

## TO THE COLONISTS OF VICTORIA

Fellow Colonists, – My name having appeared so conspicuously at the late State Trials, as the person who principally incited the diggers to take up arms, I consider myself bound to justify to you, and to the world, the course I then pursued; and, as the insurgents placed so much confidence in me as to elect me their leader, honor compels me to justify their conduct, and to snatch from oblivion the names of my brave companions who fell on the eventful morning of the 3rd December.

In thus addressing you I am well aware that I shall incur still more the wrath of the Government; but that consideration cannot keep me back from stating the truth.

You will now allow me to draw your attention to a period previous to the burning of Bentley's hotel. For a considerable time before that event, the people were dissatisfied with the laws, because they excluded them from the possession of the land, from being represented in the Legislative Council, and imposed on them an odious poll-tax. The diggers were subjected to the most unheard of insults and cruelties in the collection of this tax, being in many instances chained to logs if they could not produce their license. I have often known men to be asked for their license four or five times in the course of a day; and this having been more particularly the case since the arrival of Sir Charles Hotham. The water to be contended with in deep sinking compels the diggers frequently to change their dress; in doing so they very often leave their licenses behind; under such circumstances should they be visited by the police, they are dragged, wet and dripping as they may be, to the prison, like common felons. The scarcity of gold made the diggers feel those evils more keenly.

The corruption of the Government officials in endeavouring to screen Bentley, and the burning of the Eureka Hotel, gave an impulse to the public mind, which, it was plain to see, could not subside without reform. So little confidence had the diggers in the administration of justice, that they actually formed a committee to prosecute the murderer of Scobie.

There were three prisoners arrested for the burning of the hotel. The diggers felt that these three men should not be victimised for an act in which all were concerned, and which was provoked by the corruption of the officials. A committee was organised to have the prisoners defended. This committee also formed the nucleus of the Reform League, and issued cards of membership for the League. A deputation was sent to the Lieutenant-Governor to demand the release of the prisoners, the unlocking of the lands, perfect representation, and the abolition of the digger's license. His Excellency stated that, owing to various causes, he could not grant these requests. The committee resolved – only by a majority of one – to propose to a public meeting, to be held on Wednesday, the 29th November, that the diggers should burn their licenses; a few licenses only were burnt on that day, but the meeting unanimously resolved to take out no more licenses. On Thursday morning the police and military came out to look for licenses; a digger, who, I presume, had no license, was running away, when an officer of police ordered his men to 'fire on him,' to 'shoot him down' and he was fired at. I positively assert that the Riot Act had not been read when the digger was fired at. (See Mr S. Cumming's evidence before the Gold Commission) In fact, the diggers believed that some of

those in authority had come out that morning with the determination of having the diggers fired on. Now, fellow colonists, I have candidly confessed to you all our rashness, and all our errors; and I confidently appeal to your judgment, and ask, do you justify the Government in acting as they did on Thursday? Can you say that the Government did not trample on the constitution, by its officers ordering the troopers or military, before the Riot Act was read, to fire on some unlicensed diggers who were running away? I am satisfied that you can not; you and the world must pronounce against the Government.

When these occurrences took place, I was working in a shaft at the Eureka, 140 feet deep. Mr Hayes was at the windlass, and the diggers were employed as usual. I mention these details to show you that there was nothing preconcerted. Suddenly the news was spread that the diggers were being fired on at the Gravel Pits. To arms was the cry, and all that could muster arms moved forward in great confusion towards the Gravel Pits. When we reached Barker and Hunt's store on Specimen Hill, we perceived that the military had taken up a position behind some logs on Bakery Hill. We did not interfere with them. The 'Southern Cross' was procured and hoisted on the flagstaff belonging to Barker and Hunt; but it was almost immediately hauled down, and we moved down to the holes on the Gravel Pits Flat. These holes lie near to the road, between the camp and the position which the soldiers then occupied. As soon as we commenced moving towards the holes, the bugles of the military sounded a retreat, and the detachment withdrew to the camp. It was then proclaimed by many persons that there would be a meeting, in arms, that evening, at Bakery Hill, I went there about four o'clock p.m. There were considerable numbers then assembled. We waited for some time, expecting some of our public speakers to come forward and address us; but, through some accident or other, not one of them was present. Previous to that meeting I have never attempted to speak in public but once, and that was on the day previous. I looked around me; I saw brave and honest men, who had come thousands of miles to labor for independence. I knew that hundreds were in great poverty, who would possess wealth and happiness if allowed to cultivate the wilderness which surrounded us. The grievances under which we had long suffered, and the brutal attack of that day, flashed across my mind; and, with the burning feelings of an injured man, I mounted the stump and proclaimed 'Liberty.'

I called for volunteers to come forward and enrol themselves in companies. Hundreds responded to the call. I declared that no violence should be done to the peaceably disposed. In fact, I solemnly promised to shoot the first man who took any property from another, except arms and ammunition, and what was necessary for the volunteers to use in their defence. This declaration was loudly responded to. While addressing the volunteers from the stump, several hundreds came forward and asked me for arms, evidently strongly impressed with the idea that, in the state of feeling then evinced towards them by the authorities at the camp, it was necessary to be united and armed for self-defence. The only plan of operations I attempted to lay down was, that if the Government forces came to attack us, we should meet them on the Gravel Pits, and if compelled, we should retreat by the heights to the old Canadian Gully, and there make our final stand. I then called on the volunteers to kneel down. They did so, and with heads uncovered, and hands raised to Heaven, they solemnly swore at all hazards to defend their rights and liberties. They promised to meet next morning, and then separated.

Great excitement now prevailed throughout the diggings, and early next (Friday) morning, some armed diggers began to assemble on Bakery Hill, but on the military and police moving upon them in force, they dispersed. About seven o'clock in the morning, about 200 armed diggers from Eureka, – of which I was one, – marched to Bakery Hill, and hoisted the Southern Cross. So great was the horror excited in the minds of the diggers by the unconstitutional and bloodthirsty attack of the previous day, that, in about two hours, we numbered about 1500 armed men. After a few hours' organisation, it was proposed by some one that we should march to Eureka, which was accordingly done a little after midday. The rest of the day was spent in procuring arms, electing officers, and improving the organisation. A meeting of the captains of the various companies was held to elect a leader; I was chosen. One of those who had taken rather a conspicuous part in the movement having exhibited some disappointment at my election, the votes of the men were taken, and the result was that my election was confirmed. However, so anxious was I to prevent disunion, that I went to several influential men in the movement, and informed them that it was my intention to resign, in order to prevent the dissatisfaction of even a few. From what they told me I was induced to retain my command, because I was led to believe that, if I resigned, a large majority of those under arms would leave the movement altogether. Being personally unacquainted with military details, I felt anxious to procure the co-operation of one experienced in them. Mr Vein being elected the second in command, and having often heard him allude to passages in his military life, I requested his assistance, which he declined. This occurred on Friday evening, shortly after which the men retired to their several homes.

On Saturday morning we commenced to muster, at Eureka, about eight o'clock. Well-grounded fears being entertained that Government spies would mix with the volunteers and betray their movements, and it also being found necessary that a distinct place should be marked off in which the men could muster together and be drilled, a piece of ground at Eureka was enclosed with slabs for that purpose. The Government have laid great stress on the erection of this enclosure, and have dignified it with the titles of stockade, barricade, fortified entrenchment, and camp. It may suit their policy to give it these titles, but in plain truth it was nothing more than an enclosure to keep our own men together, and was never erected with an eye to military defence. The remainder of the day was spent in further drilling, procuring horses, arms, and ammunition, and establishing patrols throughout the diggings. Mr Magill having been recommended to me as a person possessing military knowledge, I entrusted him with the military arrangements. On Saturday evening there were about 1500 men in the enclosure, ready and willing to use their arms in defence of their rights. It is of importance to observe that we never contemplated remaining within the enclosure till attacked. We had scouts and sentries throughout the diggings, for the purpose of giving us information of any movement on the part of the force at the camp, so that we might have it in our power to arrange our future movements. About twelve o'clock I retired to bed, leaving Mr Magill in charge; at this time the majority of the men were still in the enclosure. Shortly after this, a false alarm was given, which was soon succeeded by another. On the third and real alarm being given, only about 120 men were present in the enclosure. From what cause, or by whose orders, the others had left, I cannot say, but I feel certain they intended to return next day. Before going to bed I had given permission only to one company of seventy men to leave. A great portion of this body had been on duty for thirty-six hours previous, and were unable to find tent accommodation within the enclosure.

About three o'clock on Sunday morning, the alarm was given that 'the enemy' was advancing, and I believe that one or two signal shots were fired by our sentries. On discovering the smallness of our

numbers, we would have retreated, but it was then too late, as almost immediately the military poured in one or two volleys of musketry, which was a plain intimation that we must sell our lives as dearly as we could. There were about seventy men possessing guns, twenty with pikes, and thirty with pistols, but many of those men with fire-arms had no more than one or two rounds of ammunition. Notwithstanding all these deficiencies, I cannot speak too highly of the conduct of the men present. Their coolness and bravery were admirable; and when it is considered that the odds were three to one against us, and that, owing to the carelessness or mismanagement of the out-pickets, we were really surprised, it must be evident that most of those who were present did their duty. As the inhuman brutalities practised by the troops are so well known, it is unnecessary for me to repeat them. About ten minutes after the beginning of the fight, and while standing upon the top of a hole, calling upon the pikemen to come forward, I received a musket ball (together with two other smaller bullets) in the left shoulder, which shattered my arm, and from the loss of blood I was rendered incapable of further action. Soon after I was assisted by a volunteer out of the enclosure and placed in a pile of slabs, out of view of the military and police. While in this position the latter passed several times within a few feet of me. I remained there about an hour, when, thanks to the assistance of some friends, I was enabled to leave it (the police and military having returned with the prisoners), and find my way to the bush, where I remained during the day. On the approach of night I returned to the diggings, and through the kindness of a friend procured the assistance of surgeons, who next day amputated my arm.

In the attack, or rather after the surrender of the insurgents, we lost in killed fourteen men, and in wounded twenty men, of whom eight have since died. I attach the names of those killed and wounded, so far as I could learn. Powell and Rowlands were killed near their own tents. I do not include their names in the list of killed, because they never had anything to do with the movement. The unusual proportion of the killed to the wounded is owing to the butchery by the military and troopers after the surrender. The number of killed, if added to the number of prisoners taken to the camp, together with the few who escaped, may be fairly conjectured to amount to about a hundred and forty or a hundred and fifty men. It may, therefore, appear that my return of a hundred and twenty men in the enclosure at the time of the attack is incorrect, but this apparent discrepancy will be readily understood when I state that many were taken prisoners who were not in the ranks of the insurgents. Even some of the State prisoners were not in the movement at all.

I must now call your attention to the despatches of Captain Thomas. In one place he states that the insurgents fired the first volley; in another, he states that he would have attacked us before, but that there was not a sufficient number of insurgents in one place, until the time he made the attack, for him to strike a decisive blow. I regret to contradict the first of these statements point blank. The military fired the first volley, which one company of insurgents returned much sooner than I wished, as I had directed all, except the rifles, to reserve their fire until 'the enemy' should arrive within fifteen yards of them. I do not believe Captain Thomas's assigned reason for not attacking us before, because I know he could see from the camp 500 men on Bakery Hill on Thursday evening, and 1500 on Friday morning. He could have had the honor of crushing the same number by attacking any detachment during Saturday, because the party attacked would have been supported. I believe that Captain Thomas's reason for attacking us on Sunday morning was because he was informed of the smallness of our numbers. The source whence he derived the information has yet to be discovered. I have no doubt that our numbers would have amounted to 1500 on Sunday morning, before seven o'clock, had we not been attacked.

I must here state, that there were only about thirty foreigners in the movement. There are two things connected with the late outbreak which I deeply regret. The first is, that we should have been forced to take up arms at all; and the second is, 'that when we were compelled to take the field in our own defence, we were unable (through the want of arms, ammunition, and a little organization) to inflict on the real authors of the outbreak the punishment they so richly deserved.

From the steps now being taken by the Government, I have no doubt but that we shall have many measures of useful reform carried into effect. Why were not these measures adopted before? Why did not the Government take steps to alter the land system, to amend the mode of collecting the gold revenue, and to place the administration of justice in the hands of honest men before this bloody tragedy took place? Is it to prove to us that a British Government can never bring forth a measure of reform without having first prepared a font of human blood in which to baptise that offspring of their generous love? Or is it to convince the world that, where a large standing army exists, the Demon of Despotism will have frequently offered at his shrine the mangled bodies of murdered men?

Whatever may have been the object of our rulers in adopting the line of policy they have pursued, the result has been deplorable, and such, I hope as a civilised people will never again have to witness.

I trust that from the facts I have stated, it will be evident that neither anarchy, bloodshed, nor plunder, were the objects of those engaged in the late outbreak. Stern necessity alone forced us to do it. I am induce to call your attention to this subject because I am aware of the calumnious insinuations thrown out by some of our enemies, especially by one, from whose station a more honorable and dignified course might have been expected. Those insinuations were made at a time when thirteen men had to be tried for their lives for being concerned in the outbreak.

I may here add that I have taken measures to have the history of the outbreak and its causes brought before the House of Commons, in order that the real authors of the bloodshed may be brought to trial. Should I from any untoward circumstances, be unable to prosecute this measure there are numbers ready and willing to come forward to prove the fact I have stated.

I have the honor to remain, Fellow Colonists,

Your obedient servant, PETER LALOR.

The following lists are as complete as I can make them. The numbers are well known, but there is a want of names. I trust that the friends or acquaintances of those parties may forward particulars to the Times Office, to be made available in a more lengthened narrative.

KILLED.

1 John Hynes, County Clare, Ireland.

2 Patrick Gittins, Kilkenny, do.

3 — — Mullins, Limerick, do.

4 Samuel Green, England.

5 John Robertson, Scotland.

6 Edward Thonen (lemonade man), Elbertfeldt Prussia.

7 John Hafele, Wurtemberg.

8 John Diamond, County Clare, Ireland.

9 Thomas O'Neill, Kilkenny, do.

10 George Donaghey, Muff, County Donegal, do.

11 Edward Quin, County Cavan, do.

12 William Quinlan, Goulburn, New South Wales

13 ) Names unknown. One was usually known

14 ) on Eureka as Happy Jack.

**WOUNDED, AND SINCE DEAD.**

1 Lieutenant Ross, Canada.

2 Thaddeus Moore, County Clere, Ireland

3 James Brown, Newry, Ireland

4 Robert Julien, Nova Scotia

5 —— Crowe, unknown

6 —— Fenton, do

7 Edward M'Glynn, Ireland

8 No particulars

**WOUNDED AND SINCE RECOVERED.**

1 Peter Lalor, Queen's County, Ireland

2 Name unknown, England

3 Patrick Hanafin, County Kerry, Ireland

4 Michael Hanley, County Tipperary, Ireland

5 Michael O'Neil, County Clare, Ireland

6 Thomas Callanan, County Clare, Ireland

7 Patrick Callanan, County Clare, Ireland

8 Frank Symmons, England

9 James Warner, County Cork, Ireland

10 Luke Sheehan, County Galway, Ireland

11 Michael Morrison, County Galway, Ireland

12 Dennis Dynan, County Clare, Ireland

PETER LALOR.