

"Enclosure No 6 in Duplicate

Despatch No 162 of the 20th Decr

1854" "BALLARAT

(From our Correspondent)

'Tis only ten hours since I closed my regular correspondence, but the events which have since transpired are so extraordinary as to demand an express, which I hope will arrive in time for tomorrow's issue.

About 11 to day, a body, horse and foot, left the Camp, under the command of Mr Commissioner Johnstone. When they neared the Eagle Saloon, on the New Road, the people began to "Joe" them; the party so calling were surrounded and asked for their licenses. Some had them, some had not. Those who had none, bolted off and ran among the Gravel Pit holes. This fact was soon communicated to the Camp. Mr Commissioner Rede and more force soon arrived. This gentleman got among the crowd and remonstrated with them; he said that unless they separated, he would read the Riot Act, which he soon after attempted to do, but did not read through. By this time the whole force of the Camp was out on the Flat, or on the slope leading to the township; some four or five prisoners were taken and marched off, whether for resistance or want of licenses, I know not. One man who was in charge, attempted to escape; he ran among the tents on the Flat, and both police and military were ordered by an Inspector of Police to fire on him, which they did. This happened among tents where women and children were congregated in large numbers. I do not hear any deaths on either side, though some wounded. About twelve o'clock the force was withdrawn, and as I write all again is quiet. From where I am writing I see the soldiers under arms outside the camp. The police are all under arms in the camp, and the Mess Room Verandah is breastworked with bags filled with earth and sand. Work is knocked off, and the whole population is talking over the events of the morning.

The Resident Commissioner rode up to Mr Humffray, the Secretary of the League, and some others, and said, "See now the consequences of your agitation." To which it was replied, "No, but the consequences of your impolitic coercion." I wish that our local authorities had but a little common sense. Was it right, was it politic to go on a licence hunting raid in such terms and under such exciting circumstances? Mr. Humffray personally warned the Lieutenant Governor in town, and I have called his attention to the necessity of being prepared to act with judgement under the circumstances.

The Express waits-I must conclude by saying that rain has come on after the morning's hot winds.

Dec. 1st

Event follows event here so quickly that unless each is narrated immediately on its occurrences, it appears as if months old. However, I mean to run the risk of being charged with retailing old news rather than leave you uninformed of the main facts, of which not being present, till now I was unable to get a correct version.

Well then, our present state began, from one man on Eureka asking the favour of a word from an officer in command of the body of military, which came in from Melbourne on the evening of the 28th by Eureka to whom the officer replied "I hold no communication with rebels." Soon after this a man with a blunderbuss happened to pass along the road, on which the military were marching, and

from some cause, which I am unable to learn, had his weapon taken from him immediately after, some ten men of "the Bakery Hill mob", set on the detachment, took from 20 to 30 stand of arms from the soldiers, hunted them, and then seized on the carts which were conveying the store of ammunition, ran them down a hill into some old ground and coolly searched them to see if there were any cannons stowed away in them, as had been reported; they found none but came on no inconsiderable quantity of cartridges which are now in their possession. It was in this onset that Capt. Young received his hurts, of which he is still in a very precarious state.

Information of the affair having been sent to the Camp, a body of mounted troopers were sent to the rescue to form a rear guard; these men covered the march of the military, every now and then whirling round and checking the diggers who hung in the rear. This operation had been gone through several times until when the bridge on the Flat was reached a determined stand was made, and on a volley of stones being thrown here as had been done several times before, a charge was made among the crowd. The swords were freely used which so provoked the men assembled who chanced to be armed that they fired on them; I believe the troopers fired in return, but ultimately made for the Camp. This is as far as I can make out from parties present what happened about 10 o'clock on the night of 28th.

Next day the meeting was held on the Bakery Hill as I have informed you, to which I may add that three cheers were given for Mr. Fawcner the tried friend of the diggers, and the same and a vote of thanks to Mr. Ireland and Stavelly for their handsome conduct in the matter of fees in the defence cause.

Yesterday all was quiet up to 11 o'clock and would have been so yet had not the attempt been made to look for licenses; some of those who were first asked, instead of licenses I believe showed their cards of membership of the Reform League, and when about to be taken into custody escaped among the Gravel Pit workings; more force was sent for and arrived, they drew up on the New Road, when Messrs. Read and Johstone, advanced in front of them to a crowd, the former Gentlemen tried to persuade those assembled and still gathering to disperse, failing to do this he said he must read the Riot Act, and use force; several parties remonstrated with him, on the impolitic of the course he was following. Mr Rede replied that he was merely carrying out the law as it presently stood, and that he was determined to do so at all hazards. He then began to read the Riot Act, at which time I was standing near him, as a large body of troops and foot police were at some distance behind me, I considered it my safer course to shift my quarters, which I did, but soon found that the Riot Act had been got through at such a telegraphic speed, that notwithstanding a thrice repeated "God save the diggers, I was well nigh caught in the rush of troopers, consequent on the order "draw swords and advance".

Although I am not very intimate with the Riot Act, still, I think that it is so long that there was an impossibility in the way of its being read in the time occupied by Mr. Rede.

I am borne out in the supposition by the information of several parties who assert that but a portion of it was read. If so I believe the consequent proceedings were illegal.

Immediately after the first charge, matters became so general and complicated that I can furnish but a poor narrative; there was rushing here, then back again, officers and orderlies galloped wildly along the new road, swords rattled, shots were fired, and single prisoners were taken, and marched to the camp. Some I hear are charged with having no licenses, other with attempted rescue, and a few with firing on the military and police. Monday's Police Court will, I expect put me in possession

of the real state of the facts. It was currently reported that one digger had been killed, but I cannot vouch for the truth of it. Several of the diggers I know were seriously wounded, and I saw blood marks on a few of the Police.

About half-past 12, the whole force was marched up to the Camp again. They were all under arms when the Express left, and there is still a large force employed in guarding every avenue to the Camp and patrolling every direction.

At 3 o'clock an impromptu meeting was held on Bakery Hill, when volunteers were called for, and instantly stepped forward to the amount of 500 men or so: many, though not all of these men, were armed. They assembled round the Australian flag, which has now a permanent flag staff, chose their leaders and drafted off detachments for different duties. Before separating, the volunteers were impressed with the necessity of strictly respecting property in the event of any disturbance, at the peril of instant death. They all knelt down around the flag, swore to defend each other, and prayed Heaven to prosper them.

Among the other arrangements was the setting off of fifty men to visit the tents and stores and procure arms and ammunition. This they were doing all the evening, and I hear they have been very successful.

During the meeting, Dr. Carr had the impudence to come among the ranks of the volunteers and coolly inspect the men standing there. From some evidence given in Bentley's case he is highly unpopular, and had it not been for great exertions on the part of the better disposed of those present, violence would have been the result, but as it was he got off in safety.

One thing is very much remarkable- the almost, if not actual absence of drunken men- once or twice a cheer broke forth but in general a settled determination appeared to have fallen on them- they felt the solemnity of the occasion.

I am informed that the owners of houses facing the back part of the Camp on Lydiard street have had orders to fire their premises if an attack is made on the camp by the diggers, lest they should be used as covers from which the diggers might annoy them while engaged in defending the point.

Barricades of all kinds are being thrown up inside and around the camp, on which it is considered that an attack is shortly to be made. No cannon, I believe, has as yet arrived, though I hear that Captain MacMahon is to be in before 10 o'clock to-day, with eighty troopers and half a dozen pieces.

A deputation from here went to Creswick today; and whether from a suspicion that assistance would be wanted there, or positive information received, it was deemed necessary to send a body of troopers there late yesterday afternoon. The bells at the various houses of worship are to be rung to collect the volunteers that the day's arrangements may be made.

Neither yesterday nor today have I been able to attend the land sales, but it is no great matter, as I hear that the sale has been put off, owing to the paucity of bidders.

We had heavy rain from 8 to 11 o'clock, during the night, accompanied with thunder and lightening. The weather appears just now to be as unsettled as men's minds.

Owing to circumstances neither Mr Tarelton nor Mr Commissioner Rede were present at Mrs. Hanmer's benefit tonight, though the performance was under their patronage.

The piece chosen was "Money" which was gone through in a highly creditable manner. Several amateurs presented themselves before the audience, and they, as well as regular company, acted

well. "A. Evelyn", by an amateur, deserves great praise. The gentleman who undertook this character, with a little more practice, and allowing a trifle more energy to manifest itself, would make a splendid actor. "Smooth", another amateur, was also well gone through. Mrs. Hammer, as Lady Franklyn, Miss Julia Hammer as Clara, and Miss Stevens as Georgiana, sustained their well merited reputation. During the evening T. Kline, Esq, presented Mrs. Hammer with a handsome gold watch and chain, as a mark of respect for her private worth and public character, Mr Kline informed those present that a balance given from a benefit given by Mrs. Hammer to aid in the liberation of Mr. Frank Carey, and which Mr. Carey refused to receive after his liberation, had been devoted to this purpose. Business of all kinds is very dull, owing to the excitement we are under, and unless some immediate and wise steps are taken, no improvement can be hoped for.

The diggers hold that they are right at present – the Camp does the same- the public can judge from the facts before them. The opinions of most disinterested persons here is, as the authorities assert that they were but carrying out the law; but it is asserted that the hunting for licenses as matters stood, was alike unwise and indicative of a wish on the part of the authorities here to hurry on a collision.

The new Commission of Investigation is, I think in a fix. If some of the members attend to their duties in the Council, which they should do during the passing of the Estimates, our interest, although most pressing, must be laid aside for a time, while every hour proves how instantly this Commission should set to work. And if we are now attended to can the interests of the colony justly want the services of Messrs. Fawkner and O'Shanassy? Turn which way you will, there are serious questions for consideration, and not one of which can be deferred with safety to the colony.

5am

About 300 horse and foot-military and police-have just returned from Bakery Hill, where they went to disperse some men who had been seen to assemble there about half-an-hour before. They took no prisoners, because when they arrived there was none to lay hold of. The parties in question on the hill were some 100 of the Volunteers, who had been on night service, as out-posts, &c.

There is no denying the plain fact, that organization is going on rapidly; even now the troops here are doubly outnumbered, and in a few days, unless Sir Charles interferes by sending up some men of peace immediately, now matter how brave all the force in the Colony, if concentrated here, would find work enough to do. Still, what I consider the plain truth-I say it neither as threat or bounce-many fear that harm will be done today. I can only say that things look as bad as they almost possibly can. Is there no peacemaker?

The party on night service have two men prisoners: they were endeavouring to pass themselves off as diggers, but some one recognized them as being attached to the Camp. They have been in confinement. The fact that none of these women's names is as familiar to us as that of Peter Lalor points to the inherent gender bias of Australian nationalism.