THE : CRUEL : PAST.

A Glimpse of the Australian Convict System, 1760 to 1840

To the Editor:

While rushing down the lonely harbor of Sydney, a few days ago, in company with Elder H. H. Argyle of Beaverdale, the sight of one object made me decide to write your readers a couple of letters on the above subject. The object referred to is a rock which stands in mid-harbor and is noted by the suggestive name of Pinchgut. A fort is now built on it. Its appearance has changed during the past few decades, but for all that its suggestions are as of the convict days I will refer to this rock later and will merely say here that some one has suggested that the rock with its suggestions and the memories which cling to it should be blown out of sight, but it would be necessary perhaps to remove a good many rocks and landmarks to destroy every suggestion of the awful days between 1788 and 1840.

Of the years 1787 and 1788 an English author named Henry Kingsley is reported to have said: "About this time the British government were beginning to find out that hanging men for petty theft was a mistake. Anyhow, hanging did no good. Transportation was tried and the great dominion of Australia founded."

Australia was discovered by Capt. Cook in 1770 and a few years later settlements were established. Engineers felt that "Providence had designed the country for us." As a matter of fact, the people in England were full and the questions arising as to what to do with the prisoners were hanging and no good, Botany Bay was thought of and prisoners were transported and left into force.

Botany Bay, I might say in passing, is a large bay south of Sydney a few miles and its entrance is distant from the entrance to Port Jackson or Sydney harbor.

When the question of place was decided preparations for transportation were soon made. In March, 1787, the convoy sailed. Disagreements of the first convoy then began to commence soon thereafter. On May 13th they set sail from Botany Bay. On the ships carried 1030 persons, of which the "Were nearly one male convicts and about 200 female convicts and children. The convoy occupied about eight months. It is stated that 48 convicts died on the passage. Those who survived within the first five months of arrival, it was under medical treatment, and the convoy was a floating hospital. In the meantime British gaols had been relieved. It would seem that Capt. Phillips, who was the governor of the new colony first and who afterwards became governor of New South Wales, had a hard time. The great hopes for his success that they determined upon the start were made on the days side of the ocean. He was distressed, among the convicts immediately on landing at Port Jackson which place Capt. Phillips chose in preference to Botany Bay. At any rate, only six weeks elapsed before a log of seventeen was hanged for theft. Things got very rapidly worse. It would hardly be credited if that lot of convicts, consisting of about 1000 souls, were sharpers, pickpockets, highwaymen and men of all trades. The majority of them were unaccustomed to wielding the tools broad to them by their lot. The result of their insolence and sullenness, the destructiveness of the government, brought about the "Rum Corps" of previous, then sickness and famine. By that time Capt. Phillips' good intentions seem to have been nearly as dead as he, for he was heard to "Those who escaped with the only preserved. It is horrible to relate, but it appears that nearly one in four died and are greedy at the graves." In City seven sailors are stated to have been hanged for stealing bread. A small party was sent to Norfolk Island to raise provisions. It also was a failure. Disease and famine set in after some of Sydney's early years. In the years 1790 and 1791 the convoy ship "Lady Juliana" with 226 female convicts aboard, and the accompanying ship "Pitt" with 400 male convicts, arrived. The female convicts were in a terrible state. Then the fifteen ship bearing stores was wrecked near Norfolk Island. In the meantime the gaols of the British Isles were called on to supply to the convicts ship and confined convicts to Botany Bay. Accordingly the ships New Zealand Water Corps were organized. A service Major Grose of England, I believe, to be secretary of state. I believe, in fact, a force for service at Botany Bay to return to which certain convicts were to be pardoned and the contract to supply the company with as much as possible and at little expense was given. Major Grose, I believe, was the officer that let recruiting sergeants around the docks and prisons for the service. "Scourging" was a term frequent in every other sentence in his orders. Grose was, after the Hunter, Governor of Botany Bay. The Rum Corps, the first force in the New South Wales Corps, was composed of "the refuse of the army." Grose, I believe, was a brother of Major Grose, who was a noted character in the Revolutionary war. The Rum Corps, which was the Grose regiment, was a noted one. Its officers and others carried on a commerce which earned them the name of the rum corps. A number of Rum was introduced by the officers of the corps who should purchase any rum from any ship without the intervention of the officers. The rum reached such a pitch that it became necessary to make it illegal for any one to purchase rum from ships, which this was done at a fine of £5 per gallon. It is said that a fifteen for gross or any of wheat for two gallons of rum.

The following is quoted. It is a quotation from Harry Melville. This first by the way are a political subject:

"Captain Anthony Tom Kemp, who was a soldier, came to him for his money. He would not, and he accordingly kill with Will, 'what do you want?'

"'I want to be paid, sir,' the soldier would say.

"'What will you have?' was always Captain Kemp's answer. 'I have very good tobacco, sir.' If you, the U. S. Government, (?) 'I'll give you a bottle of it, or a gallon of rum and grinds of it is a rarity, and so on.

"If the poor soldier answered, 'No, I don't want any of your goods, the captain's constant was, 'You don't deserve a sixty cane!'

"Perhaps then the soldier would say, 'Sir, if you please give me half money and half goods.' But the captain would not, and the poor soldier would go home and sorrowfully lie to his family, saying, 'Poor, poor, poor, I have disappointed Pi! and you to be good and have good for good nourishment to your dear.'"

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG.

Sydney, June 25, 1898.

II.

Perhaps it would be well at the outset to let on board the transports were taken from the prisons and hulks and under the medical of its worst features. They were presented in sufficient literally by Mission Clergy (Rev. Dr. Lang of the National Life," and I should have felt likely on this phase of the convict drama.

Perhaps a surveyor contents to the transportation has contributed to contribute who resided 45 (?) years for the Rum Corps, and who, I believe, "Do not no doubt, contribute to the with the health of the convicts (some of them letting their masses and others with the) and the Rum Corps, back on the way out." Regretting that after 1 after the following. To the Rum Corps, who was sent to the very first ship, and in the 50th (?) year of his residence in the 50th (?) year of his residence in the 50th (?) year of his residence