

## Chapter 4

## FENIAN CONVICT TRANSPORTATION

A rumour went through the prison...even to the dark cells, of a ship sailing to Australia!

Fenian convict, John Boyle O'Reilly<sup>1</sup>

Most Fenians sentenced to imprisonment were arrested in Ireland between September 1865 - during suppression of the movement's newspaper, The Irish People - and March 1867, when rebels involved in the uprisings of that month were scattered by British troops and Irish constabulary. Several hundred suspects were arrested during this period, but of these only 105 were convicted and imprisoned on charges of Fenian conspiracy<sup>2</sup>. Late in 1867 the British Government decided to include two-thirds of these prisoners in a final shipment of convicts to Western Australia. An Australian Fenian scare that followed as a consequence, invites inquiry on several major issues: Why was a decision taken to send Fenian convicts to Australia? Who were the Fenians selected, and on what basis was selection made? Was there any real justification for colonial alarm? And finally, in what particular manner did Western Australians react to an influx of Fenian convicts?

Western Australia, founded as a free British settlement in 1829, languished for two decades due to its isolation, small population, shortage of capital and lack of cheap convict labour. During a depression in the 1840's such growth as had occurred ceased, and in response to colonial requests a penal establishment was granted in 1849. The decision served Britain as much as it did the colony, since transportation to New South Wales had been abolished in 1840 and a move by Britain to renew it had met heated opposition in Sydney and Melbourne. After transportation to Van Diemen's Land ceased in 1853, Western Australia became the sole recipient of

- (1) See p. 112
- (2) Isaac Butt's figures; given during his address to an Amnesty demonstration at Dundalk, Ireland, in 1873 (Melbourne Advocate, 20 December 1873).

British convicts until continual pressure from anti-transportation groups, together with the cost of shipping convicts and maintaining the Fremantle Convict Establishment, finally prompted Whitehall to announce that transportation to Western Australia would not continue after 1867.

The official decision was despatched by the British Secretary of State, Edward Cardwell, to the Australian colonies in 1865; informing governors that no convicts would be sent to Western Australia after 26 November 1867<sup>3</sup>. Cardwell's successor, the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, reaffirmed the policy to Sir John Young, Governor of New South Wales, in a despatch of 6 September 1867, to which he added: 'I think it advisable to point out to you that Military offenders sentenced to transportation can no longer be sent to that colony'<sup>4</sup>. On 17 September, just six weeks before transportation was due to cease, Buckingham informed the Governor of Western Australia, Dr. John Hampton, that a convict transport had been chartered to carry 280 male convicts to Fremantle<sup>5</sup>. Buckingham did not mention that sixty-two Fenian convicts would be included, nor that seventeen of them had been British soldiers when arrested and were therefore military offenders who should not have been transported. Did he deliberately omit these details in the interest of secrecy or security; or did he not know that Fenians would be aboard the last convict transport? Or was it simply that Buckingham knew, but felt no obligation to advise Hampton that any convicts on board the vessel had particular political notoriety?

Precise records of when and how the decision was taken appear to be almost non-existent, but two oblique references shed some light on the matter. On a colonial despatch of December 1867, in which Governor Hampton expressed concern about rumours that some Fenian convicts were en route to Australia, an assistant under-secretary of the British Colonial Office, T.F. Elliot, made the following marginal note to his superior, Secretary of State Buckingham:

I own...(though most assuredly I should never have said so to a stranger, but only here in the confidential transaction of business) that I think that the policy of

- (3) Buckingham to Young, 6 September 1867, Sec. of State Despatches, 4-1356, NSWAO.
- (4) *ibid.*
- (5) Buckingham to Hampton, 17 September 1867, COD 70, WAA 41.

sending Fenian prisoners to this out-of-the-way and defenceless little Colony was very doubtful. As I was absent at the time I do not know particulars, but I am told there were some personal conferences on the subject, although no official reference appears.

Buckingham appended a short reply:

When I became aware of the intention of H.O. (Home Office) to send out Fenian Convicts to W.A. I pointed out the probable insecurity and communicated personally with Mr. Hardy (Home Secretary) the reply was that none but prisoners of no importance were to be sent and I believe this was adhered to<sup>o</sup>.

From the sequence of events that preceded this exchange, it is likely that the Colonial Office - responsible for communicating such matters to the colonies - did not learn about a Home Office decision to transport Fenians until news of it leaked to the London papers two days before the convict vessel was due to sail. On 10 October, a small paragraph in the Times announced that convicts were boarding the Hougoumont, bound for Fremantle, Western Australia, and that the shipment included '23 Fenians among whom, it was said, was Moriarty'. The Moriarty reference was misleading since rumours had obviously confused Bartholomew Moriarty, a relatively unimportant Fenian aboard, with Captain Mortimer Moriarty, a Fenian leader in the County Kerry uprising, who was not on board. However this inaccuracy escaped attention in the general excitement aroused by the news.

The next day, a Western Australian visitor in London, C.P. Measor, wrote a long letter to several London papers stating that he had inspected the Hougoumont and was highly critical of its facilities for carrying convicts. Measor's main motive in writing was to publicise the anti-transportation cause, but his open attack on the wisdom of Fenian transportation caused ripples at Whitehall and aroused great alarm in Western Australia when the home mail arrived there two months later. Measor wrote in part:

...We know from Manchester and other instances what the folly of Fenianism will dare, and a considerable number of turbulent spirits are among the miscreants who have now left

(6) Hampton to Buckingham, 24 December 1867, CO 18-155, PRO 1655, AJCP.

their country for their country's good;...A few months ago we might have thought the police-van mania an impossible ebullition of the lawless mind; but a scene of carnage on the ocean, and resistance there to lawful authority, is quite as much within the range of possibility where a mixture of desperate men of the worst criminal type with Irish-American rowdies who consider themselves martyrs constitutes three-fourths of the living beings cooped up in a convict ship.

It will be a mercy if the Hugoumont, (sic) reaches the Swan River without some frightful scene'.

On 15 October, the Times fuelled excitement by reporting that the Hougoumont had set sail and was proceeding down the Channel escorted by Her Majesty's screw steam gunboat, Earnest, as 'it is premised that an attempt at rescue will take place'. The paper went on to contradict its earlier report by stating that the convict transport's destination was 'New Auckland, Australia'. It is unlikely in a paper such as the Times that this alteration was a reporter's error. More probably, the paper was responding to an official or unofficial instruction to withhold factual information about the vessel's destination in the interests of security.

In the same week that the news broke, the Colonial Office received a request for an interview from William Burges, an Irish-Protestant Western Australian pastoralist who had returned from the colony on an extended home visit<sup>8</sup>. Burges requested to see either Buckingham or the Under-Secretary of State, but was received by the latter's assistant, Elliot, who listened to his complaints about Fenian transportation to Australia and responded with appropriate reassurances<sup>9</sup>. After the visit, Burges wrote to a colonial associate in Western Australia, Lionel Samson, a wealthy English-born merchant, property owner and member of the Legislative Council<sup>10</sup>. His letter had much the same tone as Measor's, and included some candid remarks he alleged Elliot and Governor Hampton had made about the wisdom of transporting Fenians to Australia:

- (7) 11 October 1867, quoted in full, Herald (Fremantle), 21 December 1867.
- (8) Burges emigrated to W.A. in 1830, settling on 8053 acres on the upper Swan. He was Residential Magistrate at Champion Bay 1860-8, and returned to Ireland 1841-4 and 1860-8, having connections at Clonmel, County Tipperary (Dictionary of Western Australians, 3 vols, - Nedlands, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 92 - hereafter, DWA).
- (9) Burges' request: 14 October 1867, CO 18-157, PRO 1657, AJCP; Elliot's comment on the interview: Hampton to Buckingham, 24 December 1867 - attached thereto, CO 18-155, PRO 1655, AJCP.
- (10) DWA, Vol. 3, p. 740.

...I have been to the Colonial Office on the subject, the Colonial Authorities here were unaware of their being sent out until the vessel had sailed, and it made a great row in the Times and other papers; even Col. Bruce (Military Commander of W.A., on a home visit), who had been on board to inspect the Guard, was unaware of it, until it appeared in the papers. The destination of the vessel was kept a secret. Mr. Elliot at the Colonial Office told me he regretted their having been sent; Governor Hampton had been asked some time back if he would have some of these Fenian or 'Political' prisoners, he refused to have them as it would only draw upon the Colony an American raid to liberate them, and he had no means to resist it. They had attempted to rescue Smith O'Brien from Van Diemen's Land and they will surely attempt to rescue those men by bombarding Fremantle, knocking down the Prison walls and letting six hundred ruffians loose to pillage and plunder the towns and commit all sorts of atrocities.

There is no attempt too daring or too vile for these Fenians. Look at their attack on the prison van at Manchester, then their plan to capture and carry off Her Majesty from Balmoral, and this day it is said that the shipping in the London docks is to be fired. When desperate men even talk of such attempts, it is time to take preventative measures. No one can tell to what an extent this Fenian movement may reach<sup>11</sup>.

When a copy of this letter reached the Colonial Office via Western Australia, Elliot vigorously denied that he had breached public service protocol during the interview with Burges:

I am much too sure of the rooted habits and principles of a whole life...to...have committed the gross impropriety of expressing - actually within the walls of a Govt. office and to a perfect stranger - disapproval of the measures of the Govt. which I am serving. I should say that I used some civil expression of regret at the alarm he may have described<sup>12</sup>.

Elliot made no mention of Hampton's alleged refusal to accept Fenian transportees, nor is there any corroboration of it in official communications. Indeed it would have been unlikely that Hampton or any other governor would have had the temerity even to question, let alone refuse, an official instruction from Whitehall. It is possible, however, that some casual or

- (11) Burges to Samson, 25 October 1867, quoted in full, Herald, 28 December 1867.
- (12) Comment on Hampton to Buckingham, 24 December 1867, loc. cit. A copy of Burges' letter was enclosed in this despatch.

private communication by Hampton on the subject, may have been made.

On 17 October, the same day that Burges spoke to Elliot, Buckingham wrote a short despatch to Hampton informing him for the first time that Fenian convicts were to be transported to the colony. As the despatch was written five days after the Hougoumont sailed, it was belated notification indeed. It seems that Buckingham reacted to the Times reports, publicity given to Measor's letter to the press on 11 October, and to Burges' visit to the Colonial Office, by way of requesting an explanation from the Home Secretary. Then, upon receipt of Home Office confirmation, he hurriedly notified Hampton, to try to allay colonial alarm likely to be roused when the home news and the Fenian convicts reached Fremantle almost simultaneously. In his haste Buckingham was unable to ascertain how many Fenians had been sent, and he was also most likely unaware that some were military offenders who should not have been transported. His notification read:

Her Majesty's Government have decided that some of the Fenian prisoners to the number of \_\_\_\_\_ should be included among the convicts.

I wish however to explain to you that the Fenians who have been selected to proceed in the Vessel consist exclusively of men of humble position and that the leaders of the party or others who were likely to prove troublesome in the colony have been carefully excluded.

As this is the last occasion on which a Convict Ship will be despatched to Western Australia, a picked Guard of Pensioners amounting to 50 men will accompany the Vessel, who will serve to maintain order among the Prisoners on board and to recruit the ranks of the Pensioner Force now stationed in the colony<sup>13</sup>.

The British Government's decision to transport two-thirds of its Fenian convicts to Australia was taken therefore, during unrecorded private conferences at a high level. It was then conveyed to subordinate Home Office officials, but did not reach the Colonial Office until Buckingham belatedly requested confirmation. The reasons behind the decision can only be speculative, but it was most likely prompted by a recognition of the

(13) Buckingham to Hampton, 17 October 1867, COD 70, WAA 41.

advantages gained from transporting younger Irish rebels, many of whom were likely to return to their cause when released, well clear of Britain. The precedent set by 1798 rebels sent to New South Wales had shown the likelihood that such transportees would elect to settle permanently in their land of exile. Thus, in the situation confronting British authorities in 1867, when Fenianism seemed to have a phoenix-like capacity to recover its strength after setbacks, transportation would have been considered a logical and desirable deterrent.

If the decision to transport Fenians reflected some degree of haste, so too did the manner of selection. Buckingham was assured by the Home Office that only less troublesome Fenian rank and file were to be transported, and duly passed the same information on to Governor Hampton, but in fact this policy was only loosely adhered to. It was true that the leading Fenian convicts, including Thomas Luby, John O'Leary, Charles Kickham and O'Donovan Rossa, and all the captive Irish-American officers were retained in Britain, but quite a few men close in rank to them were among those transported.

John Flood, for example, had been principally responsible for the smuggling of arms across the Irish Sea to Ireland. A Dublin ship-owner's son educated at the exclusive Catholic School, Clongowes Wood College, Flood studied law under the tutelage of Isaac Butt before joining the Fenians in the early 1860's. His intimate knowledge of his father's shipping trade, combined with certain navigational skills enabled him to devise a system of smuggling American rifles into Ireland. The work soon brought him into close contact with the Fenian commander in Ireland, James Stephens, and with Colonel Thomas Kelly, an Irish-American in control of Fenian military tactics. It also involved one or two Fenian missions to America. Joseph Denieffe remembered that Flood 'always looked like a sailor or petty officer who had just stepped off one of Her Majesty's ironclads. He was invariably in great spirits and the picture of health, and was a man of resources, courage and aptitude for any emergency that might arise<sup>14</sup>'. And John Denvir observed him to be: 'a fine handsome man, tall and strong,

(14) Joseph Denieffe, Personal Narrative of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, New York, 1906, pp. 127-8.

wearing a full and flowing tawny-coloured beard...who you could imagine would fill with grace and dignity the post of Irish ambassador to some friendly power'.<sup>15</sup> In 1865 Flood helped smuggle Stephens to France after the Fenian commander managed a remarkable escape from Richmond Prison. Accompanied by Kelly he took Stephens by collier to Scotland and thence via London to Calais, throwing authorities at Dover off guard with his perfect mimicry of an upper class English accent. On his return to London he became head of the IRB in England and Ireland, and in this capacity jointly organized with an Irish-American advisor, Captain John McAfferty, an ill-fated attempt to seize British arms stored in Chester Castle, near Liverpool. Attempting to escape to Ireland after the raid aborted, he was arrested at Dublin harbour on 23 February 1867. He was tried in April, found guilty of treason-felony and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment<sup>16</sup>.

Another senior Fenian on board the Hougoumont was Cornelius O'Mahony, a former national schoolteacher from Macroom, County Cork, who had served as Stephens' secretary, had helped organize The Irish People paper and was arrested during the police round-up of leaders associated with its production<sup>17</sup>. On board too was Hugh Brophy, a Dublin building contractor, who became 'centre' of the most important Dublin 'circle', comprising 1600 men. Brophy had risen to become Stephens' right hand man, and was arrested with him during a police raid on Fairfield House where Stephens was in hiding<sup>18</sup>. Other men of some note included: Thomas Duggan, a national schoolteacher from Ballincollig, County Cork, and John Kenealy, a clerk from the same county - two senior Cork 'centres' who were responsible for the

- (15) John Denvir, The Life Story of an Old Rebel, Dublin, 1910, p. 82.  
 (16) Unless otherwise noted, from Gympie Miner, 23 August 1909 (an obituary) and Gaelic American, 23 October 1909 (John Devoy's memories of Flood).  
 (17) Freeman's Journal (Sydney), 24 March 1866; Advocate, 15 March 1879 (O'Mahony obituary); Walter McGrath, 'The teacher who became a Fenian', The O'Mahony Journal, Cork, Vol. 9, 1979, pp. 32-4.  
 (18) Gaelic American (New York), 23 January 1904; Advocate, 21 June 1919 (obituary by M.P. Jageurs). See also John Rutherford, The Secret History of the Fenian Conspiracy, 2 vols., London, 1877, Vol. 1, pp. 94, 114, Vol. 2, pp. 147, 204, 306; and John O'Leary, Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism, 2 vols., London 1896, Vol. 1, p. 231.

recruitment of several thousand Fenians<sup>19</sup>; Cornelius Keane, a lawyer's clerk from Skibbereen, who was one of the first to assist O'Donovan Rossa and became 'centre' of Skibbereen<sup>20</sup>; and Michael Moore, a Dublin blacksmith who was probably the most productive Fenian pike manufacturer - at a rate of 120 per week<sup>21</sup>. As the records of all these men were well documented at their trials, the British authorities could more accurately have informed Governor Hampton that at least some of the Fenian transportees were considerably more important than mere rank and file.

That all potentially troublesome Fenians were excluded was also doubtful advice, since among the transportees were several men quite capable of extreme violence. Perhaps the best example is Michael Cody (tried as James Dunn, alias Michael Byrne), a sharp-witted Dublin boilermaker who was appointed 'centre' of Callan, County Kilkenny. Cody was one of a handful of deeply committed Fenians including John Devoy<sup>22</sup> who concealed themselves in a loft in Dorset Street, Dublin, during the winter of 1865-66. Devoy recalls that they all had revolvers and talked of killing the informers, Nagle and Warner. He describes Cody as a 'low-sized (he was 5' 6"<sup>23</sup>) but extremely powerful man of great determination..(who) had a weakness for punching policemen', though he himself retained a face that was 'a model for an artist'. Devoy adds that Cody was a close friend of Patrick Kearney, a Dublin 'centre' also renowned for strength and determination. Cody became president of a shadowy Fenian intelligence organization known to the movement as the 'Committee of Safety' but described at his trial as an 'assassination circle'. He was arrested on 8 April 1866 after the police were informed that he was expected at a particular meeting to recruit some soldiers as Fenians. Two detectives, assisted by Colonel Fielding and a

- (19) Duggan: Rutherford, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 76, 145; Walter McGrath, 'Tom Duggan', Evening Echo (Cork), 4 July 1979. Kenealy: Gaelic American, 3 June 1905; Rutherford, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 136-9, Vol. 2, pp. 128, 132-3; O'Leary, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 240-3.
- (20) Obituary, Skibbereen Eagle, 28 May 1892, reprinted in United Irishman (Dublin) 11 June 1892; Freeman's Journal, 18 February, 22, 29 March 1865, 31 March 1866.
- (21) Nation (Dublin) n.d., reprinted in Freeman's Journal, 24 February 1866. see also Freeman's Journal, 30 December 1865; Gaelic American, 6 January 1906.
- (22) Devoy had risen to Officer-in-Charge of Fenian recruitment among Irish soldiers in the British army (Pamphlet, The Rescue of the Military Fenians from Australia, with a memoir of John Devoy, Dublin, 1929; Devoy's reminiscences, Gaelic American, 21 April 1906).
- (23) 'Personal and other description of 280 convicts received per ship Hougoumont on 10 January 1868', CN9721, Convict Dept. Records, WAA 128.

party of Coldstream Guards, took the meeting by surprise, grabbed two bowie knives from a table and disarmed Cody of two revolvers in his belt. At the police station Cody shouted that he would have revenge on the 'loyal man' who informed on them; and two days later this informant, Private Maher, was shot at in a hotel. Cody's friend, Kearney, was later apprehended for the shooting after a struggle in which he attempted to draw a revolver on the detective arresting him. By some means Cody escaped custody. On 4 May he was recognized by a policeman who seized him, but he drew a seven-chambered revolver and broke loose assisted by some onlookers who interfered in the arrest. As he fled, he threw away a dagger before being seized by another policeman whom he tried to shoot. He was finally overwhelmed with several blows to the head, one of which broke his nose, and then conveyed to hospital - it is unlikely that Devoy ever saw the effects on Cody's 'model' face, since Devoy was then in prison and Cody was soon transported to Australia where he spent the remainder of his life. The police described Cody as a 'tall powerfully built man'. On his person they found thirty-seven cartridges and a list, later proven to be in his handwriting, of the names and addresses of the judges presiding at the Special Commission into Fenianism, and also of the jurors who had tried Thomas Burke and Patrick Doran - two leaders of the March uprising found guilty of high treason and condemned to be hung, drawn and quartered (sentences later commuted to life imprisonment). Cody was sentenced to twenty years. Four months later he was selected for transportation, presumably fulfilling the Home Office requirement that he would not prove troublesome in Western Australia. With a fellow 'Safety Committee' member, Thomas Baines, Cody was duly transported and, as we shall see in another chapter, became in 1877 the head of the Fenian order in Australia. Clearly Cody had a rebellious propensity, and might have been better screened by the authorities<sup>24</sup>.

Some others who were also likely to prove more desperate than had been suggested by the Home Office were seventeen soldiers from the British army in Ireland. As indicated above, these so-called 'military offenders' should not have been transported at all, had Colonial Office policy been adhered to. Although none were Fenian leaders, most had been severely punished; half having been sentenced to life imprisonment. All but two were convicted between March and August 1866, following exposure by informants who alerted

(24) Irish Times n.d., reprinted in Freeman's Journal, 3 August 1867; Perth Gazette, 19 July 1867; Advocate, 17 July 1869; Devoy's memoirs, Gaelic American, 6, 21 January 1905; Rutherford, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 157; Leon O'Broin, Fenian Fever, London, 1971, pp. 174, 179. Cody's 1877 appointment: W. O'Brien and D. Ryan (ed.), Devoy's Post Bag, Dublin, 1948, Vol. 1, p. 230.

the authorities to the fact that Fenianism had established a considerable base among British regiments in Ireland and England<sup>25</sup>. Six of the seventeen had been 5th Dragoon Guards: Thomas Delaney, William Foley, Martin Hogan, Patrick Keating, John Lynch and James Wilson (real name McNally). Three were from the 61st Foot: Robert Cranston, Michael Harrington and James McCoy. From the 24th Foot, were John Donoghue and Thomas Hasset; and from the Royal Horse Artillery, John Foley and Patrick Killeen. The others were Thomas Darragh, 2nd Queens; John Shine, 60th Rifles; James Kielley, 53rd Foot; and John O'Reilly, 10th Hussars<sup>26</sup>.

All seventeen military offenders had been convicted either of mutinous conduct or of failure to report knowledge of a mutiny to a commanding officer<sup>27</sup>. Seven had committed the further sin of deserting to avoid apprehension. To identify this group and to remind them forever of their crime, a capital letter 'D', two inches in height, was engraved on the left side of their chests. The instrument used was an awl, and the scar was made indelible with Indian ink<sup>28</sup>. All the deserters bar one who received fifteen years, received death sentences - later commuted to life imprisonment. The other military offenders received sentences ranging from five years to life. When the Hougoumont was boarded, all the military Fenians were confined with ordinary convicts, whereas civilian Fenians were allotted separate quarters of their own. It would seem that this arrangement was at least a partial recognition that the civilian Fenians, all of whom were convicted either of treason-felony or high treason<sup>29</sup>, were political prisoners rather than criminals - a concession that sympathetic Irish nationalists had earlier failed to gain official recognition of. Mutinous soldiers, on the other hand, were clearly regarded by the authorities as common criminals, and perhaps more dangerous ones in view of their training.

- (25) According to Devoy there were 15,000 Fenians in the British army in 1865, of whom 8,000 were stationed in Ireland. He claims that 1,600 of the 6,000 men in the Dublin garrison were Fenians and that 1,200 had been recruited from 3,000 soldiers at Curragh Camp (Gaelic American, 21 April 1906). Since Devoy was responsible for recruitment, his figures may well be inflated; however a Fenian presence in the British army was nevertheless substantial.
- (26) R16, Convict Dept. Records, WAA 1156.
- (27) *ibid.*
- (28) 'Personal and other description'...etc., *loc. cit.*; O'Reilly quoted, James Jeffrey Roche, Life of John Boyle O'Reilly, New York, 1891, p. 329.
- (29) R16, Convict Dept. Records, WAA 1156.

Strange as it may seem, length of sentence was ignored by the Home Office as a criterion for the selection of Fenian transportees. Thus it happened that Fenian leaders and Irish-American officers retained in British gaols on grounds that they were more important rebels, were released years earlier than some military offenders condemned to life imprisonment and transported to Australia. What the Home Office overlooked or chose to ignore, was the likelihood that a youthful soldier Fenian facing a long term or life sentence might take great risks to regain his liberty. Such a prisoner was thus potentially a more dangerous, less manageable convict than mature-aged leaders such as Thomas Luby, John O'Leary or the mild-mannered Charles Kickham. A case in point is that of John Boyle O'Reilly, a youthful soldier-Fenian sentenced to twenty years, who became the first Fenian convict to escape from Western Australia.

Born in 1844 at Drogheda Castle, County Meath, where his father was a national schoolteacher, O'Reilly was apprenticed at eleven years of age to the Drogheda Argus, to help support his family when his elder brother, an apprentice with the same paper, became too ill to work. At fifteen he was a reporter with the Preston Guardian, in Lancashire. He was already involved in Fenianism when he returned to Ireland in 1863 to enlist in the 10th Hussars. A handsome gregarious young man, a fine athlete, raconteur, and an exponent of 'treasonable' songs and ballads, O'Reilly was a popular figure among the Irish in his regiment, eighty of whom he enlisted as Fenians. During the police sweep of February 1866 he was arrested, court-martialled, convicted of mutinous conduct and ordered to be shot - the sentence later commuted to life imprisonment and then to twenty years servitude. He had just turned twenty-two. After a short detention at Mountjoy, he was transported to Millbank to serve six months solitary confinement, and progressed from there to Chatham. At the latter prison, an unsuccessful escape bid earned him one month solitary on bread and water, followed by transfer to Portsmouth, where he again attempted to escape and underwent the same punishment. He was then transferred to Dartmoor, a fearsome prison for intractables, situated on the bleak Devonshire moors. Here he made a further escape bid, and received twenty-eight days in the punishment cells. By now, O'Reilly - like O'Donovan Rossa<sup>30</sup> - was embarked on a mental and physical downward spiral in which increasingly severe punishment merely kept pace with his defiant desperation. Not surprisingly he welcomed the news that he was to

(30) As Rossa put it: 'I felt that even against prison government I could be a rebel too' (Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, My Years in English Jails, (New York 1874), Tralee, 1967, pp. 107-8); however his repeated defiance only invited heavy punishment (ibid., passim).

be transported, since it offered new horizons of experience and opportunities for escape. On the voyage out, he devised a plan to capture the ship and was only dissuaded from attempting it by Fenian comrades who did not wish to jeopardise their short sentences and by others who warned about the hazards of trying to control 218 criminal convicts on board. In February 1869, after twelve months convict servitude, he made a fourth and ultimately successful escape bid on an American whaler - examined in another chapter. As O'Reilly repeatedly demonstrated before and after transportation, he was an incorrigible escapee who was prepared to die rather than serve out his sentence<sup>31</sup>.

Some two dozen of the Fenian convict transportees were therefore more senior in the movement or more inclined to 'troublesome' conduct than Whitehall revealed to Governor Hampton. But in view of the circumstances in which Fenian transportation was decided upon, it is more likely that this omission was accidental than deliberate. It would seem rather, that certain members of the British Government or Home Office became aware that the last convict ship would shortly depart for Australia. An opportunity to include most of the Fenian prisoners in the Hougoumont's convict cargo was recognized and seized in haste, without undue concern about possible repercussions from Western Australia.

The sixty-two Fenian convicts came from over half the counties of Ireland. Nineteen were from 'rebel' Cork, nine from Limerick, four from Kerry, three from Tipperary and two each from Clare and Waterford. South-west Ireland thus provided the roots of about two-thirds of the total. A further twelve from Dublin, four from Louth, two from Laois and one each from Wicklow and Meath, provided a second concentration from the east. The north-west was represented only by Thomas Baines, a Sligo man who had been active with Michael Cody in Dublin. While from the north, came Robert Cranston, of Tyrone, and James Wilson (or McNally), of Newry, County Down. Sixty were Catholics. The two Protestants were Sergeant Thomas Darragh, a Wicklow farmer's son who had served fourteen years in the 2nd Queen's Regiment, and John Edward Kelly, an Irish-American, originally from Kinsale, County Kerry<sup>32</sup>.

(31) 'John Boyle O'Reilly' (an obituary by fellow Australian transportee, Denis Cashman), Boston Herald, 24 August 1890; Roche, op. cit., pp. 1-83. Roche's study is a classic biography. He had worked for O'Reilly with the Boston Pilot and published the study in 1891, a year after O'Reilly's death.

(32) R16, Convict Dept. Records, WAA 1156.



JAMES KEILLEY

TWO FENIAN TRANSPORTEES



JOHN EDWARD KELLY

In their occupations, the former trades of the soldiers included, about two-thirds were lower-middle and working-class townsmen, and the remainder countrymen. Within this parameter the range of jobs was extremely wide: eleven labourers, eight clerks, seven farmers, three bakers, three shoemakers, four carpenters, two builders, two masons, two drapers, two coachmen, two painters, a butcher, plasterer, tailor, cooper, boilermaker, fitter, printer, poplin weaver, spinning master, shipsmith, gardener, horse-trainer, reporter, and one who could give no trade apart from soldiering. Their ages ranged from eighteen to forty-five; about two-thirds being in their twenties. Fifty-two were single and ten were married; eight of the latter having between one and four children, and two had no children. It was recorded when they landed at Fremantle that fifty-two could read and write, seven could manage one of these skills, and three were illiterate - in English. Since two of the latter, David Joyce and Thomas Cullinane, were Gaelic speakers<sup>33</sup>, the Fenian level of literacy was comparatively high. About 84% were literate and 16% semi-literate; figures that compared favourably, for example, with the 218 non-Fenians on the Hougoumont: 78% and 22% respectively. On this basis, one could generally say that the typical Fenian transportee was a literate, unmarried, Catholic townsman, aged about twenty-seven<sup>34</sup>.

All had been arrested, tried and sentenced between September 1865 and August 1867 for a variety of roles in a concerted but ill-fated attempt forcibly to establish Ireland as an independent republic. Immediately after the first convictions, sympathetic countrymen began to agitate for official recognition of Fenians as political prisoners, hoping that certain privileges accorded to Daniel O'Connell and the Young Irelanders might be granted, the most important being physical separation from ordinary criminals<sup>35</sup>. But

- (33) Walter McGrath 'Convict Ship Newspaper, "The Wild Goose", re-discovered', Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, Vol. 74, 1969, p. 21.
- (34) Drawn from: 'Personal and other description'...etc., loc. cit.; R16, Convict Dept. Records, WAA, 1156; and the writer's survey of non-Fenian convicts on board the Hougoumont - from DWA, Vol. 2, passim.
- (35) It had been argued for example that O'Connell, during twelve months imprisonment at Richmond Bridewell, Dublin, had not been subjected to cropped hair, prison dress or standard rules in respect of visitors, and that he had access to the prison gardens to receive guests in a summer house. In regard to the 1848 rebels exiled to Van Diemen's Land, it was claimed that these men could not be distinguished in dress or appearance from a swarm of visitors who farewelled them in a prison room with wine, dessert, stories, jokes and songs (J. Pope Hennessy, paper given at a social science congress, at Manchester in November 1866, reprinted in Freeman's Journal, 19 January 1867).

these efforts were unsuccessful and all Fenians were treated at first as ordinary criminals. Shortly after sentence, beards were cut off, hair cropped, clothes exchanged for prison dress, and photos taken as the prisoners held before them black slates bearing their names and numbers inscribed in chalk. Most served about three months in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, where they were lodged in separate cells and worked during the day, in solitude, picking coir. They were then shipped to England to serve a further six months solitary confinement at Pentonville or Millbank, and progressed from there to Chatham, Portsmouth, Portland, or for intractables, Dartmoor, where limited conversation was permitted during gang labour and one letter allowed each month. Conditions were undoubtedly harsh, stretching sanity to the limit under the stress of solitary confinement, and physical health to the point of collapse under heavy labour. On the whole though, most Fenians were not singled out for worse treatment than other convicts unless, like O'Donovan Rossa, they attracted attention with acts of defiance. Substantial weight loss was common: Cornelius Keane lost thirty pounds during quarry work, Rossa observed<sup>36</sup>. Seventeen Fenian prisoners died by April 1869, though some may have been weakened by wounds sustained in the 1867 rising<sup>37</sup>.

Of the Fenians selected for transportation in September 1867, eleven were serving life sentences; one a twenty year term; twenty-six were serving sentences of seven to fifteen years; and twenty-two were serving five year terms. As the usual minimum sentence to qualify for transportation was seven years<sup>38</sup>, the inclusion of the five year men constituted another irregularity on the part of the Home Office. Moreover, the fact that none of the Hougoumont's ordinary convicts had sentences of less than seven years<sup>39</sup>, makes it clear that only the Fenians were treated exceptionally in this regard. The longest serving prisoner, just prior to transportation, was Cornelius O'Mahony, who had been arrested three years earlier during the police raid on the Irish People office. At the other extreme was John Goulding, a young carpenter from Cahirciveen, who took part in the Kerry rising of February 1867

(36) Rossa, op. cit., p. 96.

(37) Drawn from Hennessy, loc. cit.; Rossa, op. cit., pp. 54-174; Roche, op. cit., pp. 48-64.

(38) L.L. Robson, The Convict Settlers of Australia, Melbourne, 1965, pp. 8, 143-4.

(39) This writer's survey, DWA, Vol. 2, passim. Martin C. Carroll makes the same point ('Behind the Lighthouse: A Study of the Australian sojourn of John Boyle O'Reilly, 1844-1890', Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Iowa, 1954, pp. 108, 113).

but was not convicted until August<sup>40</sup>. Goulding's pregnant mother walked forty miles from Kells to Tralee to attend his trial, and on the same night that she returned by foot, was delivered of her child<sup>41</sup>. Sentenced to five years, Goulding was selected for transportation a month later. After receiving a free pardon in 1869, he was to spend the rest of his life in Australia<sup>42</sup>.

Individual Fenian reactions to transportation were largely determined by their personal circumstances. Age, length of sentence, attachment to family and kin, attitude to confinement - whether rebellious or settled - all contributed to the nature of a prisoner's response. Two quite different attitudes, on the parts of John O'Reilly and Denis Cashman, serve to illustrate. O'Reilly, young and single, serving a twenty year sentence in depressing confinement at Dartmoor, received the news with relief and joy:

A rumour went through the prison, - in the weirdly mysterious way in which rumours do go through a prison. However it came is a mystery, But there did come a rumour to the prison, even to the dark cells, of a ship sailing for Australia!

Australia! the ship! Another chance for the old dreams and the wild thought was wilder than ever, and not half so stealthy. Down the corridor came the footsteps again. The keys rattled, doors opened and in five minutes we had double irons on our arms, and were chained together by a bright strong chain. We did not look into each other's faces; we had learned<sup>43</sup> to know what the others were thinking without speaking<sup>43</sup>.

By contrast, Denis Cashman was twenty-five, married with three infant boys, and had nearly completed his preliminary six months solitary confinement at Millbank as part of a seven year sentence for treason-felony<sup>44</sup>. A clerk who became 'centre' of the Waterford city 'circle', County Waterford, he had been convicted at Dublin on 18 February 1867<sup>45</sup>. Unlike O'Reilly, who had made several unsuccessful escape bids, Cashman was thus far a subdued prisoner. Three days after the Hougoumont sailed, he began a diary retrospective to the day he heard he was to be transported. He recalls receiving the news with

(40) R16, CN 9750, Convict Dept. Records, WAA 1156.

(41) Walter McGrath, 'Kerry Patriot Who Lies in Faraway N.S.W.', Evening Echo (Cork), 4 August 1970.

(42) See Ch. 8, pp. 227-8, 233; Ch. 11, pp. 338-9.

(43) Quoted Roche, op. cit., p. 65.

(44) R16, CN 9685, Convict Dept. Records, WAA 1156; Herald (Boston), 24 August 1890.

(45) *ibid.*

bitter resentment:

On Tuesday 24th September, whilst very busily employed at the (to me) very disagreeable occupation of picking 'coir', I heard steps approaching along the corridor and halt opposite my cell door; instantly, the iron gate, and the massive wooden door of my cell were flung open and the order 'stand at ye gate' given. I, glad of anything that would even for a moment thwart the monotony, or break the wretched grave-like silence of the place, immediately came to 'attention' at the door; and found my visitors to be Head Warder 'Handy' and some warders of lower grade.

Then for the first time I learned that I was to be sent to Australia. I received the news with a very bad grace and protested in the strongest terms against being sent; but recollecting that I had no voice in the matter, and that go I should, I strove to make the most of it, and drown the bitter feelings which filled my breast, by fiercely working at, or rather teasing, the tough coir - I really felt wretched - the thought of being sent 14,000 miles away from my dear wife and children - from all that I loved on earth; with the fact staring me in the face, that I should not again for years see them caused me to feel an acute agony that I never before felt; and plunged my whole being into the deepest melancholy.

Imagination used to conjure up before me the tearful eyes and sorrowful face of my dear Kate - gazing at our dear children, who want her to tell them 'why pa does not come home' - whilst she, picturing to herself the terrible distances which divides us, in her bitter sorrow kisses back the answer she would not (even to herself) dare to speak, fearing to look the dread reality in the face. In this most trying hour of my life, when all other resources failed, I prostrated myself before the Maker, and in prayer, found a soothing relief...<sup>46</sup>.

- (46) Denis B. Cashman, unpub. diary, ML MS 1636. This typed MS is a copy of the original, the present location of which is uncertain. After release in 1869, Cashman apparently took the diary with him to America where he was later employed by O'Reilly on the Boston Pilot. A copy of the diary eventually came into the possession of Rev. Felix Duffey, editor of Ave Maria magazine, Indiana, who gave Martin Carroll access to it during his research on O'Reilly. Carroll, a Fulbright scholar, left a copy at Battye Library, Perth, and another was obtained by the Mitchell Library, Sydney. The latter lacks ten pages constituting an appendix to the diary, in which Cashman copied poems written by himself, O'Reilly and John Flood for 'The Wild Goose', a weekly journal they produced on board the Hougoumont.

So who were the Fenian convicts, from a broader perspective? Socially they tended to be a class below the Young Irelanders who rebelled in a minor rising in 1848 - the main skirmish of which was unkindly, but not inaccurately, described as 'the battle of Widow Ryan's cabbage plot'<sup>47</sup>. Essentially the Young Irelanders were middle-class, literary revolutionaries, driven to minor violence somewhat haphazardly. And compared with the United Irishmen of 1798, the Fenians lacked an aristocratic and middle-class leadership, Protestant and Catholic, provided by such men as Lord <sup>Edward</sup> Fitzgerald, Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet; sympathy and support from radical Protestant as well as Catholic clergy; and a broad agrarian base of poverty-stricken Catholics worked into a frenzy by atrocities for and against them. When the Fenians launched their movement in the 1860's, economic conditions in Ireland were better than they had been for decades<sup>48</sup>. The timing of the movement was dictated more by attempts to take advantage of Irish-American civil war expertise and financial support, than by social discontent in Ireland. This factor, combined with the failures experienced by nationalists in 1798 and 1848, restricted enlistment almost exclusively to lower-middle and working class recruits from predominantly Catholic counties that had a long history of resistance to English rule. But if contrasts are apparent between Fenians and their revolutionary predecessors, equally apparent is the continuity of a principal objective all shared. As the Fenian poet and journalist John Boyle O'Reilly put it:

The principle underlying the Irish movement is the unquestionable one of a nation's right to its own country and laws, to establish its own resources, to tell its own story to the world<sup>49</sup> in its own way, and not in the way of another country;

(47) Quoted Oliver MacDonagh, Ireland, New Jersey, 1968, p. 48.

(48) 'It was a time of great political activity among the young men, especially those whose fathers had been active in 1848. Times were good and the country was recovering from the effects of the great famine and from the failure of 1848' (John Devoy, Gaelic American, 23 January 1904).

(49) 'The Irish National Cause', an address given by O'Reilly at Boston on 17 March 1890, reprinted in Roche, op. cit. p. 747.

Implacably opposed to notions of Irish self-determination were the Fenians' most committed opponents, Anglo-Irish Protestants, who realised only too well that their social, political, religious and economic ascendancy in Ireland depended entirely on British rule. When some emigrated to Australia, a good many of them continued to hold a powerful antipathy towards radical Irish nationalism of any ilk. Not surprisingly then, it was these colonists particularly, and other British-minded loyalists influenced by them, who were most alarmed when it became known that Fenian convicts were en route to Fremantle.

The news broke when home mail bearing the Times reports and C.P. Measor's alarmist remarks reached Perth in December 1867, about three weeks ahead of the Fenian transportees. At about the same time Lionel Samson MLC received William Burges' letter written in the same fearful tone. Protest meetings were held, and a deputation led by two wealthy English-born pastoralists, William Brockman and Samuel Phillips, confronted Governor Hampton on 18 December, brandishing Burges' letter before him<sup>50</sup>. On the same day, Hampton was handed an unsolicited opinion from the Crown Solicitor, a Fremantle property owner named George Leake, who contended that the colony's security faced a dire threat from Fenianism. Leake drew Hampton's attention to reports that a Fenian vessel (Erin's Hope) had been cruising off the west coast of Ireland. He contended that if the British Government had felt it necessary to provide the Hougoumont with an armed escort down the English Channel, then there was every possibility that a rescue attempt might be made at the isolated and unprotected port of Fremantle: 'for a vessel merely armed with one long 18 pounder might with shells lay Fremantle in ashes in a few hours'<sup>51</sup>. Leake supported Burges' suggestion that Hampton request protection from a British gunboat. Since the Fenians had shown a capacity to invade Canada, he argued, they were equally capable of invading Western Australia<sup>52</sup>.

Hampton advised the deputation that he thought some of the statements

- (50) Perth Gazette, 20 December 1867; Hampton to Buckingham, 24 December 1867, loc. cit. Brockman was an unofficial MLC (DWA, Vol. 3 p. 75) and Phillips an actual MLC 1857-72, who owned a 12,513 acre property at Toodyay (DWA, Vol. 1, p. 267; Vol. 3, p. 676).
- (51) Leake to Hampton, 18 December 1867, encl., Hampton to Buckingham, 24 December 1867, loc. cit.
- (52) *ibid.*

in Burges' letter were greatly exaggerated, and that in any case it was 'most undesirable to excite the public mind' over the Fenians<sup>53</sup>. He conveyed Buckingham's assurance that only lesser Fenians unlikely to prove troublesome had been transported, but he conceded that the colony was at risk should a Fenian vessel enter Fremantle harbour to attempt a rescue. If necessary, he assured them, he would request that a warship be sent from the Admiralty's Australian naval station at Sydney. The next day, Hampton forwarded a formal reprimand to Crown Solicitor Leake, advising him that the Fenian matter was fully under control, and cautioning him: 'it is no part of your duty to comment on the proceedings of the Imperial Government, or to proffer advice to the Government of which you are a servant unless called upon to do so',<sup>54</sup>.

Despite Hampton's assurances, concern felt by conservative middle-class colonists continued to mount over the next few days. The Perth Gazette, a paper that most reflected their interests, announced on 20 December that thirty-eight Fenians were aboard the Hougoumont: 'a band of desperate men...about to be landed in this colony...(whose) party do not hesitate at taking the most desperate measures for liberating their captive friends',<sup>55</sup>. Nor was there much comfort from a report in the Fremantle Herald about 'race hatred' being stirred in Britain and Ireland by the impending Manchester executions and threatened reprisals<sup>56</sup>; though this more liberal paper, did express its hope that the Fenian transportees might recognize the colony was to be their future home, and thus reconcile themselves to their fate in expectation of eventually resuming a position in free society<sup>57</sup>. A far less sanguine opinion was privately expressed by Captain Charles Manning, a leading land-holder, merchant and commander of the Fremantle company of the Western Australian Volunteers<sup>58</sup>. Manning penned a 'Strictly Private and Confidential Letter to be shown to no other person than to His Ex. the Gov.', which he forwarded on 21 December to Major Robert Crampton, the colony's commanding military officer, who duly passed it on to Governor Hampton. Manning confided that he had 'a considerable interest at stake, in the Colony, of my own and of others whose powers of attorney I hold.' He added that he was the consignee of the Hougoumont, and had been informed by

(53) Hampton to Buckingham, 24 December 1867, loc. cit.

(54) Colonial Secretary to Leake, encl., ibid.

(55) 20 December 1867.

(56) 21 December 1867.

(57) ibid.

(58) DWA, Vol. 3, p. 557.

his London brokers that 'Fenian privateers were on the look out for her'. His main concern, however, was the threat of a local rebellion involving not only convicts but, far more dangerously, a Fenian element in the free community, including some of his own troops:

...For some months past I have had hints given me of a probable rising among some of the Bond people of Fremantle and the inmates of the C. (Convict) Establishment, their holding possession of the town for a few hours, and seizing vessels in harbour, carrying off what booty they could secure and such women as they might in their raid take a fancy to.

What appeared in yesterday's 'Perth Gazette' and in today's 'Herald' confirms this...

Now, Sir, perhaps no one in this Colony knows better than I do the daring audacity - disregard of life (own or of others) of American ruffians. I had experience of them previous to my leaving Peru<sup>59</sup> and I know them to be capable of anything. Two or three of them as leaders could, before the Hougoumont discharged her surplus stores, have full possession of her, and sail away with such of our wives and daughters they might please to select and three or four hundred Convicts that assisted them in their enterprise.

Under these circumstances, knowing as I do that there is fenianism in Fremantle believing it to exist among the Prisoners - some caution is requisite in the re-issue of arms to the Corps which I am <sup>60</sup> trusted with. I cannot depend upon every one of the numbers<sup>60</sup>.

Manning's alarm at the prospect of an Irish uprising reminiscent of the 1804 rising in New South Wales, appears to have stirred Hampton into action. On 23 December he despatched to Commodore Rowley Lambert, Commander of the Australian naval station at Sydney, a request that he send a warship to Fremantle, enclosing copies of the letters from Burges, Leake and Manning as evidence of colonial concern<sup>61</sup>. Hampton added that he did not entirely concur with their alarm, but as Fremantle 'might without any difficulty be destroyed by a Fenian privateer with even only one heavy gun', he thought it a wise policy to provide interim protection until he had received a decision from the Home Government on what measures should be taken for the

(59) Born 1807, the son of a London Merchant, Manning (a Protestant) arrived in W.A. in 1854 from Peru, to manage a branch of the family business, the headquarters of which was in London under his brother, Henry (DWA, Vol. 3, p. 557).

(60) Manning to Crampton, 2 December 1867, Governor's Corres. 1865-70, WRA 136.

(61) Hampton to Buckingham, 24 December 1867, loc. cit.

colony's security. Hampton then despatched to Buckingham a full report of the Fenian scare and the steps he had taken to contain it. As to what might be attempted within or without the colony by Fenian sympathisers, he advised Buckingham that he had no reliable indications to date, but that he was 'quietly making such arrangements as appear to be necessary regarding fire arms and ammunition and keeping suspected persons under unobtrusive observation'. Whether any further precautions should be taken, he concluded, was a matter for the Home Government to decide, bearing in mind that the colony comprised 'a community where the Irish element largely prevails, and where about three fifths of the military at my disposal are Irishmen'<sup>62</sup>.

It should be noted that Hampton's increased concern about a possible Fenian threat, particularly in regard to allegations of Irish 'disloyalty' in the military, was obviously influenced at least partly by Captain Manning's belief that a proportion of Irish rank and file in the Pensioner Guards and Volunteers were potential rebels. Manning, in turn, was a subordinate of Colonel John Bruce, the colonial military commander who inspected the Hougoumont in company with William Burges, while the vessel was being made ready to depart from England. Bruce was an Anglo-Irish Protestant from Athlone, County Westmeath, who had arrived in Western Australia in 1850 as a staff officer of the Pensioner Guards<sup>63</sup>. Burges, a wealthy colonial landowner, was also an Anglo-Irish Protestant, with family connections at Clonmel, County Tipperary, whom he visited during lengthy trips back to Ireland in 1841-1844 and 1860-1868<sup>64</sup>. As we have seen, it was Burges' alarmist communication with the Western Australian merchant, Lionel Samson, that originated much of the initial fuss about a Fenian threat, and Manning's added pressure on Governor Hampton that helped sustain it. What is evident then, is a chain of direct links between the anti-nationalist interests of Anglo-Protestant gentry in Ireland, and the anti-Irish fears and suspicions of emigrant Protestant gentry, English and Irish, in Australia. Part of the 'cultural luggage' of some Protestant emigrants in Australia, particularly men of large property or merchant interests, was thus a long-standing commitment to oppose radical Irish nationalism whenever and wherever it

(62) *ibid.*

(63) DWA, VOL. 3, p. 84.

(64) *ibid.*, p. 92.

appeared; to maintain their social ascendancy and wealth at 'home' and in Australia.

The immediacy of responses from Whitehall and Sydney to Hampton's appeal for protection, indicates how seriously the Fenian threat was received. Buckingham declined Hampton's request to send a British warship but secured instead War Office approval for two companies of the 14th Regiment to be detached from Tasmania without delay<sup>65</sup>. From Sydney, Commodore Lambert assured Hampton that he would have acted sooner had he been kept informed by the Home Government, but as it was he had ordered H.M.S. Brisk - a corvette armed with sixteen broadside guns, carrying fourteen officers and 175 men - to depart as quickly as possible<sup>66</sup>.

Neither measure was of much solace to fearful colonists in Western Australia awaiting the imminent arrival of the Hougoumont. Despite all haste, the Brisk did not reach Fremantle until 2 February, almost a month behind the Fenian convicts, and the arrival of the 14th Regiment was even more belated. The troops finally reached Fremantle on board the Virago on 4 June, a week after orders were issued from Whitehall that unless there was good reason to retain them, they were to be sent back to Tasmania<sup>67</sup>. In the meantime, late in December, the manager of the Bank of Western Australia, Francis Lochee, confidentially informed Hampton that he had found it necessary to try to calm a number of Fremantle property-owners. He had received, further, an alarmist communication from Edward Newman, a British-born merchant, Freemason, and member of Fremantle Town Trust<sup>68</sup>. Newman had called for immediate measures to prevent Fremantle from being sacked and bombarded, and had hinted that some colonists were privately preparing to take their own action to prevent

- (65) Admiralty to Colonial Office, 5 March 1868, CO 18-155 PRO 1655, AJCP; Colonial Office to War Office, 26 February 1868, *ibid.*; Buckingham to Hampton, 26 February 1868, COD 72, WAA 41.
- (66) Lambert to Hampton, 17 January 1868, Governor's Corres. 1865-70, WAA 136; Perth Gazette, 7 February 1868; Fremantle Herald, 8 February 1868.
- (67) H.M. Bingham (Commander of Virago) to Hampton, 4 June 1868, Governor's Corres., 1865-70, WAA 136; Hampton to Buckingham, 8 June 1868, CO 18-158, PRO 1658, AJCP; Buckingham to Hampton, 30 May 1868, COD 72, WAA 41; Inquirer and Commercial News (Perth), 10 June 1868.
- (68) DWA, Vol. 3, p. 630.

the Fenian convicts from landing<sup>69</sup>.

Hampton responded with a flamboyant display of courage; moving himself and family from Government House at Perth to the 'front line' at Fremantle Port. He afterwards reported to Buckingham:

I at once removed to that town with my family and establishment, publicly announcing my intention to remain there until the Fenians were disposed of; at the same time quietly endeavouring to allay the apprehension of the residents, and, without attracting their attention making every practicable arrangement which the means at my disposal would admit<sup>70</sup> of for promptly dealing with any contingency that might arise<sup>70</sup>.

There are indications that other colonists, notably Irish-Catholics, viewed with scorn and amusement the consternation displayed by respectable middle-class English or Irish-born Protestants such as Burges, Manning and Newman. A wit who wrote a regular column for the Fremantle Herald, titled 'Chips by a Sandal Wood Cutter', occasionally using the pen-name 'Barney O'Keefe', implied that Fremantle may have been partly evacuated. He ridiculed such alarm as follows:

Sir i am a Englishman at leest my father was wich is much the same, and i am proud of it, at leest if i aint i ort tu be, wich is much the samer...I ere the Fenians is jest come, hif so i'm off, i am packing up a few walyeables and shall sure clear hout. I wepe for the kuntree of mi adopshun<sup>71</sup>.

Further insights into the Irish viewpoint can be gained from the recollections of J.T. Reilly, a free immigrant who arrived in Western Australia with his parents in 1853. Reilly raised himself from printer, clerk and bookkeeper to become, by 1867, an importer and general store proprietor. Actively involved in Church and civic affairs, he was secretary of a committee for Catholic education, a founder of the Catholic orphanage, secretary of Perth Building Society, and had served on Perth City Council<sup>72</sup>. In retrospect Reilly dismissed the Fenian scare as a manifestation of Protestant-loyalist

- (69) Lochee to Hampton, 31 December 1867, Governor's Corres. 1865-70, WAA 136.  
 (70) Hampton to Buckingham, 29 January 1868, CO 18-158, PRO 1657, AJCP.  
 (71) 'Letter to the editor', 11 January 1868, Fremantle Herald, 25 January 1868.  
 (72) DWA, VOL. 3, p. 705. See also Fremantle Herald, 8 February 1868; Bruce to Granville, 4 August 1869, CO18-163, PRO 1661, AJCP.

panic mixed with anti-Irish prejudice:

...there was an immediate outburst of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic feeling that was as ridiculous as it was reprehensible. The newspapers were full of anticipated dangers and public meetings in various parts of the country succeeded in working up the timorous until recourse was had for protection to the Governor. The Governor never had any appreciation of the scare, nor did he for one moment believe that Fenians would commit any outrage whatever but by acting diplomatically he delayed public indignation, and by sending for H.M.S. Brisk instilled a feeling of security, or rather pandered to the cry of the 'loyalists'<sup>73</sup>.

As we have seen, Hampton took the Fenian threat from within and without the colony rather more seriously than Reilly knew, but he gave no indication of this when Reilly and the Catholic Chaplain of Perth prison, Father Matthew Gibney<sup>74</sup>, approached him a few days before the Hougoumont arrived. The two men assured Hampton that in their view there was no cause for alarm, and they suggested that the Fenian transportees would give no trouble if treated as ordinary convicts, particularly if they were kept together in one group under Gibney's pastoral supervision. According to Reilly, Hampton undertook to comply with this request and concluded the interview with some 'kindly observations as to the political differences that had resulted in the deportation of Fenians to this colony'<sup>75</sup>.

To sum up, the outlook of a small minority of wealthy Irish-Protestant and English immigrants such as Burges, Manning and company appear<sup>s</sup> to have been solely responsible for conjuring up an image of Fenians as desperate revolutionaries led by 'American ruffians' who were capable of any atrocity including rampant destruction, rape and the kidnap of women. In turn this body of opinion pressed Governor Hampton into taking more precautions than he had earlier contemplated, though his display in moving himself and family to Fremantle indicates that he did not concur with so hysterical a view. Nor is it likely that most colonists - ex-convicts, Australian-born and free immigrants - Catholic or Protestant, endorsed the conservative-loyalist view. Since on Hampton's admission, the Irish element in Western Australia largely prevailed, including three-fifths of the colony's military, it is reasonable to assume that a large body of opinion

(73) J.T. Reilly, Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Western Australia, Perth, 1903, pp. 84-5.

(74) Born in Ireland in 1839, Gibney was ordained at Dublin in 1863 and arrived in W.A. the same year (DWA, Vol.3, p. 311).

(75) Reilly, op. cit., p. 85.

shared J.T. Reilly's belief that Fenian convicts would not prove troublesome if treated reasonably. The Fremantle Herald, a liberal-minded paper, took a similar view; as did the South Australian Chronicle, which put conservative alarm in Western Australia into an accurate perspective:

Why our neighbours should regard the Fenians as exceptionally desperate and formidable characters, we do not perceive. They have had, at their own invitation, prisoners convicted of murder, rape, arson, burglary, and almost every other crime against society; and surely they are become suddenly fastidious, when they regard with such unprecedented horror, the introduction of a few disaffected Irishmen. Many of the men who took part in the rebellion of 1798, and were enrolled as United Irishmen, were sent to New South Wales, and there became respected and prosperous settlers. ...Unless the authorities of West Australia, in their zealous loyalty, treat them with undue severity, and drive them to desperation, there is no cause to consider Fenians as more dangerous characters than the average of the great body of convicts whom they have invited to make a home on the western coast<sup>76</sup>.

Thus in Western Australia in 1867, as in the eastern Australian colonies before and during the O'Farrell furore, a powerful minority of influential Protestant loyalists played a key role in shaping public and official consternation about a perceived Fenian threat. As to whether or not such fears were justified, this chapter has emphasised the sources of anti-Fenian fears shared by the movement's colonial opponents, in contrast with the more sanguine approach of liberal Irish-Catholic and non-Irish opinion. It remained to be seen however, whether the actual conduct of the Fenian convicts, or that of comrades intent on freeing them, would fulfil conservative-loyalist apprehensions as to Fenian anti-British fanaticism, or verify liberal-minded confidence that the movement had no cause to threaten life and property in Australia.

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(76) Reprinted in Perth Inquirer and Commercial News, 12 February 1868.

## Chapter 5

ON BOARD THE HOUGOMONTAustralia

This great continent of the south, having been discovered by some Dutch skipper and his crew, somewhere between the 1st and 19th centuries of the Christian era, was, in consequence taken possession of by the Government of Great Britain, in accordance with that just and equitable maxim, 'What's yours is mine; what's mine's my own'. That magnanimous government, in the kindly exuberance of their feelings, have placed a large portion of that immense tract of country at our disposal, generously defraying all expenses incurred on our way to it, and providing retreats for us there to secure us from the inclemency of the seasons...

Fenian convict, John Edward Kelly,  
en route to Australia, November 1867<sup>1</sup>

Various Fenian accounts of their experiences aboard the Hougoumont provide a useful opening framework for some estimations as to the kind of men they were. This examination of conditions aboard the vessel and of Fenian responses to them, seeks to answer three general inquiries. The first: whether or not the Fenians received normal treatment from the convict system, as administered aboard a transport. Secondly, whether their conduct justified or not the ultra-loyalist view that Fenians were brutal, amoral ruffians. And thirdly, whether the manner in which they were treated laid any basis for their subsequent adjustment within the Western Australian penal system.

When news of the Hougoumont's departure reached South Australia in December 1867, the Adelaide Observer took up the anti-transportation cause with a double-edged attack: on the Home Government for dumping surplus British criminals in Australia; and on Western Australia for being a willing recipient to the last hour of transportation. To dramatise its point, the paper drew attention to the inhumanity and adverse social consequences of closely confining convicts on a transport such as the Hougoumont:

...it is the practice to keep the convicts securely below during the greater part of the three or four months that

(1) See p. 139.

they remain on board ship. They are fastened down, in fact, like wild beasts, and are thus left to their own horrible devices - the least criminal being incurably contaminated by the most vicious...this last ship is showing even the English public what a monstrous evil it is to shut hundreds of the worst criminals up in the hold of a ship for months together, and then let them out upon a young colony, ten times more vicious than they were before they left the mother country<sup>2</sup>.

The Observer's report reached Fremantle in January 1868, just a few days after the arrival of the Hougoumont, prompting an immediate rebuttal from the ship's captain, William Cozens, who flatly denied that any inhumane treatment of convicts had occurred:

For the information of yourself and all the good folks of South Australia, I inform you of the arrival here of the 'floating hell' Hougoumont. I was surprised and vexed to see the South Australian papers copying such trash. The fellow who wrote it ought to be kicked. He knows nothing about the discipline of a convict ship. We were supposed to have a very bad lot on board and yet no attempt was made to seize the ship, nor were the prisoners kept below like a lot of wild beasts. On the contrary they were on deck from daylight to dark and gave not the slightest trouble!<sup>3</sup>.

In 1868 interested public opinion for the most part took Cozens at his word, but as the years passed the Hougoumont's 'floating hell' image steadily gained sway, aided partly by ex-Fenian transportees who had an interest in sustaining Irish national indignation against England and English treatment of exiled Irish patriots. John Boyle O'Reilly, one of the most noted Fenians transported to Australia, laid the foundation in his novel Moondyne (1878), a romantic tale, partly autobiographical, of convict life in Western Australia. In a single sentence he painted an unforgettable picture of confinement on board the Hougoumont:

Only those who have stood within the bars and heard the din of devils and the appalling sounds of despair, blended in a diapason that made every hatch-mouth a yent of hell, can imagine the horrors of a hold of a convict ship<sup>4</sup>.

In 1890 another former Fenian transportee, Denis Cashman, portrayed the same image from his recollection of the voyage:

(2) n.d., reprinted Inquirer, (Perth), 15 January 1868.

(3) Times (London), 22 April 1868.

(4) J.B. O'Reilly, Moondyne: A Story from the Underworld, Boston, 1879 (3rd Edition), p. 208.

A three month's voyage on board a British convict ship to an Irish political prisoner is an indescribable horror. It is utterly monotonous, and is only varied occasionally by hearing the cat on a convict's back, the funeral services now and again, followed with a splash and the fins of a shark or two darting after the prize; the constant rattling of chains on limbs and hands of the unfortunate convicts;...

O'Reilly's biographer, James Roche, accepted the same picture of the Hougoumont without question in 1891<sup>6</sup>; as did the former Fenian, Michael Davitt, who recounted O'Reilly's experiences in a book he wrote after visiting Australia in 1895<sup>7</sup>. And so the image survived, even as late as 1954 in T.J. Kiernan's The Irish Exiles in Australia. Kiernan, in keeping with an inclination to portray Irish convicts as noble victims of a harsh and vindictive penal code, quoted a long passage from Moondyne as evidence of the Fenian experience en route to Australia. It concluded:

Hideous incidents filled the days and nights as the convict ship sailed southward with her burden of disease and death. The mortality among the convicts was frightful. Weakened and depressed by the long drought, the continuous heat, and poisonous atmosphere, they succumbed to the fever in its first stages. The dead were laid in a row on the port side as they were carried from the hold. Relays of sailors worked at the shrouding from the hold. The bodies were wrapped in sailcloth with a cannon-ball tied at the feet<sup>8</sup>.

In all a grim record of the Hougoumont's voyage, but how close to the truth? As much as it may have impressed nostalgic Irish nationalists, the 'floating hell' image is cast under doubt, for example, when a head count reveals that only one convict died during the voyage<sup>9</sup>. The account

- (5) 'John Boyle O'Reilly', an obituary by Denis Cashman, Boston Herald, 24 August 1890.
- (6) James Jeffrey Roche, Life of John Boyle O'Reilly, New York, 1891, p. 68.
- (7) Michael Davitt, Life and Progress in Australasia, London, 1898, p. 458.
- (8) T.J. Kiernan, The Irish Exiles in Australia, Melbourne & London, 1954, p. 153.
- (9) Of 280 convicts who boarded at Portland, 279 disembarked at Fremantle. The convict who died, Thomas Cochrane, was not a Fenian (Hampton to Buckingham, 17, 24 September 1867, COD 70, WAA 41; 'Inward Report for the Port of Fremantle on Arrival of Hougoumont', CSO, 626-104, WAA; Dictionary of Western Australians, 3 vols., Nedlands, 1979, Vol. 2, compiled Rica Erickson, p. 105 (hereafter DWA).

that follows is indebted to Martin Carroll's discovery of Denis Cashman's diary in 1954<sup>10</sup> and to the Mitchell Library's acquisition of three important sources since the late 1960's: a second diary of the voyage, kept by John S. Casey<sup>11</sup>; 'The Wild Goose', an original and complete series of the weekly journal produced on board by a Fenian editorial staff led by John Flood and John O'Reilly<sup>12</sup>; and John Flood's notebook, a collection of verse, most of which appeared in issues of 'The Wild Goose', plus two pages of shorthand lessons O'Reilly gave Flood<sup>13</sup>. As well as being informative records in themselves, these sources provide a key to passages in Moondyne that refer to the voyage. Although O'Reilly's novel features a convict transport named 'Houguemont', he did not intend, nor claim, to present an historically accurate account of conditions on board. He produced rather a compilation of his own experiences, those of convicts on other transports, and an element of imagination. When these components are separated with the aid of other sources, the novel provides a useful descriptive supplement to the facts of the voyage.

At 3.45 a.m. on Monday, 30 September 1867, thirty-six Fenian convicts were roused from their plank beds in the solitary cells of Millbank Prison, London. They were provided with new prison dress and hustled into communal

- (10) Denis B. Cashman, unpub. diary, 24 September 1867 - 8 January 1868, ML MSS 1636. See Ch. 4, fn. 46.
- (11) 'Journal of a voyage from Portland to Fremantle on board the convict ship Hougoumont', 7 October 1867-9 January 1868 (zerox copy), ML DOC 1447, 6-458C. Mitchell Library obtained this copy from County Cork, Ireland, to which Casey returned after his release in 1869. Compared with Cashman's diary, Casey's is a rather bare source. It concentrates on his personal discomfort, yearnings for home, the weather and details of Fenian concerts. There are also signs that some content has been censored. It is, however, a useful cross-reference to Cashman's diary. For a comparison of the two diaries: Fitzgerald to McGrath, 3 July 1869, Fitzgerald Papers, Pascoe Vale, Victoria.
- (12) 'The Wild Goose: A Collection of Ocean Waifs', Vol. 1, Nos. 1-7, 9 November-21 December 1867, John Flood Papers, 1867-71, ML MSS 1542, 6-446C. This journal, of which there is only one complete collection of original issues in existence, was passed down from Flood (then residing at Gympie, Queensland) to his daughter Rosalie, one of two daughters who survived him in 1909. Rosalie, who subsequently became Mother Patricia of the Loreto Order, preserved the document at Loreto Abbey Convent, Ballarat, and later at Kirribilli Convent, Sydney, up to her death in 1950, upon which ownership reverted to her niece, John Flood's grand-daughter, Shelagh Johnson. Mrs. Johnson made the original available to the Mitchell Library in 1968 (interview with Shelagh Johnson, 4 June 1980).
- (13) John Flood's notebook, ML MSS 1636. This document was acquired by Flood's grand-niece, Cussie Flood, whilst visiting Australia from Ireland. After Miss Flood's death in 1975, her brother, Rev. John Flood, presented it to the Town Museum, Navan, Ireland, from which Alan Queale, a Brisbane historian, acquired a copy for the Mitchell Library. (McGrath to Queale, 9 July 1976, ML MSS 1636).

cells for breakfast. Hearty greetings were exchanged as the Fenians indulged in the <sup>first</sup> conversation they had had with each other since the March rebellion or earlier. After a hurried meal all the Millbank transportees, Fenian or otherwise, were chained in pairs, answered a roll call, then marched across the quay to board the gun boat Earnest, en route to join the Hougoumont, anchored at Shearness, in the mouth of the Thames. For Denis Cashman it was a memorable occasion, marred only by the fact that he was chained to 'a foxy animal who growled like a bear'<sup>14</sup> when he stretched to shake hands with a comrade, or strained with a tourist's enthusiasm to catch sights along the Thames:

I certainly had a splendid view through the small circular window of the cabin in which I was stowed of the 'Houses of Commons and Lords' - I thought the Parliament house the most beautiful piece of architecture I had ever beheld; it is a chef d'oeuvre of the most florid Gothic style and embellished from base to the summit of its lofty towers with one mass of ornament, foliage and beauty. The portion of Westminster bridge which I saw was also very beautiful...A little further on I saw 'Somerset House'...a splendid edifice, but from the restlessness of the animal to whom I was chained, and indeed the general rush of my friends to the small window, I was unable to see sufficient of it to impress my mind with its style<sup>15</sup>.

It is worth noting that Cashman's rapturous appreciation of London architecture hardly conforms to the conservative loyalist view which had all Fenians typecast as low-minded Irish ruffians.

At about 3 p.m. the Earnest arrived at Shearness where her convict cargo transferred to the transport, Hougoumont. During the afternoon a convict contingent from Chatham, including a number of soldier Fenians, was taken on board. Early the next day the Hougoumont headed down the channel, escorted by the Earnest. More convicts embarked on 2 October at Portsmouth, and the remainder came on board four days later, at Portland Roads. Amongst the latter was John O'Reilly who had arrived in Portland from Dartmoor. He recalled the embarkation as follows:

...there were twenty men on each chain, the political prisoners separate from the criminals. 'Forward there!' and we dragged each other to the esplanade of the prison.

(14) Cashman, loc. cit., 15 September 1867.

(15) *ibid.*

It was a gala day, - a grand parade of the convicts. They were drawn up in line - a horrible and insulting libel on an army - and the governor, and the doctors of the prison and ship received them. There were two or three lounging in the prison yard that day who, I remember well, looked strangely out of place there. They had honest, bronzed faces and careless sailor's dress, - the mates and boatswain of the Hougoumont, who had come ashore to superintend the embarkation<sup>16</sup>.

O'Reilly adds that one incident deeply touched the Fenians as the last of them were loaded on board. A final farewell to Patrick Dunne<sup>17</sup> from his sister, Bridget, symbolised the wrenching from family and kin that all shared:

Just as we reached the gangway to go on board, a woman's piercing shriek rose up from the crowd on the wharf; a young girl rushed wildly out, and threw herself, weeping and sobbing, on the breast of a man in our chain, poor Thomas (sic) Dunne. She was his sister. She had come from Dublin to see him before he sailed away. They would not let her see him in prison, so she had come there to see him in his chains. Oh! may God keep me from ever seeing another scene like that which we all stood still to gaze at; even the merciless officials for a moment hesitated to interfere. Poor Dunne could only stoop his head and kiss his sister - his arms were chained; and that loving heart-broken girl, worn out by grief, clung to his arms and his chains, as they dragged her away; and when she saw him pushed rudely to the gangway, she raised her voice in a wild cry: 'Oh God! Oh God!' as if reproaching Him who willed such things to pass<sup>18</sup>.

The Hougoumont, which derived its name from Hougoumont Farm - one of the sites of the Battle of Waterloo, was an 875 ton Blackwall frigate built at Moulmein, Burma, in 1852. During the Crimean War its British owner chartered it to the French government as a troop transport, after tactfully changing its name to Baraguay d'Hilliers. After the war ended in 1856 it regained its original name, and continued service as a cargo ship and migrant transport. Just prior to its charter as a convict transport by the British government, the Hougoumont had returned from South Australia, having been chartered to carry emigrants there in 1866<sup>19</sup>.

(16) Quoted Roche, op. cit., p. 65.

(17) A twenty-three year old Dublin painter, Dunne was convicted on 30 January 1866 of treason-felony and sentenced to five years (R16, CN 9722, Convict Dept. Records, WAA 1156). He gives his own account of the farewell in a letter to his parents from Fremantle (reprinted in The Irishman, Dublin, 25 April 1868).

(18) Quoted Roche, op. cit., p. 66.

(19) CO 386-72, PRO, London, cited by Martin C. Carroll, 'Behind the Lighthouse: A Study of the Australian sojourn of John Boyle O'Reilly 1844-1890', PhD thesis, Univ. of Iowa, 1954, p. 121.

After it was chartered as a convict transport, the Hougoumont underwent special modifications. Comments made by C.P. Measor when he inspected the vessel at the East India dock in September<sup>20</sup>, and passages in Moondyne<sup>21</sup>, enable a reconstruction of its appearance. To facilitate the daily exercise of convicts, its upper deck was partitioned into areas separated by nine foot high wooden barriers. These were fitted with doors for the passage of sailors working the ship; each door being guarded during the day by two Pensioners with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets. The lower deck was similarly divided into compartments, by bulkheads reinforced with iron and fitted with carbine holes to enable the guard to fire on convicts if a need arose. Non-Fenian convicts together with the seventeen soldier Fenians, were accommodated in the main lower deck section amidship. On the same level, but in separate quarters astern, the civilian Fenians were housed. On either side of lower deck compartments were sleeping berths eighteen inches by six feet, the majority fixed and seventy in the form of hammocks. Access to the upper deck was by way of ladders surrounded by cages of iron bars. If we substitute 'Fenian' for 'female' (there were no female convicts on board), O'Reilly's picture in Moondyne is probably quite accurate:

...around each hatchway, reaching from the upper deck, or roof of the convicts' room, to the lower deck or floor, was an immense grating, formed of strong iron bars. This arrangement gave plenty of air and a good deal of light, the only obstruction being the bars.

Seen from below, on the convicts' deck, every hatchway stood in the centre of the ship like a great iron cage, with a door by which the warders entered, and a ladder to reach the upper deck.

The convicts never tired of looking upward through the bars, though they could see nothing above but the swaying ropes and sails, and at night the beautiful sky and stars.

In the forward and smallest compartment of the ship between decks lived the crew, who went up and down by their own hatchway. In the next, the largest compartment, lived the male convicts, three hundred in number. The central compartment was the hospital; and next to this the compartment for the female convicts. The after compartment between decks was occupied by the sixty soldiers who kept guard on the ship.

(20) Fremantle Herald, 21 December 1867.

(21) O'Reilly, op. cit., pp. 198-200.

The main or upper deck was divided as follows: the after part, under the poop deck, was occupied by the staterooms for officers and passengers, and the richly furnished cabin dining room. Forward of this, beginning at the foot of the poop, was a division of the deck to which the female convicts were allowed at certain hours of the day. The next section was the deck where the male convicts were allowed to exercise, one hundred at a time, throughout the day<sup>22</sup>.

After boarding, all convicts had their chains removed and were directed to quarters. As one of the soldier Fenians accommodated with ordinary convicts, O'Reilly balked at descending one of the caged ladders into what appeared to be a seething mass of criminal humanity:

...As I stood in that hatchway, looking at the wretches glaring out, I realised more than ever before the terrible truth that a convict ship is a floating hell. The forward hold was dark, save the yellow light of a few ship's lamps. There were 320 [actually 218] criminal convicts in there, and the sickening thought occurred to us are our friends in there among them? There swelled up a hideous diapason from that crowd of wretches; the usual prison restraint was removed, and the reaction was at its fiercest pitch.

Such a din of diabolical sounds no man ever heard. We hesitated before entering the low-barred door to the hold, unwilling to plunge into the seething den. As we stood thus, a tall gaunt man pushed his way through the criminal crowd to the door. He stood within, and, stretching out his arms, said: 'Come, we are waiting for you'. I did not know the face; I knew the voice. It was my old friend and comrade, Keating<sup>23</sup>.

O'Reilly's concern was understandable. Along with his fellow military rebels he found himself closely confined with over two hundred criminals, many of them hardened, habitual offenders. About a quarter were serving sentences for violent crimes: twenty-two for rape, twelve for murder, twelve for manslaughter, ten for wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm, and four for attempted murder<sup>24</sup>.

At Portland the last of the free passengers embarked, bringing the

(22) *ibid.*, p. 199.

(23) Quoted Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

(24) Survey of non-Fenian convicts on board the Hougoumont, DWA, Vol. 2, *passim*.

Hougoumont's full complement to 431, under the command of Captain William Cozens. The ship carried 280 convicts; 42 crew; 44 Pensioner Guards; 18 Pensioners wives and their 25 children; 4 assistant warders, their wives and 9 children; Dr. W. Smith R.N., surgeon superintendent; Rev. M. Williams, religious instructor; Father Bernard Delany, Roman Catholic chaplain; and Captain Robert Young, returning to the colony after leave of absence in England<sup>25</sup>.

Young had the distinction of being the only free voyager to embark with great reluctance. A former Dragoon Guardsman appointed storekeeper of Perth prison in 1860, his diligence had earned him advancement to superintendent of the prison. But in mid 1866 he became involved in a colonial scandal concerning a relationship between his wife and the governor's son, George Hampton, who had been appointed by his father to the position of acting comptroller general of the Convict Establishment. A complaint about the affair made by the Bishop of Perth, resulted in Young being granted a year's leave of absence in England. When this expired in mid 1867, he requested any appointment other than his post in the colony, but was unsuccessful both in that submission and in a request to have his leave extended. His unfortunate luck continued when his application to secure the position of religious instructor on the Hougoumont was turned down in favour of Williams; and to his further chagrin he was not permitted passage for his wife, as it was 'contrary to general regulations to give ladies passages in convict ships'. Presumably the Pensioners' and warders' wives were not considered ladies<sup>26</sup>.

For the assistant warders on the other hand, the vessel's departure was not a minute too soon. Three of them, Charles McGarry, William H. Howard and Thomas Rowe, had complained to the Colonial Office that the high cost of maintaining their families at the Royal Hotel, Portland - fourteen shillings per family a day, had exhausted their finances. Buckingham's response on this occasion was more benevolent, prompted no doubt by his admission that there was 'great difficulty...experienced...in finding qualified men willing to proceed to the colony in that capacity'. All three were paid four months' salary in advance and granted an allowance of ten shillings for every day they were detained in Portland. The Colonial Office recorded, however, that its generosity was to be regarded as a once only offer: 'As this is the last convict ship which will be sent, the course purposed cannot be adduced as

- (25) Buckingham to Hampton, 17, 24 September 1867, COD 70, WAA 41; 'Inward Report for the Port of Fremantle on Arrival of Hougoumont', CSO 626-104, WAA.
- (26) Young to Sec. of State, 14 February, 8 April, 1 July, 30 July 1867; Asst. Under-Sec. to Young, 13 July 1867, CO 18-157, PRO 1657, AJCP.

a precedent'<sup>27</sup>.

Early in October the last stores were loaded, and the vessel only awaited favourable winds to depart from Portland. Fourteen bales of convict supplies, including 2270 pounds of soap had been taken on board, together with one unusual item described in Buckingham's despatch to Hampton as '50 gallons of Dr. Calvert's preparation for curing the Scab in sheep, intended for gratuitous distribution in Western Australia'<sup>28</sup>. On 12 October the wind swung favourably to the west and at 2.55 p.m. under a fresh breeze the sails were set<sup>29</sup>. The departure stirred in Denis Cashman a deep sadness, as he had hoped to receive a letter from his wife before he left<sup>30</sup>. O'Reilly on the other hand, experienced a sense of romantic adventure:

The last convict had been sent below. The barred doors in the railed hatchways were locked. The hundreds of cooped criminals mingled with each other freely for the first time in many years. The sentries had been posted at the hatches and passages on deck. The sailors had skaken out the sails. The capstan had been worked until every spare link of cable was up.

The Houguement (sic) was ready for sea...The convict ship with all sail set before a strong quarter-breeze ploughed heavily round the South of England, then spread her arms like a sea-spirit as she swept majestically towards the southern seas<sup>31</sup>.

On the first morning at sea, Sunday 13 October, the Fenians were permitted on deck at 6.00 a.m.. Cashman records that the first mass was conducted by a Fenian convict, John Casey, - Father Delany, presumably, being indisposed. Afterwards they made themselves 'quite comfortable below and talked till morning'. Cashman drew a top bunk between Thomas Baines and John Edward Kelly, who comprised part of his mess of eight men. Each mess appointed a captain to collect provisions and act as spokesman, and prepared its own meals from a minimal but reasonably balanced diet. Breakfast consisted of biscuit and tea, or occasionally hot chocolate. Dinner was usually pea soup, salted beef, and preserved potatoes - which

- (27) McGarry, Howard and Rowe to Colonial Office, 5 October 1867; Col. Office to the Governor, Portland Prison, 8 October 1867; CO 18-157, PRO 1657, AJCP. Buckingham to Hampton, 14 October 1867, COD 70, WAA 41.
- (28) Buckingham to Hampton, 17 September 1867, COD 70, WAA 41.
- (29) Fremantle Herald, 11 January 1868.
- (30) Cashman, *loc. cit.*, 12 October 1867.
- (31) O'Reilly, *op.cit.*, pp. 204-207.

resembled uncooked beans. Four times a week plum duff was substituted for the soup. At 2 o'clock each day a glass of wine was issued, and at 4 o'clock a skilly (gruel). In addition each convict received 7-14 pints of water daily, an occasional tobacco issue, and fruit when available<sup>32</sup>.

On the fourth day out, the Hougoumont ran into bad weather in the Bay of Biscay. For a week it ran into fierce squalls which tore canvas to shreds. Heavy seas were shipped and on at least one occasion the vessel barely missed being capsized<sup>33</sup>. Cashman's diary makes no mention of particular stress in the civilian Fenian quarters, but O'Reilly's description of bedlam in the main convict section was probably accurate:

The first few days of the voyage are inexpressibly horrible. The hundreds of pent-up wretches are un-used to the darkness of the ship, strange to their crowded quarters and to each other, depressed in spirits at their endless separation from home, sickened to death with the merciless pitch and roll of the vessel, alarmed at the dreadful thunder of the waves, and fearful of sudden engulfment, with the hatches barred. The scene is too hideous<sup>34</sup> for a picture - too dreadful to be described in words<sup>34</sup>.

As the weather cleared, the normal routine of daily exercise on deck returned, providing an opportunity for the military and civilian Fenians to mingle and discuss means for relieving the monotony of the voyage. Cashman proposed a play, which was at first agreed upon but later abandoned in the absence of room below for a stage. Concerts were then decided on and taken up with enthusiasm; being held every second or third night for most of the voyage. As the soldier Fenians also participated, permission must have been given to them to join the civilians' quarters on these occasions. Over half the Fenians performed in one concert or another, most of the entertaining being done by Cashman and Joseph Noonan, supported by Michael Moore, Michael Cody, Patrick Doran, Thomas Bradley, John Flood, John Sheehan and John O'Reilly<sup>35</sup>. Programmes worked out beforehand by Cashman<sup>36</sup> contained a wide range of songs, prose and verse: from political content such as 'Burial of McManus', 'Fenian Tayloy' and 'Tom's Grave', to romantic or comic ballads such as 'The Last Rose of Summer' and the 'Elopement of Jackie and

(32) Cashman, loc. cit., 13 October 1867 - 8 January 1868.

(33) *ibid.*, 14 October.

(34) O'Reilly, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

(35) Casey, *loc. cit.*, *passim*.

(36) Cashman, *loc. cit.*, 25, 26, 29, 31 October, 8, 14, 20 November 1867.

Molly'. There were recitals from Shakespeare and Dickens; and from O'Reilly, readings of his own poetry, including 'The Old School Clock'... and 'Uncle Ned's Story'. John Edward Kelly, an Irish-American, was a popular performer, his recital of 'Gertrude of Wyoming' being one of the few items permitted to be repeated at successive concerts. Every concert concluded with 'Let Erin Remember', which the Fenians adopted as a national anthem - 'God Save Ireland' not coming into vogue until after the Manchester executions. The format of a typical concert was a follows:

### 1st Part

Song	Paddies evermore	Noonan
Song	Lamb dearg aboo	Doran
Song	Ned of the hill	Brady
Recitation	Downfall of Poland	Self (Cashman)
Song	The rising of the moon	J. Flood
Song	Rally for Ireland	Lombard
Song	Marseilles Hymn	Moore

### 2nd Part

Song	Tell me Mary	Noonan
Duet	Goodbye Sweetheart	Self and Joe (Noonan)
Song	Macreeveen Eeven	Kearney
Recitation	Uncle Ned's Tale (2nd part)	O'Reilly
Song	Fontenoy	Brophy
Song	Convict Ship	Fennell
Song	Elopement of Shaun McCarthy	Sheehan
Chorus	Let Erin Remember	All <sup>37</sup>

The extent to which the concerts succeeded in their purpose is apparent from Cashman's post-performance remarks: 'Old Joe sang beautifully. This air recalls scenes and happy memories, never to be forgotten. J. Flood sang 'Shaun O'Farrell' in splendid style - but by jove Sheehan excels, he's a card....had us all roaring with his story - he has a refined brogue and splendid delivery'<sup>38</sup>.

Towards the end of October the Hougoumont entered the tropics, heading

(37) *ibid.*, 30 November 1867.

(38) *ibid.*, 26, 29 October 1867.

for the Cape Verde Islands; the wind steadily dropping in proportion to the rise in temperature. Cashman, for one, was stunned by the beauty of the environment - a whale spouting, shoals of porpoises chasing the ship, a seventeen foot shark sighted near the bow, the crew harpooning a giant turtle, and the fascination of schools of tiny flying fish' darting thro' the water like birds'<sup>39</sup>. His lyrical diary entry for 28 October hardly conforms to the image of a 'floating hell':

28th: A beautiful morning - I was on deck early. Ship running at about 8 knots, under square yards - a sail in sight - whale was seen today spouting water about 60 feet high - a most exquisite sunset this evening. I watched him for about an hour, sinking into the sea, and have never before beheld anything so beautiful, the light clouds round the western horizon were burnished with the most varied and beautiful tints, parts appearing like lakes of burnished gold, fringed with a luminous silver border, and in parts where he peeped thro' crevices of thick clouds it looked like so many furnaces or camp fires in the distance - just as he was half emerged (sic) in the water, a ship no larger than a bird appeared gliding across its disc. After he had disappeared the clouds assumed the most grotesque and fanciful appearance. Some looked like kangaroos smoking short pipes, others like huge bears sitting on their haunches, and in fact the most curious animals imaginable. When the grey twilight appeared we were piped below, and are now about to open our concert for the 28th (today).<sup>40</sup> As I am to appear - I had better have a rehearsal<sup>41</sup>.

The tropics, however, had a less glamorous side, as Cashman soon discovered. When the ship approached the equator in the mid Atlantic, the temperature reached 90<sup>0</sup>F and hardly dropped during the night. To add to the general discomfort the wind died, leaving the vessel at times almost completely becalmed<sup>41</sup>. Similar weather, broken occasionally by a brief tropical storm, continued through mid-November while steady progress was made south towards Trinidad Island, east of Brazil. These conditions obviously provided an inspiration for O'Reilly's graphic description of the Hougoumont becalmed:

...the trade winds faded and died, the sea lost its ripples, but kept its waves, that rose and fell slowly, with long, monotonous rolls like an ocean of malten glass. The sails of the Hougoumont (sic) slopped backward and forward, the

(39) *ibid.*, 28 October - 4 November 1867.

(40) *ibid.*, 28 October 1867.

(41) *ibid.*, 29 October - 12 November 1867.

ropes hung useless, the pennant clung to the mast.

...The air was stifling and oppressive. There was no draught through the barred hatches. The deck above them was blazing hot. The pitch dropped from the seams and burned their flesh as it fell.

...Among the officers of the ship, there was silence also. They knew they were in a latitude where calms lasted for long periods. They flushed the decks with water constantly to try to keep them cool, for the sake of the prisoners below.

A dark line, very faint, was moving on the face of the glassy ocean...In half an hour it fanned their faces, but so gently that still the sails hung useless, and the pennant only stirred an inch from the mast. But it was a breath - it was a drink. When the night fell, the breeze strengthened, and the ship moved.

There was no sleep on board that night. <sup>42</sup>The hearts of all were filled with deep relief and gratitude<sup>42</sup>.

It is likely that a Fenian plan to seize the ship was discussed at the commencement of these conditions in late October, when a change of course could have taken them without great difficulty to America. Cashman stated in 1890 (in an obituary to O'Reilly) that O'Reilly was 'father to a scheme to capture the ship, guards, convicts and all. A number of us secretly consulted and decided to try the experiment, provided we could get the greater part of our associates to determinedly enter the project'<sup>43</sup>. In his diary, too, Cashman hints that some kind of subversion was afoot: An entry for 29 October reads, 'I have to go below to school for two hours, being an odd number...even numbers are to go down tomorrow'. Cashman relates in the obituary that the pros were considered: O'Reilly had the courage to go through with it 'like a thunder-clap', and Flood was a first-class navigator, competent to take the ship to any port once he had charts and instruments; but adds that the cons swayed the men. Those with short sentences to serve and wives and children to return to, rejected the idea of permanent exile; and the problem of restraining over 200 criminal convicts, or turning them loose on any civilised community, finally put paid to mutiny<sup>44</sup>.

Discipline throughout the voyage was firm but not excessive for a convict transport. In fact minor misdemeanours were occasionally treated with

(42) O'Reilly, op. cit., pp. 223-231.

(43) Boston Herald, 24 August 1890.

(44) Boston Herald, 24 August 1890.

remarkable good humour. In at least two cases of petty theft for example, Surgeon Smith recommended that the culprit be tried by courtmartial conducted by his peers. Cashman observed with amusement one very slovenly thief tried and sentenced to a thorough scrubbing<sup>45</sup>, and another acquitted on a lack of evidence, after a trial conducted 'in admirable style' complete with broomstick-armed guards<sup>46</sup>. More serious charges earned withdrawal of privileges, a session in the punishment cell, irons, or a flogging. As O'Reilly describes, the means for these measures and for the ultimate punishment were prominently displayed:

The fore part of the main-deck, running out to the bowsprit...was roofed in, the angular section taking in the bowsprit. The front of this section, running across the deck, was composed of enormous bars, thicker than a man's arm, like those around the hatches, and within these bars, in sight of the...convicts on deck, were confined the malefactors or rule-breakers.

...The evil doers confined here for punishment had neither bed nor seat; they sat upon the deck, and worked at heavy tasks of oakum picking. They could not shirk, for a warder kept sentry outside the cage.

As these refractory ones looked through the bars at the deck, they saw, strapped to the foremast, a black gaff or spar with iron rings...This was the triangle, where unruly convicts were triced up and flogged...

Above this triangle, tied around the foremast, was a new and very fine hempen rope...This was the ultimate appeal, the law's last terrible engine, - the halter which swung<sup>47</sup> mutineers and murderers over the hissing sea to eternity<sup>47</sup>.

The Fenians, however, had little contact with the instruments of authority. One of them, reported for having an awl in his possession which he refused to give up, had his wine stopped for seven days<sup>48</sup>. On another occasion the eight members of No. 7 mess were brought before Surgeon Smith for having concealed a rope that belonged to the boatswain. All had their wine stopped, and one of them, Foley, was confined for a time in the punishment cell<sup>49</sup>. None of the Fenians had irons put on - and were fortunate to avoid them. Cashman records that irons were welded around the ankles, joined with a chain that restricted movement, and left on for the rest of the voyage:

(45) Cashman, loc. cit., 13 November 1867.

(46) *ibid.*, 19 November 1867.

(47) O'Reilly, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.

(48) Cashman, loc. cit., 19 November 1867.

(49) *ibid.*, 4 December 1867.

It was awful to hear the unfortunate with the chains clanking everywhere they went - There were so many of them in them (the chains) that the clank was continuous on deck and below. They had to bring them to bed with them, as they did not get them off till the ship came to anchor<sup>50</sup>.

Floggings were administered to two convicts only, neither of them Fenians. The first lashes were laid onto a convict when the vessel was two weeks out from Portland: he withstood forty-eight from the boatswain with no sign of suffering, and was cheered at the end by the convicts assembled on deck to observe the punishment<sup>51</sup>. The second flogging was given to the ring-leader of a group that broke into the ship's store the night of New Year's Day. All convicts were piped on deck at 1.00 p.m. to watch thirty-six lashes laid onto him; but Cashman, for one, averted his face until the punishment was over<sup>52</sup>. No hangings occurred during the voyage.

If O'Reilly did urge the Fenians seriously to contemplate mutiny late in October, then no word of it reached the captain. Some of the Fenians, however, may well have decided that all would benefit if O'Reilly's restless energy could be channelled into a less hazardous preoccupation. At the beginning of November, the idea of producing a regular journal was first aired. A meeting for the purpose on 2 November was adjourned because of the heat, and reconvened three days later, attended by John Flood, Cornelius O'Mahony, Thomas Duggan, John Casey, Denis Cashman, Michael Cody, Joseph Noonan, and John O'Reilly. Resolutions appointed Flood editor, O'Reilly sub-editor and John Edward Kelly manager. On 7 November a further meeting discussed the title; eventually settling on Kelly's suggestion, 'The Wild Goose'. The project was encouraged by Father Delany who provided foolscap paper, pen and ink, and was himself a contributor to later issues. Cashman's artistic talent was employed on decorative titles, painstakingly inscribed in ornate script interlaced with shamrock wreaths; and Eugene Lombard was appointed a copyist<sup>53</sup>. Number 6 mess became the publishing office, from which a hive of activity produced the first issue on Saturday, 9 November. The launching, Cashman records, was a memorable occasion: spirits were high, there had been dancing to guitar music on deck, and at night a concert was

(50) *ibid.*, diary appendix, n.d., c. January 1867.

(51) *ibid.*, 26 October 1867.

(52) *ibid.*, 2 January 1868.

(53) Lombard, letter to his parents, 22 January 1868, quoted, The Irishman (Dublin), 4 April 1868.

was postponed so that O'Reilly could read the journal aloud to their comrades<sup>54</sup>.

The first issue comprised eight sheets, double column, in closely written copperplate. It opened with an address by John Flood, 'To Our Readers', in which a personified goose declared the paper's object: 'I will aim to console you for the past, to cheer you for the present, and to strengthen you for the future'. Flood also wrote the leader, 'Home Thoughts', a stoic acceptance of the winds of fortune that had resulted in their exile, balanced with an unrepentent affirmation of their motives:

...-wild, volatile, thoughtless, reckless, we may be called, but that stigma is undeserved. We love the little island that has pleased God to make our motherland. In her few smiles, in her many tears, and in her countless sufferings, we love her. The blessed hope of turning again to her genial soil, and to the dear ones we left behind, will give us strength to bear and brave the worst; and until then, thro' pain, and regret, and sorrow, we will still look back and pray for her and for them with the true unswerving love known only to Exiles<sup>55</sup>.

O'Reilly contributed 'Farewell', a poem conveying similar sentiments written the day they left Portland, and Kelly included 'Prison Thoughts', written in Millbank in July 1867. Kelly also displayed his satirical wit in a mocking tourist guide, 'Australia', an extract from which is at the head of this chapter. Joseph Noonan contributed 'A Leap for Liberty', recounting the circumstances of his arrest in Kerry after the March rebellion, and a subsequent escape attempt. He had made his way to London but was arrested there and taken aboard a train, handcuffed and escorted by Irish detectives. When the police unwisely acceded to his request that they remove the handcuffs to stop his hands swelling, he leapt through the window of the speeding train. Recaptured four days later, he was transported to Ireland under heavy guard to stand trial at Tralee, where he was sentenced to seven years servitude<sup>56</sup>.

The remainder of the first issue comprised the first chapter of a folk serial, 'Queen Cliodhna and the Flower of Erin: A Tale of Our Pagan Ancestors', by the Cork schoolteacher, Thomas Duggan, and two light-hearted columns, 'Answers to Correspondents', and 'Latest News', which included a number of jokes - one being that Neptune had unleashed some recent squalls

(54) Cashman, loc. cit., 1-10 November 1867, See also Boston Herald, 24 August 1867; Roche op. cit., pp. 67-8.

(55) 'The Wild Goose', Vol. 1, No. 1, 9 November 1867, ML MSS 1542, 6-446C.

(56) *ibid.*

because 'he has enough finny-uns in his dominions, and is incensed at the thought of a fresh influx of those turbulent beings'. The issue concluded with a small inscription:

Printed and published at the office, No. 6 Mess, Intermediate Cabin, Ship 'Houguemont', for the Editors, John Flood, and J.B. O'Reilly, by J.E.K. Registered for transmission abroad<sup>57</sup>.

In all, seven weekly issues were produced; the last being a double-sized Christmas special which so impressed Captain Cozens and the mates that some copies of this edition were requested by them. The editorial staff busily obliged<sup>58</sup>. In return for their gainful industry and the positive influence the journal had on Fenian morale, the editors were granted certain privileges. O'Reilly was permitted to move out of the main convict section to join his comrades in No. 6 mess of the civilian Fenian quarters; all the staff were given extra tobacco - and on one occasion, a tasty meat loaf; and if they wished, the editors were allowed to remain on the upper deck until 7.30 p.m.<sup>59</sup>. John Flood wrote the most material, including nine poems and all the leaders; the latter didactic in tone, emphasizing a Victorian concern for moral betterment. O'Reilly provided nine poems and four prose items, and Kelly, Duggan, Noonan and Father Delany provided the rest<sup>60</sup>. All the writers chose pen-names. Flood was 'Binn Eider' - his birthplace, a peninsula north of Dublin Bay; O'Reilly was 'Boyne'; Duggan, 'Mushra'; Kelly, 'Kappa' or 'Laoi' (in Gaelic lettering); and Father Delany, 'Beta' or 'Delta'<sup>61</sup>. Very little of the content could be termed subversive but there was no mistaking the journal's nationalist leanings. For example Kelly, the only Irish-American among the Fenians, contributed a two-part memoir recounting a 4th July celebration in Boston that concluded:

Thus do the Americans commemorate their country's natal day. That night, sadly contrasting the position of my own country with that of the proud American republic, I fervently prayed that a happier day might dawn for my own native isle of the sea<sup>62</sup>.

(57) *ibid.*

(58) Cashman, *loc. cit.*, 31 December 1867, 2, 3 January 1868.

(59) *ibid.*, 4, 17, 20, 29 December 1867.

(60) At some later time, John Flood lightly initialled in pencil the authors of many items on the original 'Wild Goose'. Cashman also indicates the source of some items in his diary.

(61) Cross-checking with Cashman's diary and Flood's notations unravels the pen-names. See also Walter McGrath, 'Convict ship newspaper, "The Wild Goose", re-discovered, Journal of the Cork Hist. and Archaeological Soc., Vol. 74, 1969, pp. 24-6.

(62) 'The Wild Goose', Vol. 1, No. 5, 7 December 1867, ML MSS 1542, 6-446C.

Saturday was publication day, a special occasion when the Fenians would gather below deck to hear the journal read aloud by Flood or O'Reilly. The rapt attention given was later described by O'Reilly:

Amid the dim glare of the lamp the men, at night, would group strangely on extemporized seats. The yellow light fell down on the dark forms, throwing a ghastly glare on the pale faces of the men, as they listened with blazing eyes to Davis's 'Fontenoy' or the 'Clansman's Wild Address to Shane's Head'.<sup>63</sup>

The journal relieved monotony during the latter half of the voyage, lifted Fenian spirits, and may have diverted despondent minds from notions of mutiny. More importantly, it contributed to the growth of a healthy relationship of mutual respect between those in command of the ship on the one hand, and Flood, O'Reilly and company, who had established a natural ascendancy among the Fenians, on the other. Delany's role in helping develop this relationship does him much credit. When the vessel reached Fremantle, Flood held the only complete series. This was retained by the prison authorities as his private property until his release, and was eventually passed on by his grand-daughter to the Mitchell Library, in 1968. 'The Wild Goose' is as unique today as it was in 1867: a handwritten, superior literary compilation of prose and verse produced aboard a convict transport by a small group of patriotic Irish felons with the aid of their priest.

Early in December the Hougoumont passed the rocky south Atlantic pinnacle of Tristan da Cunha, swept ahead of the roaring forties; alternate squalls and lighter days propelling the ship an average of 150-200 miles per day<sup>64</sup>. In mid December a convict named Thomas Cochrane, who was not a Fenian, died of natural causes. The burial service, conducted with due respect before all convicts, deeply impressed Cashman:

The convicts ranged themselves at either side of the starboard side of the ship and on Forecastle deck and after a few minutes, the procession began. A cross-bearer leading ...followed by the officiating Priest in robes - and his clerk, next came the corpse covered with a Union Jack and

(63) Quoted Roche, op. cit., p. 68.

(64) Based on daily distances recorded by Cashman, loc. cit., 30 November - 14 December 1867.

borne by 6 convicts when the procession reached the inside of the bulkhead door 'The Miserere' and 'Te Dium' (sic) were repeated. The body being placed in a slanting position projecting from a starboard port hole - at the conclusion of the prayers the body with a heavy weight tied to the feet, was gradually allowed to slip. A splash immediately intimated that it was consigned to its watery grave. The whole scene was very solemn and impressive<sup>65</sup>.

Again the reality of the voyage - one death only, and the burial conducted with ceremonious dignity, belie entirely the image of a 'floating hell' punctuated with deaths.

Christmas was observed with due festivity mid-way between South Africa and Australia. The Fenians began the day with a dawn rendition of 'O Come All Ye Faithfull', lunched heartily on 'plum-duff and salt horse', quaffed two glasses of wine each, and went up on deck for smokes. In the afternoon they retired below to listen to O'Reilly read the Christmas 'Goose'<sup>66</sup>. Weeks of close association and effort on the journal sealed close bonds between O'Reilly, Flood, Cashman and Kelly. Cashman indicates that he could depend on O'Reilly to lift his spirit on occasions when he became deeply despondent over the loss of his family<sup>67</sup>. Flood benefitted from O'Reilly's tutorship in shorthand skills<sup>61</sup>, and from the warm sincerity O'Reilly continually radiated. A dedication to Flood, heading a humble but moving poem O'Reilly gave to him, reflects his unaffected warmth in ties of friendship:

However mediocre the following lines may be, the feelings of admiration, respect, and friendship which prompted me to write them are deep and true; and by the worth of those feelings I know they will be received and judged. Hereafter, when our exile is ended, they may recall to memory, the beginning of our friendship and the many pleasant (and busy!) days we spent together over our little 'Wild Goose'<sup>69</sup>.

Early in January the Hougoumont approached Western Australia, the winds light, at times almost becalming the vessel. An air of expectancy pervaded the ship. Eugene Lombard probably expressed the view of many Fenians after three months at sea: 'Really I was heartily sick of life on board ship,

(65) *ibid.*, 16 December 1867.

(66) *ibid.*, 25 December 1867.

(67) *ibid.*, 25, 29 December 1867.

(68) John Flood's notebook, ML MSS 1636.

(69) *ibid.*, 'To John Flood Esq.' (unpublished poem).

the journey was so long'<sup>70</sup>. And if Cashman's attitude was representative of those with short sentences and families, then prospects of a peaceful return to society took precedence over further considerations of Fenianism:

Of course we all conjectured as to what sort of place our new abode will be - when we are to regain our liberty - and chalking out our future modes of life - my only hope is to earn money with as much expedition as possible and have my dearest K and dear boys<sup>71</sup> with me wherever I may pitch my tent as quickly as I possibly can<sup>71</sup>.

Even for young single men like O'Reilly, facing long sentences, the new land held a ray of promise<sup>72</sup>. The expectancy all would have shared, their wonderment at first sight of the coast, the exotic air of the place, the knotted stomachs from a glimpse of their goal, are all portrayed with vivid accuracy by O'Reilly:

From morning light they leapt on the rail, looking away over the smooth sea to where the land was yellow with heat above the unseen continent. There was a warmth and pleasure in the promise it gave.

The straining eyes were saved the long pain of watching the indistinct line. The shore of Western Australia is quite low, and the first sight of land are tall mahogany trees in the bush. The ship passed this first sight-line early in the night; and next morning, when the convicts were allowed on deck, they saw, only a few miles distant, the white sands and dark woods of their land of bondage and promise.

The sea was as smooth as a lake, and the light air impelled the ship slowly. At noon they passed within a stone's throw of Rottnest, and every eye witnessed the strange sight of naked black men working like beavers in the sand, the island being used as a place of punishment for refractory natives.

An hour later, the ship had approached within a mile of the pier at Fremantle. The surrounding sea and land were very strange and beautiful. The green shoal-water, the soft air, with a yellowish warmth, the pure white sand of the beach, and the dark green of the unbroken forest beyond, made a scene almost like fairyland.

(70) Lombard, loc. cit., 22 January 1868.

(71) Cashman, loc. cit., 7 January 1868.

(72) O'Reilly, op. cit., p. 251.

But there was a stern reminder of reality in the little town of Fremantle that lay between the forest and the sea... in the centre of the houses, spread out like a gigantic star-fish, was a vast stone prison.

There was a moment of bustle and noise on the deck through which rang the clear commanding voice...and the next moment the anchor plunged into the sea and the cable roared through the hawse-hole. Every soul on board took a long breath of relief at the end of the voyage<sup>73</sup>.

The Hougoumont came within clear sight of land on 9 January, and at 9.30 a.m. was boarded by water-police who inspected the vessel and provided pilotage. During the afternoon a steam tug-boat flying the governor's flag drew alongside, and an official party led by Governor Hampton came aboard. 'He wore a blue tunic, with epaulettes like a naval officer, white trousers, and a cocked hat', O'Reilly recounts<sup>74</sup>. After official consultation, a Fremantle Herald reporter who accompanied the party was granted an interview with Captain Cozens and the religious instructor, Rev. Williams. When he inquired about the Fenians, Williams replied that their conduct had been 'most civil, obedient and religious', and Cozens added, 'exemplary from beginning to end'<sup>75</sup>. The news greatly interested those ashore, the Herald observed, since opinion on the Fenians had been delicately balanced:

The town was in a state of great excitement, and pretty equally divided between those who sympathised with them and those who from fear or principle were determined to find that they had attempted some desperate deeds during the voyage<sup>76</sup>.

And so conservative loyalists moved by 'fear' would have been somewhat relieved, and those moved by 'principle' somewhat disappointed, with reliable news that the Fenians had been well-behaved en route to Fremantle. It is likely that both groups had to endure considerable ribaldry that day, from the Irish and from other liberal-minded colonists who were either unperturbed by the Fenian furore, or inclined to sympathise with Irish national aspirations.

It seemed, in fact, as if the winds of fate were unkindly disposed

(73) ibid., pp. 251-252.

(74) ibid., p. 252.

(75) Herald, 11 January 1868.

(76) ibid.

towards Fremantle loyalists. Only two months earlier, a royal reception committee served by those avowed Fremantle anti-Fenians, Captain Charles Manning, Lionel Samson MLC, and Edward Newman<sup>77</sup>, had worked day and night preparing scrolls, constructing arches, organizing balls and training a Fremantle cricket eleven in readiness for Alfred's visit - only to learn early in November, after a long and puzzling wait, that the Galatea, for reasons best known to those on board<sup>78</sup>, had sailed straight past Western Australia en route from Cape Town to Adelaide, quite contrary to despatches Hampton had received requesting the colony to make ready for a royal visit<sup>79</sup>. The cricketers had been among the first whose patience had worn thin - 'they are getting tired of waiting for their long expected match with an eleven from the ship', the Inquirer reported<sup>80</sup> - but when news of the Prince's arrival at Adelaide was cabled to Perth, a writer told the Inquirer quite bluntly that Prince Alfred had given them 'the go-by'<sup>81</sup>. However for the most part, loyalists tried to contain their disappointment with stoic fortitude, as the Inquirer sadly commented:

Our flags are half-mast high, and our decorations left to wither in the summer heat. There is but one course left to us, and it is a very simple one - say nothing more about it<sup>82</sup>.

A final indignity for loyalists at Fremantle occurred shortly after the arrival of the armed corvette, Brisk. Late one night the loud report of cannon seaward greatly alarmed the town's most respectable citizens. Many

(77) Herald, 21 September 1867; Inquirer, 9 October 1867.

(78) Buckingham later explained to Hampton that there had been an unfortunate misunderstanding (Buckingham to Hampton, No. 32, 3 March 1868, CO 18-155, PRO 1655, AJCP). A memo to Buckingham from the Admiralty reported that it had considered the Swan River too exposed an anchorage, and King George Sound 300 miles distant from Perth, too small and shallow for the Galatea (attached to Hampton to Buckingham, No. 198, 23 November 1867, CO 18-155, PRO 1655, AJCP). The fact that the Galatea was able to anchor in the Swan for a royal visit in 1869, suggests the Admiralty's explanation may possibly have been a cover up of either a complete oversight, or a Foreign Office caution that Alfred's visit should not coincide with the arrival of Fenian convicts there.

(79) Buckingham to Hampton, No. 30, 1 May 1867. NO 44, 26 June 1867; Hampton to Buckingham No. 198, 23 November 1867; CO 18-155, PRO 1655, AJCP.

(80) 30 October 1867.

(81) 13 November 1867.

(82) 6 November 1867.

of whom 'startling from their beds...rushed all but naked into the streets', the Fremantle Herald recorded<sup>83</sup>. They feared an attempt<sup>84</sup> rescue of the newly arrived Fenians was in process, the report continued, but later learnt 'it was only the night practice of the Man-of-War'<sup>84</sup>. As if losing a Princely visit and being landed with Fenians was not enough, stress on Fremantle loyalists was increased by the presence of the very warship sent to protect them.

More precise conclusions may now be drawn in regard to the inquiries proposed at the beginning of this chapter. As to whether the Fenians received normal treatment aboard the Hougoumont, the answer must surely be that they did not. Far from being singled out for harsh treatment, as had occurred on some transports carrying 1798 rebels to New South Wales<sup>85</sup>, the authorities treated Fenians on the whole more favourably than ordinary convicts. All convicts on board had the same basic diet, daily routine and discipline certainly, but the fact that three-quarters of the Fenians were accommodated in a separate compartment, was the first indication that special consideration had been accorded them. This step, together with official encouragement of 'The Wild Goose', including small privileges awarded to its editorial staff, contributed to a remarkably convivial relationship that progressively developed between the captain and others, including Father Delany, and the Fenian leaders.

On the second issue, whether Fenian behaviour on board justified the

(83) 29 February 1868.

(84) *ibid.*

(85) Two of the most notorious incidents occurred on the Hercules and Atlas, which arrived at Sydney from Ireland in 1802, both carrying large contingents of United Irishmen. Captain Luckyn Betts of the Hercules put down a suspected mutiny by having thirteen convicts shot dead. A trial at Sydney found Betts guilty of manslaughter and fined him £500. On the Atlas, 68 convicts died out of 178 taken on board. An inquiry established that Captain Richard Brooks had negligently kept his convicts too closely confined below deck (H. McQueen, 'Convicts and Rebels', Labour History, No. 15, 1968, p. 16; S.H. Sheedy, 'The history of the Sheedy family and of United Irishmen transported to N.S.W.', ML MSS 1337, pp. 132-7).

'brutal ruffian' image of them projected by conservative loyalists, the answer is again a decided negative. One Fenian only served a time in the punishment cell, none were put into irons, and a few only had privileges withdrawn for minor offences. The captain summed up this record as 'exemplary'. But implied in the ruffian image was something more than a Fenian propensity to violent anarchy; it conveyed also, the idea that they were low-minded, disposs<sup>ess</sup>ed individuals labouring under rebellious delusions created by conspiratorial leaders who exploited their ignorance. The evidence given, however, reveals little factual basis for such a belief. On the contrary, the style and manner of the Fenian concert performances, diary entries, journal contributions and religious observances, create a strong impression that most shared a high-minded consciousness of their Irish culture and a deep commitment to their nation's right to self-determination.

As to the final inquiry, whether Fenian attitudes to their treatment during the voyage laid a basis for subsequent adjustment within the convict system, the answer is an affirmative. From the evidence given, it is clear that the Fenians permitted separate quarters responded well to that arrangement, and that all benefitted from encouragement given to their cultural activities. O'Reilly, for example, left Dartmoor a desperate would-be escapee, and at one point suggested mutiny on the Hougoumont; but once he absorbed himself in 'The Wild Goose', his work on it and the friendships it helped establish seem to have dispelled, at least partly, despondent feelings and rebellious ideas. Enlightened handling of Fenian convicts during the voyage thus contributed as much as could be expected to the establishment among them of reasonably settled attitudes towards convict servitude.

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