

For The Term of His Natural Life

By MARCUS CLARKE

CHAPTER XXIII.—(Continued.)

The experienced convict disciplinarian did not rate the ability of John Rex highly enough. From the instant the convict had heard his sentence of life banishment, he had determined upon escaping, and had brought all the powers of his acute and unscrupulous intellect to the consideration of the best method of achieving his purpose. His pretended piety had accomplished the end he had assumed it for. He had won the confidence of Meekin; and into that worldly creature's ear he poured a strange and sad history. He was the son, he said, of a clergyman of the Church of England, whose real name, such was his reverence for the cloth, should never pass his lips. He was transported for a forgery which he did not commit. Sarah Purfoy was his wife. She, an innocent and trusting girl, had determined to follow her husband to his place of doom, and had hired herself as lady's maid to Mrs. Vickers. "My great sorrow is for the poor woman. She is in Sydney, I have heard, and my heart bleeds for her." Here Rex heaved a sigh that would have made his fortune on the boards.

"You might write to her."

"You know the orders, sir—the commandant reads all the letters sent. Could I write to my poor Sarah what other eyes were to read?" and he watched the parson slyly.

"N—o, you could not," said Meekin, at last.

The next day Meekin, blushing with the consciousness that what he was about to do was wrong, said to his penitent, "If you will promise to write nothing that the commandant might not see, Rex, I will send your letter to your wife."

"Heaven bless you, sir!" said Rex, and took two days to compose an epistle which should tell Sarah Purfoy how to act. The letter was a model of composition in one way. It stated everything clearly and succinctly. Not a detail that could assist was omitted, not a line that could embarrass was suffered to remain. John Rex's scheme of six months' deliberation was set down in the clearest possible manner. He brought his letter unsealed to Meekin. Meekin looked at it with an interest that was half suspicious. "Have I your word that there is nothing in this that might not be read by the commandant?"

John Rex was a bold man, but at the sight of the deadly thing fluttering open in the clergyman's hand his knees knocked together. Strong in his knowledge of human nature, however, he pursued his desperate plan. "Read it, sir," he said, turning away his face reproachfully. "You are a gentleman: I can trust you."

"No, Rex," said Meekin, walking loftily into the pitfall: "I do not read private letters." It was sealed, and John Rex felt as if somebody had withdrawn a match from a powder barrel.

In a month Mr. Meekin received a letter, beautifully written, from "Sarah Rex," stating briefly that she had heard of his goodness; that the inclosed letter was for her husband, and that, if it was against the rules to give it him, she begged it might be returned to her unread. Of course, Meekin gave it to Rex, who next morning handed to Meekin a most touching and pious production, begging him to read it. Meekin did so, and any suspicions he may have had were at once dispelled. He was ignorant of the fact that the pious letter contained a private one, intended for John Rex only, which letter John Rex thought so highly of that, having read it twice through most attentively, he ate it.

The plan of escape was, after all, a simple one. Sarah Purfoy was to keep a vessel hovering round the southern coast of Van Diemen's Land without exciting suspicion. The escape was to be made in the winter months, if possible, in June or July. The watchful vessel was to be commanded by some trustworthy person, who was to frequently land on the southeastern side, and keep a lookout for any extraordinary appearance along the coast. Rex himself must be left to run the gauntlet of the dogs and guards unaided. "This seems a desperate scheme," wrote Rex, "but it is not so wild as it looks. I have thought over a dozen others, and rejected them all. This is the only way. Consider it well. I have my own plan for escape, which is easy if rescue be at hand. All depends upon placing a trustworthy man in charge of the vessel. You ought to know a dozen such. I will wait eighteen months to give you time to make all arrangements." The eighteen months had now nearly passed over, and the time for the desperate attempt drew near. Faithful to his cruel philosophy, John Rex had provided scapegoats who, by their vicarious agonies, should assist him to his salvation.

He had discovered that of the twenty men in his gang effort had already determined on an effort for freedom. The names of these were Gabbett, Vetch, Bodenham, Cornelius, Greenhill, Sanders (called the "Moocher"), Cox and Travers. He would urge these men to their fate, and take advantage of the excitement attendant on their absence to effect his own escape. "While all the island is looking for these eight boobies, I shall have a good chance to slip away unobserved." He wished, however, to have a companion. Some strong man, who, if pressed hard, would turn and keep the pursuers at bay, would be useful without doubt; and this comrade-victim he sought in Rufus Dawes.

Beginning from a purely selfish motive to urge his fellow-prisoner to abscond with him, John Rex gradually found himself attracted into something like friendship by the sternness with which his overtures were repelled.

"Have you no friends whom you wish to see?" he asked, one evening, when Rufus Dawes had proved more than usually deaf to his arguments.

"No," said Dawes, gloomily. "My friends are all dead to me."

"What, ah?" asked the other. "Most men have some one whom they wish to see."

"I have resolved. I stay here."

"And leave your innocence unproved?"

"How can I prove it?" cried Rufus Dawes, roughly impatient. "There are crimes committed which are never brought to light, and this is one of them."

"Well," said Rex, as if weary of the discussion, "have it your own way, then. You know best. The private detective game is hard work. I, myself, have gone on a wild goose chase before now. There's a mystery about a certain shipbuilder's son which took me four months to unravel, and then I lost the thread."

"A shipbuilder's son! Who was he?"

John Rex paused in wonderment at the eager interest with which the question was put, and then hastened to take advantage of this new opening for conversation. "A queer story. A well-known character in my time—Sir Richard Devine. A miserly old curmudgeon, with a scape-grace son."

Rufus Dawes bit his lips to avoid showing his emotion. This was the second time that the name of his dead father had been spoken in his hearing. "I think I remember something of him," he said, with a voice that sounded strangely calm in his own ears.

"A curious story," said Rex, plunging into past memories. "Among other matters, I dabbled a little in the private inquiry line of business, and the old man came to me. He had a son who had gone abroad—a wild young dog, by all accounts—and he wanted particulars of him."

"Did he get them?"

"To a certain extent. I hunted him through Paris into Brussels, from Brussels to Antwerp, from Antwerp back to Paris. I lost him there. A miserable end to a long and expensive search. I got nothing but a portmanteau with a lot of letters from his mother. I sent the particulars to the shipbuilder, and by all accounts the news killed him, for he died not long after."

"And the son?"

"Came to the queerest end of all. The old man had left him his fortune—a large one, I believe—but he'd left Europe, it seems, for India, and was lost in the Hydaspes. Prere was his cousin."

"Ah!"

"It annoys me when I think of it," continued Rex. "With the resources I had, too! Oh, a miserable failure! The days and nights I've spent walking about looking for Richard Devine, and never catching a glimpse of him! The old man gave me his son's portrait, with full particulars of his early life, and I suppose I carried that ivory gimcrack in my breast pocket for nearly three months, pulling it out to refresh my memory every half-hour. If the young gentleman was anything like his picture, I could have sworn to him if I'd met him in Timbuctoo."

"Do you think you'd know him again?" asked Rufus Dawes, in a low voice, turning away his head.

There may have been something in the attitude in which the speaker had put himself that awakened memory, or perhaps the subdued eagerness of the tone, contrasting so strangely with the comparative incoherence of the theme, had caused John Rex's brain to perform one of those feats of automatic synthesis at which we afterward wonder. The prodigal son—the likeness to the portrait—the mystery of Dawes' life! These were the links of a galvanic chain. He closed the circuit, and a vivid flash revealed to him—The Man.

Warder Troke coming up, put his hand on Rex's shoulder. "Dawes," he said, "you're wanted at the yard," and then, seeing his mistake, added, with a grin, "Curse you two; you're so much alike one can't tell 't'other from which."

Rufus Dawes walked off moodily; but John Rex's evil face turned pale, and a strange hope made his heart leap.

"Troke's right, we are alike. I'll not press him to escape any more."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Pretty Mary—as ugly and evil-smelling a tub as ever pitched under a southerly buster—had been lying on and off Cape Surville for nearly three weeks. Captain Blunt was getting wearied. He made strenuous efforts to find the oyster beds of which he was ostensibly in search, but no success attended his efforts. In vain did he take boat, and pull into every cove and nook between the Hoppolyte Reef and Scouten Island. In vain did he run Pretty Mary as near to the rugged cliffs as he dared to take her, and make perpetual expeditions to the shore. In vain did he—in his eagerness for the interests of Mrs. Purfoy—clamber up the rocks, and spend hours in solitary soundings in Blackman's Bay. He never found an oyster. "If I don't find something in three or four days more," said he to his mate, "I shall go back again. It's too dangerous cruising here."

On the same evening that Captain Blunt made this resolution, the watch-

man at Signal Hill saw the arms of the semaphore at the settlement make three motions thus:

The semaphore was furnished with three revolving arms, fixed one above the other. The upper one denoted units, and had six motions, indicating one to six. The middle one denoted tens, ten to sixty. The lower one marked hundreds, from one hundred to six hundred. The lower and upper arms whirled out. That meant three hundred and six. A ball ran up to the top of the post. That meant one thousand.

Number 1306, or, being interpreted, "Prisoners Absconded."

"There's a bolt," said Jones, the signalman.

The semaphore signaled again—"Number 1411."

"With arms!" Jones said, translating as he read. "Come here, Harry! here's a go!"

But Harry did not reply, and, looking down, the watchman saw a dark figure suddenly fill the doorway. The boasted semaphore had failed this time, at all events. The "bolters" had arrived as soon as the signal!

The man sprang at his carbine, but the intruder had already possessed himself of it. "It's no use making a fuss, Jones! There are eight of us. Oblige me by attending to your signals."

Jones knew the voice. It was that of John Rex. "Reply, can't you?" said Rex, coolly. "Captain Burgess is in a hurry." The arms of the semaphore at the settlement were, in fact, gesticulating with comical vehemence.

Jones took the strings in his hands, and, with his signal book open before him, was about to acknowledge the message, when Rex stopped him. "Send this message," he said. "Not sent! Signal sent to Eaglehawk!"

Jones paused irresolutely. He was himself a convict, and dreaded the inevitable cut that he knew would follow this false message. "If they find me out—!" he said. Rex cocked his carbine with so decided a meaning in his black eyes that Jones banished his hesitation at once and began to signal eagerly. There came up a clinking of metal and a murmur from below. "What's keeping yer, Dandy?"

"All right. Get those iron rods, and then we'll talk, boys. I'm putting salt on old Burgess' tail." The rough jest was received with a roar, and Jones, looking momentarily down from his window on the staging, saw, in the wailing light, a group of men freeing themselves from their irons with a hammer taken from the guard house; while two, already freed, were casting buckets of water on the beacon woodpile. The sentry was lying bound at a little distance.

"Now," said the leader of this surprise party, "signal to Woody Island." Jones perforce obeyed. "Say, 'An escape at the mines! Watch One-tree Point! Send on to Eaglehawk!' Quick, now."

Jones, comprehending the force of this maneuver, which would have the effect of distracting attention from the Neck, executed the order with a grin. "You're a knowing one, Dandy Jack," said he.

John Rex acknowledged the compliment by uncocking the carbine. "Hold out your hands! Jimmy Vetch! Come up, and tie our friend Jones. Gabbett, have you got the axes?" "There's only one," said Gabbett. "Then bring that, and any tucker you can lay your hands on. Have you tied him? On we go, then." And in the space of five minutes Harry had been silently clutched by two forms, who rushed upon him out of the shadow of the huts, the Signal Hill station was deserted.

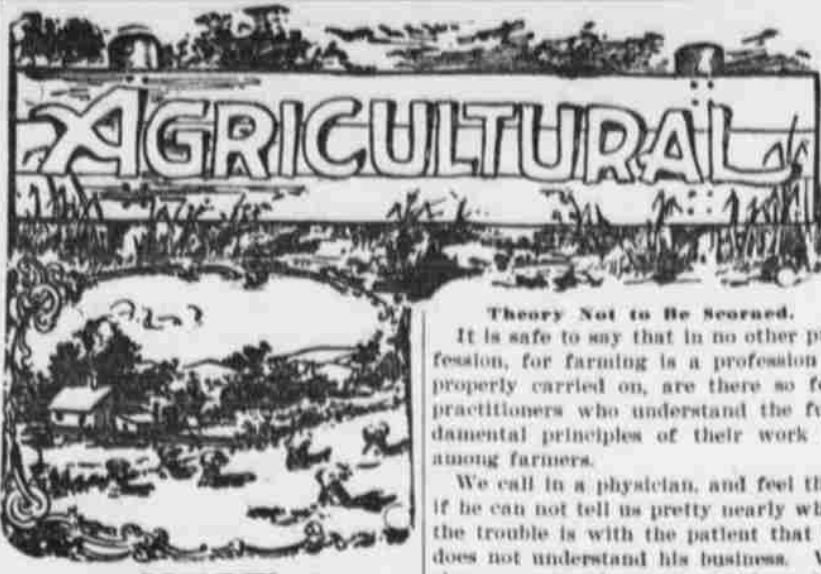
At the settlement Burgess was foaming. Nine men to seize the Long Bay boat, and get half an hour's start of the alarm signal was an unprecedented achievement! What could Warder Troke have been about? Warder Troke, however, found eight hours afterward, disarmed, gagged and bound in the scrub, had been guilty of no negligence. How could he tell, that at a certain signal from Dandy Jack, the nine men he had taken to Stewart's Bay would "rush" him; and, before he could draw a pistol, trust him like a chicken? The worst of the gang, Rufus Dawes, had volunteered for the hated duties of pile driving, and Troke had felt himself secure. How could he possibly guess that there was a plot in which Rufus Dawes, of all men, had refused to join?

Constables, mounted and on foot, were dispatched to scour the bush round the settlement. Burgess, confident, from the reply of the Signal Hill semaphore, that the alarm had been given at Eaglehawk isthmus, promised himself the recapture of the gang before many hours; and giving orders to keep the communications going, retired to dinner. His convict servant had barely removed the soup when the result of John Rex's ingenuity became manifest. The semaphore at Signal Hill had stopped working.

"Perhaps the fools can't see," said Burgess. "Fire the beacon—and saddle my horse." The beacon was fired. All right at Mount Arthur, Mount Communication, and the coal mines. To the westward, the line was clear. But at Signal Hill was no answering light. Burgess stamped with rage. "Get me my boat's crew ready; and tell the mines to signal to Woody Island." As he stood on the jetty, a breathless messenger brought the reply. "A boat's crew to One-tree Point! Five men sent from Eaglehawk in obedience to orders!" Burgess understood it at once. The fellows had decoyed the Eaglehawk guard. "Give way, men!" And the boat shooting into the darkness, made for Long Bay. "I won't be far behind 'em," said the commandant, "at any rate."

(To be continued.)

A debt is adorned by payment.



Prevents Mud Around Tank.

To prevent a mud hole forming around a watering tank a structure like this can be built. A hole or pit is dug the size of the tank to a depth of six feet and is filled with broken stone. The tank is then mounted on whatever kind of foundation desirable which can be made of brick or stone. The overflow pipe is placed in the center of the tank instead of at the sides which is usually the manner of attaching it. When the wind blows the water instead of slopping out of the sides and making a mud hole runs over the top of the waste pipe in the center of the tank and runs down to keep away in the broken rock and porous sub-soil. The accompanying illustration will indicate how it is constructed and the manner of disposing of the overflow of water from a stock tank. It will be better to have the water line a few inches lower than the top edge of the tank so as to preclude the possibility of any water escaping and making a mud hole.



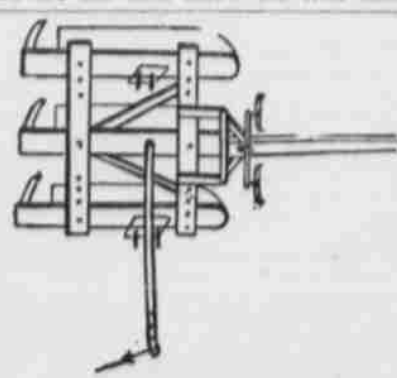
PLAN FOR THE WATER TANK.

Crops Following Cow Peas.

One ought not to get the idea that a worn out piece of ground can be planted to cow peas one year and be sown to seed so as to raise a paying crop the following year. Cow peas renovate the soil and supply nitrogen, but they can not and do not entirely rebuild it in a short period. If one has a worn out strip of soil, he must expect to spend some time and energy on it to get it in proper condition. A plan somewhat after the following would work well: Sow five pecks of cow peas per acre broadcast and with them four or five hundred pounds of some good fertilizer, using a fertilizer more heavily endowed with potash and phosphoric acid than with nitrogen, although it should contain some nitrogen. About the middle of the summer plow the cow peas under, lime the soil heavily, five hundred pounds or more to the acre, harrow in and sow to a mixture of crimson clover and rape. This, plowed under the following spring, would give one a soil fairly good for some cultivated crop upon which a liberal quantity of fertilizer should be used.—Exchange.

Marker for Corn and Beans.

The runners of this marker for corn, beans, etc., are of ash, with pieces of oak 1x4 nailed on top. The crosspieces are of spruce, 1x6. Can mark rows 2 1/2, 3, 3 1/2 or 4 feet, with guide pole to swing either way. What makes this marker all the more valuable and really a short cut, are the cultivator teeth to the rear of each runner. These teeth are set one inch below the iron shoe



NEW STYLE OF MARKER.

To Kill Canada Thistles.

It may be a trifle early to discuss Canada thistles, but if you are liable to forget, clip this out and put it where you can get it readily, and apply the remedy when the season comes: Put half a bushel of salt in a barrel, and hot water enough to dissolve the salt; stir till dissolved. Add water enough to nearly fill the barrel and dissolve in it one quart can of concentrated lye. Let it cool, then sprinkle freely on the thistle patch. It is claimed they will wilt and die. This ought to be effective if anything will.

ANGEL OF THE SEA.

Philanthropic and Religious Work of a Countess.

One of the most remarkable religious philanthropists of the world is Adelaide, Countess Schimmelman. The Countess is 52 years old and her life story forms a remarkable romance. For many years she has devoted her life to the welfare of the fishermen and sailors of Germany and Scandinavia, and her name is as well known among them and as deeply respected as is that of Miss Agnes Weston in British ports. The work of the Countess among the miners of the Rhine district is also a remarkable record, and it was while moving among these men that she had frequent opportunities of hearing of Evan Roberts and the Welsh revival, and this induced her to visit Wales.

The Countess can converse fluently in five languages and several dialects. The ease with which she changed her speech while working among the cosmopolitan population of Cardiff has been a matter of wonderment. One of the most remarkable meetings she has attended during her visit to Wales was an underground service in one of the mines at 5 o'clock in the morning, before the miners began their work. The men sang and prayed and listened attentively to an address by the Countess.



COUNTESS SCHIMMELMAN.

The Countess is a daughter of the late Count Lehnsgrewe Schimmelman, and was born in the castle of Ahrensburg, in Holstein. Her early life was spent in the most exclusive aristocratic circles on the continent, and for eighteen years she was maid of honor to the late Empress Augusta, of Germany, the Kaiser's grandmother.

She never took kindly to the conventionalities and insincerities of court life, however, and eventually dissociated herself from her class and kindred, and, acting under strong religious convictions, Tolstoyan in character, decided to devote the whole of her life and possessions to the amelioration of the lot of the fishermen and sailors of Germany and other countries. The enthusiasm and unselfish sharing of her world's goods which characterized her work among these toilers of the sea raised the ire of her immediate relatives.

In her autobiography she relates how the superintendent of a private asylum was induced to certify her as insane. Notwithstanding the warnings of friends, she was kidnapped, and kept in secret seclusion in a place which she has described as a "human hell," where "lunatics of the worst description" surrounded her.

Eventually the Danish minister of police heard of her plight. Parliament was moved on her behalf by means of the representations of a niece of Prince Bismarck, and she was released after the foremost specialists of Germany had pronounced her to be absolutely sane. She at once went to Denmark, her father's native land, and was received with unbounded sympathy by every one from the royal family downward.

Her evangelistic work among the seamen was resumed, and in order to do this satisfactorily she purchased the yacht Duen, the property of Prince Waldemar, of Denmark, youngest brother of Queen Alexandra. Since then her mission work has so increased that its ramifications are now world-wide. Her "homes" on the Baltic, and especially the Naval Home at Kiel, are taken as models all the world over.

As many as 3,000 sailors and fishermen have attended her meetings at Hamburg and elsewhere. Among the annual subscribers to her mission funds are many of the occupants of the thrones of Europe, including Queen Alexandra, whom the countess has visited on more than one occasion.

A Lovely Catch.

Mrs. S.—And so you are leaving us, Bridget? And what are you going to do?

Bridget—Please, mum, I'm going to get married.

Mrs. S.—Dear me! Isn't that rather sudden? Who is the happy man?

Bridget—Do you remember, mum, me askin' you about four weeks ago to go to the funeral of a friend? Well, I—o be goin' to marry the corpse's husband. Sure, he told me then I was the life o' the party.—Harper's Weekly.

You may as well tell your wife the truth; she'll find it out, anyway.