

C H A P T E R F O U R

Betsey and Henry

For the first time in over a year, Frederick Fisher knew mental relief. His labours with the Provost Marshal continued undisturbed, and once more he began to garner dump and dollar from his modest wages to slowly re-establish his fortunes.

He heard little of the exploits of his successors in the paper making venture, nor would he in his new security ever be chagrined were they to succeed on the foundation he had laid. He could feel that the partners deserved one another. But the early months brought news from London. Mrs. Ann Fisher had written on 23rd. of September of the previous year:

Dear Frederick, Having an unexpected opportunity of sending a letter by Mr. Smith I gladly embrace it to let you know that we are all in health and hope it will find you the same.

I wish I could say the same of our Circumstances. They have been getting worse ever since you left England. I may truly say, like Don Quixote's little fat man, we have been tossed about like a cork in a kennel, which is the reason I have not been able to keep up the regular Correspondence you wish for, but fully mean to write much oftener than I have hitherto done as soon as I get settled a little more comfortable.

But all things are very indifferent in this Country. Indeed, we often wish ourselves where you are. Everyone speaks highly of it,¹ that were it not for having a family and could manage to come over with any prospect of getting a living on our arrival I would not hesitate about leaving a country I am quite disgusted with.

Our old friend Mr. Potter makes us often laugh when we talk of it. I am convinced if he had the means of coming he would not be long before he paid you a visit. He says it is enough to make a man go thieving on purpose to get over, provided he can't get [there] without. He desires to be remembered to you. I wrote to you and Messrs. [Wild or Wylde]² by their Packet but suppose you have received it long before this time.

Betsey has lost her two children about three months ago. She and her husband are doing well and they are the only ones that are.

In regard to the seeds you wrote for, I need not tell you [it] is quite out of our power to send after [your] having our situation as above. Your Grandmother and Uncle are pretty well and desire to be remembered to you. The rest of the family desire the same. Their good wishes also accompany it.³

Mr. Morgan called upon [us] with your letter. I have not time to say more at present as Mr. Smith is waiting for this. I remain your affectionate mother. A. Fisher

P.S. Your father sends his love to you and desires you will send [letters] as often as you can by persons that are coming home, as that will save a great part of the postage. (DG)

With what pain Frederick reflected upon this new evidence of the dire effects upon his beloved parents of his own past folly, may be imagined. Moreover, he was too loving a brother not to feel for his sister Betsey's loss. And thinking of her, how could he fail to remember his sweetheart, her namesake, of whom there had been no word since he had been convicted. His feelings for the choice of his heart were deep as ever, and he could not imagine that her love for him should have wearied through absence. Her silence was a mystery; and what was even more mysterious was the silence of his family regarding her, as though she had never even existed.

Even the expressed affection of all those precious to him at 51 Willow Street, fortifying him in the shame of his exile, could not diminish the pangs of longing for his own Betsey. He could envy his next younger brother, Samuel, the joy of a devoted wife and a brood of children, and smile nostalgically in remembrance that they had named the second son, born soon after Frederick's transportation, in honour of his distant uncle. Their birthdays fell in the same month.

Between sorrow and homesickness, Frederick found no glimmer of joy; not even in the notion of his family's eagerness to join him.

At the moment it was out of the question that they should join him; but in due time the possibility would stir him passionately and become perhaps the profoundest motive power of his life.

He could not endure yet to unveil to them the debacle of the paper making scheme, the success of which would have been as much for them as for himself. His temperament was generally uncommunicative, and nothing need now be said about the irremedial.

What Frederick did not know then, as he put away his mother's letter with such care that in time to come his murderer could lay his hands upon it, was that Ann Fisher has chosen to conceal from him another calamity which had befallen the family only twelve days before Mr. Smith had provided her with the unexpected opportunity to send a letter.

Robert Henry William, third son of Ann and James Fisher, always called by the family simply Henry, had been sentenced to transportation for seven years on charges of fraud; and at the time of her writing was in prison at Newgate.

Henry was tried at Middlesex Sessions on September 11th, 1818, as a labourer

. . . late of the Parish of St. Giles [he] pretended to Frederick Luther, bookseller of the same parish, that Mistress Conner, of 9 James Street . . . had ordered of him a Maltham's Prayer Book, and thus obtained from him a book worth 19 shillings by fraud, no Mrs. Conner being existing as described. (Witnesses, Frederick Luther, Samuel May and Mary Reynolds.) True Bill found.

2. Second indictment, that . . . being an evil disposed person and daily going about devising, contriving and intending to cheat and defraud the liege subjects of our said Lord the King of their monies heretofore to wit: - On the twenty-seventh day of June . . . with force and arms . . . unlawfully knowingly and designedly did falsely pretend to Richard Baker [of Parish of St. James, Clerkenwell] that he the said Robert Henry William Fisher had then a Book Walk to dispose of + and

+ Probably equivalent to a door to door clientele for book purchases.

...
[had] supplied with books the several persons as follows:

[Here follow twelve names]

... and that each of the said persons had purchased of him . . . within the last four weeks six or seven numbers of different periodical publications and among others, Kelly's New Bible, Fox's Martyrs and Kelly's Geography. Whereas in truth and in fact the said Robert Henry William Fisher had not then a Book Walk to dispose of nor did he supply with books the several persons . . .

And whereas in truth and in fact each of the said persons had not nor had any or either of them purchased of him . . . within the then last four weeks or at any other time six or seven numbers of different periodical publications . . . but in truth and in fact the whole statement made by Fisher to the said Richard Baker was false and fabricated solely for the purpose of fraud and deception. By means of which false pretences . . . Fisher then and there . . . unlawfully, knowingly and designedly did obtain of and from the said Richard Baker the sum of fifteen shillings in monies numbered of the monies of . . . Richard Baker and one James Baker and one Bank Note for the payment and of the value of One Pound payable and secured by and upon the said Note being then due and unsatisfied to the said Richard Baker and James Baker the proprietors thereof with intent to cheat and defraud against the form of the Statutes in such case made and provided . . . (PRO, London)

Nine witnesses were sworn and a True Bill found.

Ann Fisher possessed in a marked degree a reluctance to convey bad news to any of her family it might adversely affect. When she was obliged by circumstances to do so, she managed it with astonishing understatement. On the occasion of Henry's conviction she may have postponed the evil day of informing Frederick on the self-induced persuasion that it would be more appropriate to let the news coincide with definite details of the date and place of his transportation. If she reasonably supposed that seven years banishment meant that Henry was destined for servitude in New South Wales, she would in some

degree be gratified. She could then be assured that her best beloved Frederick, hope of the family, would be able to find solace from the nearness of at least one of his kin.

Of course, there was a great difference between these two sons. On Frederick she and her husband had lavished their learning, had educated him, with not inconsiderable pride in the result. But by the time Henry had been born, the exigences of their struggling, if respectable business and the demands which a growing family made when Europe's turmoil pressured them, exhausted all practical means of turning him into a scholar. In fact, although he ^{was} fairly quick-witted and articulate he had never obtained command of the simple matter of spelling. Among the discouragements of the times, it had seemed of little importance. What really mattered, in Ann's view, was that Henry was deeply fond of his eldest brother and had greatly missed him. And besides, at a time when life in the penal colony seemed to have superiority over that in dear old England, the real calamity was simply in separation.

Ann knew Frederick's temperament full well - knew his reserve, all the more worrying to her because of his intense feelings of affection, ambition and love of home. In his letters she had seen hints of desperate rage bursting out from overlong repression. His outward casualness was deceptive, she knew; so that when he poured out the poignancy of his longings - when some demon took charge of his pen as in defiance of his will, she could feel afraid for the desolation of his soul in exile.

Ann would not, therefore, add one mite to Frederick's burden by any premature word concerning Henry. If she had chosen, she who was the embodiment of fortitude, could have overwhelmed Frederick with ill news.

In the years since the Battle of Waterloo (and the year of Frederick's lapse) vast changes had occurred in the realm of Great Britain under the momentum of the industrial revolution and the ruling classes' mania for Empire. In agriculture methods were being revolutionized as ~~the~~ magnates bought up with wealth amassed from ~~the~~ sweated labour extensive tracts of arable land which formerly had been the domains of small yeoman and crofter. Thus might they exalt themselves by mere possessions into the upper echelons of the social order; yes, even into the nobility, since nothing impressed the incurably vulgar

and spendthrift Hanoverians than the ostentation of ill-gotten riches.

Hordes of dispossessed rural workers had been forced to make their way into the urban areas of the country where industrialisation was growing at a rate which wrought appalling social conditions for the working people. Liverpool and London (with its first million population) teemed with half-starved and too often shelterless people in quest of means of livelihood. From this disorganised mass, factory owners selected the best material at wages suitable to their own interests, but which kept the unfortunate employees on the edge of destitution. The time had not yet arrived when it would be suddenly discovered that working men were tools of astounding potentiality which required and repaid due care. In Manchester, where the cotton mills and coal mines were increasing in importance, increasing numbers of women and children as the cheapest and most tractable form of labour, were being absorbed to perform arduous tasks under the most deplorable conditions which fatigued them to death: the staple diet had degenerated to one of oatmeal and water in many extensive areas.

The nutritional decline for the labouring populace had been brought about by the operation of the Corn Laws promulgated in the interests of the big landowners. They wanted cheap foreign grain to be excluded from Great Britain in order to retain for themselves the swollen profits to which they had become accustomed by the demands of the Napoleonic wars. The price of bread became exorbitant, even to costing one shilling a loaf. This just equalled a labourer's daily earnings. On that meagre staple a family had to sustain life.

The Luddite riots of 1811 and 1812 had done nothing to bring about amelioration of the people's condition during the intervening years. The worsening now of the social evils due to the supremacy of the landowning aristocracy and industrialists who maintained 'parliament' and the monarchy as their special weapons against the unorganized poor, would in the summer of 1819 see sixty thousand people gather to hear the radical Leigh Hunt, at St. Peter's Fields, Manchester, where they were fired upon by mounted yeomanry. Eleven would die; four hundred people including one hundred women would be wounded in the atrocity made possible by the nervousness of the authorities.

Fears of a repetition of the French Revolution - in Great Britain - had not died down; nor had those responsible for the oppression of

and degradation of the people - in spite of the ominous signs of popular revolt - made any significant step towards relieving the common distress.

There was nothing extravagant in Ann Fisher's observation by letter to Frederick, that the family often wished to be where he was, away from the theoretical satisfactions of living in a free society offered to the rest of the world as the supreme civilization of its time. Out of her vast reading of classical philosophy she could find no comfort. Had not Plato characterized the democratic system as the most corruptible of all systems, harbouring in itself the seed of its own destruction. To be sure, she saw no evidence of democracy about her, so perhaps she was concerning herself about a chimera. But then, for five centuries the light of humanity had been Magna Carta, which was a curiosity set up like a pagan god whose will had to be imagined for him and abrogated at his subjects' convenience.

The immediate problem of Henry was his lack of training in any field, which might disadvantage him at Port Jackson. ^{Ann Fisher} She had to satisfy herself whether or not his excursion into petty crime could have been a deliberate attempt to escape from the prevailing conditions in London. At 21 years old, at large in a seething community, it was difficult to avoid becoming involved in trouble. Violent mobs roamed the streets, unhampered by authority. Eminent persons suffered at the hands of desperadoes. Innocent pedestrians in the ill-lit streets were liable to be seized by unscrupulous individuals who could hope by systematized perjury to procure a lawfully-provided reward for bringing the hapless victims to certain conviction. It was a mode of livelihood in bitterly hard times.

By comparison, indeed, Macquarie's domain in New South Wales was ~~relatively~~ a paradise. The merits of exile there, developed as a frequent topic in the bosom of the family, may have swayed the impetuous Henry to arrange for his own transportation. It would mean one mouth fewer to feed. Besides, Henry was not indispensable to James Fisher's ailing business as printer and engraver as now was Samuel. 'A man might go thieving on purpose . . . ' Verily, it was so, Ann Fisher knew. Moreover hardened felons were known to have obtained their return to New South Wales from the disillusionments of victorious England. Still, it was disagreeable for one who was essentially God-fearing and upright.

Henry's course had been charted in another direction, for theft was not his metier. The tactics he chose contained an element of the absurd, inasmuch as his plan was over-elaborate in proportion to the pecuniary gain it brought. At the same time, ^{it} might have been calculated relative to the penalty it would carry.

The Convict Indents, when at last Henry was entered for transmission to Port Jackson, described him as brown haired, hazel eyed and of pale complexion, but lacking an inch or so of Frederick's height. He was shipped from England on the Baring, which landed him at Sydney on June 26th, 1819. Frederick was ^{by then,} ready for him, and by virtue of the good graces in which he stood with the Provost Marshal could make immediate contact with his errant junior. There were many items of news about London and his people which Frederick burningly desired to learn without delay. The waiting had been oppressive since he had learned the truth.

When he confronted Henry and had gotten over the first impulse as senior son of the Fisher family to assume an air of disapproval of Henry's escapade, the questions nearest to heart surged out. Who better than one's own brother fresh from the family hearth and the old Shoreditch environs could repaint in faithful colours the lost land? Who else could revive the suggestion of voice and touch of the loved parents? Henry went further.

It was inevitable that Frederick should enquire after Betsey, the sweetheart whose shadowy figure flitted on the farthest fringe of the family interest. If Frederick had been overbearing in his criticism of Henry for following a fraternal example which had been better ignored, Henry may be deemed to have spiritedly retorted, and this, not from unkindness.

At all events, within the first few weeks of Henry's sojourn in Port Jackson, Frederick would have learned for the first time, and perhaps in an unpleasant fashion, that the silent Betsey had borne Frederick a daughter after his conviction at the Surrey Assizes. The shocked Frederick may have been taunted callously, in the way of younger brothers, with the good fortune of ~~already~~ ^{already} being rid of the responsibility of supporting the infant, ~~three~~ three years old! Now was clear Ann Fisher's reticence in the matter. The law was piously unrelenting

about illegitimacy, which was a monopoly of the nobility who could afford it. Failure of a man to provide financial support for his natural children was liable to lead to his committal to prison. Not only was moral turpitude abhorrent in the lower classes, it was likely to lead to strains upon charity. Should a man already be a Prisoner of the Crown, extension of his servitude would follow. Then surely, Betsey had proved her devotion by keeping silent. From the same worthy notion of protecting Frederick, his mother too had shared in a tacit conspiracy.

The thought of his being shielded from knowledge which, coming after protracted delay, only deepened and confused Frederick's emotions. Though some might choose to regard him as a philanderer, his reaction was one of grief that he should lose years of contact with the little life which henceforward should have to be a guiding light in his exile. Out of all the darkness and anxiety had come a beacon to which all his efforts must now be bent to reach. At last, here was meaning.

Whatever passed between the brothers during the time they had together at Port Jackson can only be conjectured beyond the certainty that Henry had been the courier of the news of Frederick's parenthood. Equally certain it is that their reunion terminated in a bitter quarrel.

Presently, Henry was assigned to employment beyond the Blue Mountains crossed for the first time seven years previously. The exploration had opened up a vast area of good land which altered the agricultural prospects of the colony very materially. Within a short period, thanks to Macquarie's expeditious ordering of a road to be built by convict gangs, men and settlers thrust westward to take up grants of land hurriedly surveyed, to wrest from it the wealth lying in its fertility. The 'evil disposed', devising, contriving, cheating Henry, as the Middlesex Assizes branded him, was as capable of hard work, ingenuity and devoted service - given the chance to employ them - as any of his non-convict superiors. A little dismayed perhaps by the conflict which had arisen between himself and Frederick, he applied himself assiduously to every task given to his hand.

In Sydney, Frederick found new inspiration for his personal economies. No longer did he stint for penny or dump for the mere

satisfaction of possession, or out of habitual anxiety for his personal future: every coin was tribute to his child whom he drew passionately to himself in imagination. She was his family, his own morsel of life in which all that was worthy was to be created. He saved for the child against the day when fate should bring them together and he could take up the joyous responsibility of a father. He could feel none of the shame conventionally obligatory upon begetters of children out of wedlock. His only remorse flowed from powerlessness to be its immediate support, to stand protectively with it and its mother.

Nowadays he could dream, as only an insular man can dream, of a time when his life would be re-ordered and made complete in marriage with Betsey. In affectionate honour of one of his favourite sisters, Frederick named the child Harriet, at least for himself. It may have been that no respectable font around London would be subjected to contamination by the submission of a child which was extra-nuptial. 'Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven,' was all right in its way; but convention was convention, after all. Adopting a penurious mode of living without sacrificing appearances, Fisher cast around for some more lucrative opening for his energies. He grew increasingly impatient to amass money in the glowing infatuation of a young father for his first-born.

While awaiting the presentation of a new opening, Frederick faithfully performed his duties for the Provost Marshal, who did not miss observing the unvarying correctness of his conduct, the precision of his clerical work and his capacity for industry. By now, Frederick was beginning to think in terms of legalistic jargon, so deeply immersed had he become in the documentation of law enforcement for the Territory of New South Wales.

Privately, Frederick tormented himself still about the silence of the mother of his child, hungering for a crumb of news how they were faring; even more, some word to say what the child was like - whom she favoured, for so ardent is the desire of the parent for immortality in the offspring. At times he could reproach himself, feeling that he was reaping the full harvest of his youthful essay into crime. Might Betsey not have concluded he was no longer worthy of notice while she revelled in delirium of motherhood? Might he not wonder also

what Christian strength had allowed his mother to pass over his relationship with Betsey without a shadow of admonition, she who was punctilious on the point of good manners and seemly conduct?

They were truly married who truly loved, and irrevocably divorced when love between them faded. From this position he was not likely to shift. There were those who would think it perverse.

Notwithstanding the security of his employment with the Provost Marshal who was personally benign, the possibility of greater financial advancement led Frederick to relinquish his position. Towards the end of the year (1819) he became a clerk with the partnership of Daniel Cooper and William Hutchinson, proprietors of the jingoistically-named Waterloo Flour Mill.⁴ His having been over two years with J. T. Campbell his reputation was high. Clerical ability was at a premium in a colony where so many of the community were illiterate or semi-illiterate. In this new field, Fisher may have anticipated finding the opportunities he sought for obtaining wealth. At heart he was a dealer; costing up merchandise, billing customers, and all the incidental processing inspired a vision of steady profit. The abstractions of law were pale comforts beside the tangible evidence of monetary gain.

Besides, Daniel Cooper was one of the wealthy merchants of the colony. In Sydney Town he was partner with one Levy in a successful emporium, and he was proprietor of the Waterloo Stores. Cooper's interests extended to agriculture and horse breeding. He scorned nothing that could be sold for cash or bartered, be it colony-grown tobacco, cereal grain, dried peas and other produce, timber - anything! Frederick saw that Cooper was a man worthy of study as one who could smell a profit even better than could Simeon Lord or the Pits Row miser, Terry.

After he had become well settled in the routine of Waterloo Flour Mill, Frederick received information that an attempt was to be made to sell the paper mill site at Lachlan Swamps. On July 1st, 1820, he advertised in the Sydney Gazette warning the public against purchasing the site, as owing to his retaining an interest in it no transfer of the property could be made without his concurrence. The advertisement was repeated in the next issue of the newspaper a week later.⁵

Under Daniel Cooper's watchful eye, Frederick's competence in the new field of activity grew steadily. The enlargement of his scope for increasing financial gains did not develop sufficiently to satisfy his impatient nature. At the end of a year at the flour mill, Frederick returned to the office of the Provost Marshal in his old capacity.

It is possible that about this time some settlement concerning the paper mill site was reached and that Frederick was able to extricate himself finally from it with satisfactory profit, since there appear no further references to his involvement with it. Such a transaction could have been instrumental in his leaving the flour mill for the prestige of the Provost Marshal's office, with finance more secure.

Since the arrival of Commissioner John Thomas Bigge in the previous year (1819), Governor Macquarie's ambitious developmental schemes had received a check. At every turn Macquarie was made to feel the disapproval of the regal watchdog, whose authority extended to the point of his being able to override Macquarie's opinions. The Governor was required to give good reasons for opposing anything against which Bigge had set his will, and these were many. Particularly, Bigge frowned upon the erection of imposing buildings such as Macquarie had planned, notwithstanding their utility was of an urgent order. The humiliation of Bigge's supervision, and consciousness of the tacit disapprobation in Whitehall that it signified, as well as the smarting awareness that his enemies, the most disloyal and self-seeking in the colony were enjoying a triumph, aged Macquarie rapidly.

Bigge already had noted for the information of Earl Bathurst that manufacturing was making headway in the penal settlement. He observed that one Simeon Lord, for example, 'an intelligent manufacturer . . . with great industry and success established manufactories of cloth and hats that have been beneficial to the colony.' This was not a pleasant admission to have to make.

Judge Barron Field, who had managed after a short stay in the colony to become embroiled in politics and the composition of dull poems, and was himself perturbed by the spirit of enterprise and democratic opinion springing up, warned Bigge:

I see the shadow of the spirit of American revolt at

taxation rising in the shape of a petition for trial by jury; it will next demand legislative assembly; and end in declaring itself a nation of freebooters and pirates.

If his own apprehensions had not been sufficient, this reminder of the imperial trauma over the American colonists' rebelliousness, helped Commissioner Bigge stiffen the official disapproval of all sense of independence and initiative and led him to report to London:

As I do not conceive that it is consistent with the policy by which this country has always been guided, to encourage in any of the colonies, the establishment and growth of manufactures . . . I think that no encouragement should be given, in the shape of convict skill and labour, to such manufactures as interfere with either objects, or that require a number of men to be confined to one spot. The only manufactures hitherto established are those of Mr. Lord, for coarse cloths, stockings and blankets, and two for hats. From the specimens . . . your Lordship will be enabled to form a judgment of the progress that has already been made in New South Wales in the manufacture of a principal article of export from the mother country, and of the expediency of discontinuing any encouragement to its further Progress.

The litany of the anti-emancipists was never allowed to fall silent - that no matter how much it benefited the colony and made life there more supportable, profitable convict enterprise must be frustrated. 'In the beginning was the Word . . .' and for this rapacious element, the Word was that New South Wales was a penal settlement where the outcasts from Great Britain were to be unremittingly punished for daring in any extremity to violate the laws of property. For in reality, property was holier than life - at least other people's life.

Macquarie had been weak in treating his charges as human beings, and the sooner such nonsense was abolished, the better.

It was a broken and much relieved Macquarie who found himself after several requests, given leave to vacate the post of Governor.

On December 1st, 1821, he was succeeded by Sir Thomas Brisbane, at the reading of whose commission in Hyde Park, Sydney, Macquarie spoke in farewell to the populace.

The loss of Lachlan Macquarie was keenly felt by the majority of settlers in New South Wales, where officialdom was prone to regard majorities as of no significance - unless backed by main force. The sense of loss was not so sharp in the first years when Brisbane proved a not unfriendly Governor (perhaps more interested in his hobby of astronomy than in delving into the problems of the settlement), as later when the full effects of Bigge's recommendations came into force.

Frederick Fisher may have been among the many to be dismayed by the ending of Macquarie's term. The goodwill of the departed Macquarie was commemorated throughout the land by the affectionate ditty,

Macquarie was the prince of men,
Australia's pride and joy!
We ne'er shall see his like again;
Here's to the old Viceroy.⁺

But if Macquarie's ~~day~~ had run out, whose reward for twelve years of hard labour, more exacting and painful than any sentence of similar duration imposed upon a convict, slighting, cynical and immeasurably ungrateful, his own, Frederick may have reflected, might with God's help be more blessed. Whatever his weaknesses and enthusiasms - which were always amiable - Lachlan Macquarie had built nobly and had inspired hope among his community of exiles, in the most difficult conditions.

Fisher may have perceived too, for he was discriminating, that whatever Commissioner Bigge might have recommended, or what mischief may have been engineered by the anti-emancipists, the regeneration of convicts, remote from the daily repressions of class-riven Britain, had in the main advanced too far to be nullified. A sense of nationhood had sprung up spontaneously, hostile to the infamies of rank and privilege. Judge Barron Field had been disagreeably prescient, to an extent.

⁺ Anonymous verse in Rev. J.D. Lang's notes to Poems: Sacred & Secular

During these ominous times, no solution had been found for the mystery of Betsey and Frederick's child. The few letters Frederick received from England between 1818 and 1822 did nothing to unshroud it. Silence. The tormented young father could only think that Henry had betrayed what for the family in London had been agreed secrecy, since no other word came forth, even in spite of his appeals. No denial. No assent. He could only feel wrong^d, cheated; but the great love his parents bore him was not to be weakened by the thought of his parental anguish. Their first duty lay in the protection of their own first-born from the implacability of the law.

By 1822 Fisher's various employments had brought him into acquaintance with most of the notables of the settlement, and he had good knowledge of what was going on in official circles. For instance, he came upon the fact that James Meehan, deputy Surveyor General who was incidentally Collector of Quit Rents for the Crown was no longer able to carry out the duties of the latter office, owing to failing health. Meehan had given twenty-two years of splendid service to the colony, during which he had performed an immense quantity of surveying. The privations, discomforts and physical demands upon him added their burden to his mounting age. At length he was incapable of continuing.

Meehan and Frederick were acquainted, possibly not alone through the Bank Mill venture, and it would seem Meehan formed a good opinion of the young Ticket of Leave man. At all events, the deputy Surveyor General would be expected to nominate a suitable replacement for either or both of the offices he was relinquishing. Fisher, of course, was no surveyor of land, but he had other capacities which commended him for the remaining position.

Possibly upon some temporary basis, Frederick Fisher was nominated and confirmed in the duties of Collector of Quit Rents, which duties he took up prior to June, 1822. During the following August, Meehan resigned formally both his positions.⁶

As deputy to the somewhat over-rated Surveyor General, John Oxley, Meehan had received annually £136. 17. 6d from the Treasury, and a similar amount from the Police Fund as Collector of Quit Rents.⁷ The

Collector was required to travel over the whole territory of New South Wales, wherever people were settled upon land grants, at least once a year. The regulation annual payment, fixed over a number of years in relation to the value of the acreage granted was received by the Collector and recorded. At one stage the Quit Rent was equivalent to five per cent. of the land value. (Grants were made only to free settlers or convicts who had been pardoned or had received their freedom by servitude.)

It says much for Frederick Fisher that while still holding Ticket of Leave, with several years of his sentence still to run, he was considered worthy to be taken into the government's employ as custodian of some of its revenues. His notable service with the Provost Marshal certainly would have directed official attention to him when the need for a Collector arose, independent of whatever goodwill Meehan may have shown towards him.

Preferment, however, was not lightly given. The work called for hardihood, knowledge of law governing lands granted, as well as a flair for legal expression. Besides integrity, the position called for firmness, sound judgment and courage.

The dual positions of Collector and Surveyor, especially in the early years of the colony's development and its population was small, could be adequately managed by Meehan. But as the tempo of exploration increased and there was a constant issuing of grants wherever new and productive areas were opened up, surveying alone became formidable. Arrears of work accumulated. Within certain limits the mapping out of a grant temporarily established upon geographical features might be delayed over a long period without more clamour than an impatient grantee might raise, and little harm done. But the Quit Rents accounts had to be satisfactorily made up to suit the needs of the Colonial Treasurer. The demands upon the possessors of grants were therefore imperative.

It is not clear if Frederick was appointed Collector at the same rate of salary as had been received by James Meehan; and it is difficult to imagine that so hazardous an office should have been rewarded on a lesser scale. Subsequent events suggest that at this

period there was an improvement in Frederick's finances, so that he probably received the customary salary for collecting Quit Rents, but in addition pecuniary advantages from acting as bailiff when necessary. Very likely he earned commissions from the duties of distraining chattels of defaulting grantees and from the sale of properties entailed by inability of people to meet their obligations. Possibly, too, he received commissions on collections.⁹

Insofar as the new work satisfied his restlessness and desire to acquire material possessions for the future of his child, it suited Frederick. A horse provided by the government took him wherever duty required, which might be up to 170 miles into the 'interior', as far as settlement had then reached. The task was not easier for him than it had been for the greatly experienced Meehan, for his youthful stamina did not lessen the intricacies of his assignments. The travelling was rough, whether he went mounted or with the benefit of a gig. The privations were severe, due either to the exposure to the extremes of stunning summer heat or winter cold.

The loneliness necessitated by the fact of his carrying on the person quantities of government money, threw his mind upon the enigmas of the future, or launched him into sad-sweet fantasies of reunion with Betsey and the bliss of beholding his daughter. His natural insularity protected him from those longings for casual company on far flung routes, and thus from too easy access to absconded convicts turned bushranger who lived precariously and brutally on wayfarers. The larger the collection of rents, the greater risk there was in passing singlehanded through the narrow defiles of primitive forest.

Meehan would have been accompanied by assistants necessary to his surveying which was combined with the collection of Quit Rents, and consequently would be relatively safe from ~~native~~ bushrangers.

Then, also, courage was required of the new collector to press government demands upon grantees who were in as dire need of ready cash as were any of the skulking bandits along the roads. With the latter, the pistol he carried gave some assurance in moments of difficulty; but only his personal qualities could guide him successfully

through ordeals such as those requiring him to seize and sell the chattels of settlers in financial straits, or to officially dispossess in more complete form, many who had over-rated their ability and under-rated their resources to carve from the towering opposition of nature, the smiling and profitable farm of their dreams. Such work demanded determination - it might almost be said, heartlessness. Fisher was not heartless, but he was punctilious in performing duties to the letter. One advantage, if such it might be called, lay in his ability to hide any feelings of repugnance towards executing the law against the merely unfortunate. He had had long practice in hiding his feelings. The vision of a secure future for his child sustained him, so that he could act in a detached way for a cause against which no argument could prevail.

There were opportunities for private trading of which Frederick would eagerly avail himself. Who could be in a better position to arrange useful deals over the countryside than the one man who would know every other settler's special need? Everything had a value in the young colony - an axe, a spade, a hoe were treasures when iron ploughs were sufficiently rare and new land had to be opened by main strength. The whole Quit Rent run was a mart where he could promote barter or commission purchases of calico, bags of flour, other staples as well as seeds. So many trifles were needed in the isolated hamlets where bark cabins were the hopeful preludes to rich homesteads. These activities would be merely incidental to his main work, but they could not be ignored.

Fisher pursued his way westward where in 1813 William Blaxland, Lieut. Lawson and W.C. Wentworth had successfully cross^{ed} the Blue Mountains to discover a rich hinterland for settlement. He went 20 miles southwest along the road^{which} led to Liverpool on the Georges River. And on, fourteen miles more to reach the settlement which so short a time before (1820) Governor Macquarie had named Campbell Town. Pressing on through the District of Airds, he came by Appin, a meagre hamlet, and next the territory of Illawarra, rich in grazing tracts and great stands of cedar. More southerly from the fork at Campbell Town ran the vast and uncertain 'new country' of Argyle, to which the more avid

land-takers were trekking as they already had done into Illawarra. There seemed no limit to the common hunger for land. Where they went with their herds, Frederick presently followed and exacted the government's due.

Frederick was now at the peak of his manhood, thirty years old, confident, acquisitive, shrewd and observant, withal physically toughened by his occupations, so remote from the past, hazy, virtually sedentary life of the fine printer and engraver. His slight frame had the resilience of a steel spring; the deceptively small and delicate hands which wrote so delightfully, hesitated not before any task more seemly to gross members. The firmness of his drive informed his body. Among his observations was the fact that the keenest merchants of the colony were investing in cattle, wheatgrowing and particularly in the acquisition of land. The lastnamed and beef were becoming increasingly valuable.

It would have been strange had Frederick remained impervious to the call of land ownership when so many around him were bent upon securing their future and that of their posterity by means of it. Was it not the basis of economic value? The surge of transportation from Great Britain where the troubles of the common people were in no wise eased, made property ownership more desirable. Fisher had come to have a feeling for property in company with the hordes of other convicts whose ancestors might never have conceived it possible to own a square foot of land. A race bred from generations of vassals found an appetite for possession of some portion of that land which Whitehall distributed in the certainty that Australia, lock, stock and barrel was a liability. As he followed his routine, Frederick studied the possibilities of becoming owner of land in fee simple - by purchase - since he was as yet ineligible to obtain it by grant.

Behind the growing liking for the role of landowner - even of rentier - arose a passionately tinted vision of the child of his body whom he had never seen. And time was fleeting. Of his servitude seven of his fourteen years had dragged out and only now it seemed the tide of fortune was setting in his favour. Now, all was urgent. He

looked for likely properties which his growing prosperity brought within the bounds of his desire.

Fisher's time was not spent wholly in the countryside. Sydney Town's quaint and bewildering sprawl contained many grants from which he had to collect rent. Grants of a few acres in the heart of the settlement and farming areas within view of the Tank Stream came within his scope. If he had not been already well-known on account of his paper manufactory and his employment with the Provost Marshal, he unavoidably became familiar as the government collector of Quit Rents. On June 3rd in 1822, he was surely grimly interested and maliciously amused to receive for his immediate attention a document as follows:

AUTHORITY TO DISTRAIN - John Oxley, Surveyor General, empowering Mr. Frederick Fisher of 56 Phillip Street, Sydney, to distrain the Goods and Chattels of Samuel Terry or the tenant in possession in the house and premises situate as described on the other side¹⁰ for Eight pounds three shillings and 5d. being 4 years 3 months rent due to the Crown for same, on the First Day of January now long past, and for your so doing this shall be your sufficient warrant. (ML)

What bitter memories of Terry's complicity in the wrecking of his manufactory lightened Frederick's footsteps the short distance from his lodging to the Pits Row miser's roost around the corner! Of course, he would not have the satisfaction of actually selling up Terry; Terry was too wealthy to let a few pounds imperil his larger interests however painful it was for him to meet his just debts. But there would be something enjoyable in meeting eye to eye such an enemy while in possession of the full authority of the law to make the older man squirm. If it was not much recompense for what he had suffered at the Lachlan Swamps where the mill stood rotting and useless, it was nevertheless sweet. He could envisage as he came within view of Terry's inn the loathsome ritual of Terry's calling a servant to fetch up drinks to smoothen the awkward

moment, with the reputed sniffing of the servant's breath against the possibility that the rascal had tossed off a drop himself while opportunity offered.

Whatever he anticipated, Frederick meant to show Terry by the plainest expression short of speech, the contempt he felt for one who could undermine so brave an adventure as manufacture of the colony's special need - paper. He would have to be content with a simple show of power.

NOTES

1. Stories reaching England often pictured New South Wales as a sort of Promised Land, partly because of exaggerated accounts of the success of some former convicts. The unsavoury side of life in the colony was lost to view - the harshness of the free settlers towards assigned labour, as well as that of some officials and even emancipated convicts. The latter, at last coming to prosperity treated their assigned workers as they themselves had been treated - as beasts of burden to be worked to the limit of their endurance and on inadequate rations and shelter. Inhumanity towards their employees was rife, and the wretched assignees were subdued by threat of being turned over to magistrates. Some of these, too, were users of assigned labour and were no whit less cruel and stupid than the villains who appealed to them.
2. Ann Fisher's writing here is illegible. The view that Wylde is name intended is based upon remarks by Frederick in a later letter concerning the Judge Advocate (John Wylde) and his father (Thomas), Clerk of the Peace. It almost suggests that the Wylde had been personally known to the Fisher family in London. The Wylde arrived at Port Jackson per the ship Elizabeth, October 5th, 1817. Probably one of them carried a letter from Ann to her son, who appears to have been 'close' to the Wylde, such as to have expected from that direction important assistance in gaining remission of a portion of the term as prisoner. Frederick's bitterness towards John Wylde (later on) for his inaction in that respect conveys a sense of betrayal.
3. This letter alone is sufficient refutation of William Kerr's fanciful claim that after Frederick's conviction his family, - 'enraged by the disgrace . . . took little further notice of him.'
4. The industrial suburb of Waterloo could well have gained its name from the presence of the Waterloo Flour Mill, commemorating the decisive battle.
5. Nothing appears to have developed from the Clarkson-Duncan agreement for setting up another paper mill on Clarkson's site. In after years, although John Hutchinson claimed to have made 'white' paper among other products, and has been considered questionable, the only paper mill shown to have existed after

the Fisher-Duncan debacle, was one 'old paper mill' in the same area. This was possibly identical with Bank Mill which had evidently passed into the possession of Simeon Lord who had his other ^(woollen) mills in the vicinity. There appears no positive evidence that it ever operated after Fisher's activities there. Had Hutchinson succeeded as he claimed, to produce 'white' paper, Lord was not the man to allow so conspicuous an achievement to die on the branch as it were.

The NSW Census of 1828 does not reveal any George Duncan or Warren in the occupation of paper makers. Even as soon as 1825, John Busby, engineer, reported to the government on the prospects of finding for Sydney an adequate water supply to augment or replace that of the heavily contaminated Tank Stream:

. . . I was led to examine the large lagoon in the vicinity of the old paper mill, from which the Waterloo Mills draw part of their supply . . . the water is perfectly transparent and colourless . . . so abundant . . . If the Old Paper Mill and the located ground towards the lagoon be procured, the embankment already made may be raised . . . and an additional reservoir be thus obtained.

The term Old Paper Mill, implies that it was then derelict or at least long unused. It may have been acquired by Simeon Lord on account of its valuable streamside frontage in connection with his cloth and woollen mills, and not for any paper-making potential.

In 1828 the government was desirous of removing industrial undertakings from the water sources at the Lachlan Swamps, and on December 8th of that year, Simeon Lord wrote to the Colonial Secretary demanding £5,000 compensation for the surrender of his rights in water supplying his paper mill for the purposes of an alternative Sydney water supply (DG) No agreement could be reached, and it is understood that the Privy Council was resorted to. A figure much in excess of the original claim was granted to Lord's widow.

6. Historical Records of Australia, Vol. X.
7. Not an inconsiderable salary, though not munificent either considering

the hardships entailed.

8. James Meehan's application for a pension was granted subject to his settlement of the Quit Rent Accounts.
9. The NSW State Archives contain Frederick Fisher's personal notebooks and loose papers showing descriptions of land grants on which he collected Quit Rents, with his action marked upon them. Calculations of receipts, commissions and expenses are also shown. Another such notebook is in the possession of the Dixon Gallery.
10. Description on reverse of Authority to Distrain goods and chattels of Samuel Terry, June 3, 1822:
Bounded on the N. side by Skinner's Lease and bearing E. $4\frac{1}{2}$ degrees N. 133 feet; on the E. or front side by Pits Row Pitt Street bearing S. $3\frac{3}{4}$ degrees E. 142 feet; on the S. side by a line W $2\frac{3}{4}$ degrees E; and on the W. side by the Brook leading to the Tanks; comprehends the leases made to Rosetta Marsh and Thomas Evestaff. (ML)

NOTE - Pits Row got its name from the presence of a series of pits which were sunk to receive water for storage, from the Tank Stream.