**Characters**

***Reminiscences of Bendigo by the Almanac***

***Written by Peter MacIver***

Then as now, Bendigo was full of characters. In these three *Reminiscences*, it is a wizard oil king, a foul mouthed cockatoo and a drunken Scotsmen. There are many more in Scott’s stories. I chose these three for no other reason than they tickled my fancy.

"THE WIZARD OIL KING."

December 19, 1908. “I first met Frank Weston, the "Wizard Oil King," in Bendigo at Charing Cross, in 1864 or 1865. He drove up in one of the old-fashioned Albert cars, and drew a large crowd around him by his splendid singing and good banjo playing, and last, but not least his exquisitely droll story-telling, wherein he described with graphic effect his first landing, in Adelaide, when he was escorted to his hotel by a brass band and welcomed by the Governor of South Australia. After he had got his audience fully interested he burst into laughter, and said, "That is what it ought to have been, but wasn't." The crowd roared with laughter, and the genial Frank then started on his Wizard oil, what it had cured, what it could, cure, and said that it is only reason for selling it was because he was a public benefactor, and all that he did was for the benefit of humanity. Then he would cry, "Just a bottle or two left; who will have it; only 3/ each." He caught on, and the first night sold 36 dozen.

He did things in great style, was always well dressed, and wore a frock coat and stylish silk hat, and put up at the Shamrock hotel when in Bendigo. He travelled all through Victoria and did a roaring business, and after a time established agencies for the sale. It was really good for toothache, sprains and other light ailments, and the profits must have been enormous. A chemist told me that it could be made up and sold for 2/3 per dozen, wholesale, and then realise a fair profit.

After I went to Melbourne I once more came in contact with Weston when he started the famous Christy Minstrel Troupe. Weston and Hussey was the firm. I was at the opening performance at St. George's Hall, Bourke-street, and from 7 o'clock till the opening time the crush was terrific. I was there, having had tea in town so as to be there early. You had to go upstairs to St. George’s Hall and when I was at the bottom my hat was sent off my head right, to the top. After a great struggle I got up there, and on stooping down to pick up my hat I found a sovereign. I advertised next day that I had found a sum of money, but it was never claimed. The performance was a wonderful success, and for months ran to crowded houses.

The team disbanded after a time, and I lost sight of Frank for a long time; in fact, I heard he had died in Africa, when I ran across him in Melbourne, and he gave me a most interesting account of his travels there, where, at one time, he had enough to retire on, but lost it in speculations, he was about Melbourne for a time, and again disappeared and we thought this time there will be no return. I was at Rutherglen for a short period in 1894, when Frank Weston turned into my shop spotless in attire, and still on the Wizard oil. He gave a free entertainment in the Town Hall, at which I was present, and there was a crowded house, and before starting he said, "Well, surely I see my old friend, Mr. Scott here tonight, whom I first met at Bendigo," and I told the miners the story, and said his oil was good. He sold 2 dozen that night, and after the performance we had a good time.”

Interestingly, David Scott also went into the oil business when he and Harry Boyle owned Boyle and Scott’s. There are many adverts in the newspapers of the 1880s advertising the wonderful curative qualities of “St. Jacobs Oil” for sports injuries.

"A BLASPHEMOUS COCKATOO”

December 26, 1908. “Mr. Allan, of the Crusoe hotel, Crusoe Gully, had a cockatoo that was the champion swearer of the Bendigo district, and many visitors to Bendigo used to drive out to hear the wonderful talking bird. He was a caution, and no mistake, and would almost make your hair stand on end when you heard him for the first, time. Some of the visitors offered very large sums for master cocky, but Mr. Allan would not sell. He was at Crusoe when I left Bendigo, but I heard about him very often after that. When W. G. Grace's team was at Bendigo in 1874 some of the cricketers were driven out to Allan's. Jim Lillywhite, the well-known Sussex cricketer was one of them, and he was so taken with the bird's prowess that I believe he offered £100 for the bird, which was refused. I never heard anything about master cocky since, so I suppose he has passed in his checks, and moulted his feathers long before this time.”

"THE MAN FROM THE WHIPSTICK."

January 30, 1909. “I remember a bushman who said he came from the Whipstick made a terrible hullabaloo, and threatened to paint Bendigo red, make his appearance in View Point one night. He was a ferocious-looking Scotchman, of stalwart build, and looked as if it had been many a long year since his hair or whiskers had been cut. He was over 6ft. high, and offered to take on the whole of the police force if necessary.

We were returning home from a gymnasium class we belonged to on the aforesaid night, about 10 o'clock. The force must have heard about Terrible Jock-that was the name he gave himself-as not one of them was in sight, and we were wondering what he was going to do to us, as he threatened he must have a go at someone, just to keep his hand in, as he called it, and to show us what he used, to do in the Highlands. He had had a liquor or two, which had got to his head. We tried persuasion but he got more boisterous. Our gymnasium master was a Mr. Dan Cranston, an old man-of-warsman, and a splendid man with the sword and single-stick, having won many prizes in the old country and other places against the pick of the world. He also tried, to pacify the terrible Turk-I mean Highlander-but he refused to be pacified, and made a rush at Mr. Cranston to start the fun.

It was good fun for us, but not for the man from the Whipstick. Mr. Cranston had only a light cane, but he played it to such good purpose on the legs and shoulders of Terrible Jock that he soon took the fighting out of him, and at last he burst into tears and begged to be forgiven, and he would not do it again. The flogging he got sobered him quicker than anything could have done, and you would have thought he was a different man altogether, he was so subdued. He was fairly cowed, and left us in tears, and said Bendigo was no place for him, and he would go back to his beloved Whipstick.

We heard afterwards that he slept in some stables in Market-square that night, and very early in the morning took his departure, and we heard no more of him. No doubt he had great strength, but Mr. Cranston never allowed him near enough to use it. Such a man as our old gymnastic master would be invaluable to attack some of the cowardly larrikin pushes in our large cities that maltreat people.”

Having spent many happy evenings in the centre of Bendigo on a Friday night, it is worth noting that things have not changed greatly since David Scott’s time. Mind you, a drunken Scotsman wouldn’t possibly behave like that nowadays!