it was a ship that proved to be French we swam out and reached a boat that put off for us they took me on board but refused the woman I refused to go on board without her, we embarked together the crew treated us kindly and landed at Otaheite, where we fell in with English Missionaries who took a fancy to me and wished me to settle there and marry the Native woman whom I had brought with me, I refused for I longed to see England the place [text missing] birth. I left her in the care of the Missionaries who promised to send her back to her tribe, I embarked on board an English Ship and worked my passage to Liverpool I engaged there in a ship bound for Quebec for I found that I must starve in England; at Quebec I was desirous to enter a Man of war I was on the point of joining H.M S Buffalo when she was ordered to Botany Bay with the Canadian prisoners, afraid prudence would not allow me to go where I was almost sure of being recognised I joined a merchant ship bound to Hull; at Hull we were paid off, and I was at Manchester on my way to seek

[Page 7]

employment at Liverpool when I was recognised by the police. Now my Lord I beg your mercy, do not for the sake of God send me back to that dreadful Land where chains and darkness must be my lot; condemn me to death with a few hours preparation I shall die cheerfully, sentence me to be hanged rather than go back to live like a dog and to die like a dog.

MLMSS 5536/Item 2

[Page 1]

Private

[indecipherable]  
18 August  
1844

My dear Lord Denman

I have given directions for the commutation of the Sentence in conformity with your recommendations.

I quite agree in your opinion, that the absolute assignment of fixed Punishment to certain Crimes, irrespective of varying circumstances is injudicious and ought henceforth to be avoided.

I did introduce a Bill, which has become Law, for this purpose of bringing within this penalties of Arson Fire raising in Buildings, not part of the Curtilage, and for Agricultural

[Page 2]

purpose: and make Prisoners under his age of [indecipherable] on conviction are subjected to Whipping, either in public or in private at the pleasure of the Court, in addition to the Penalties now inflicted by Law.

The Frequency of this Crime, as now committed by Children of

[Page 3]

Esclavage - -ce des maux, cette inuite des iniquities.

[Indecipherable], is grievous and alarming.

I am  
My dear Lord  
Yrs. sincerely  
[Indecipherable]

The  
Lord Denman