



ROGER CHARLES TICHBORNE, from a daguerrotype made in 1853

IN fiction, the recognition of the long-lost heir is easily effected by some convenient strawberry birthmark, or golden locket, or at least by the handbag in which the young child was deposited at the station. In real life however something more than that is required when an heir to a fortune turns up after 14 years, especially if in that time the wasted young man of 25 has apparently swollen into a fleshy wreck who has completely forgotten every scrap of an undeniably scrappy education and married an illiterate woman with an illegitimate daughter. The family in question, wealthy Roman Catholic landed gentry in Hampshire, automatically rejected the claimant, and the civil action in which Roger Tichborne sued for possession of his estates became a Victorian *cause célèbre*. This trial, and the criminal one that followed, were notable both for their extreme length and for the widespread bitterness of feeling which they roused. The claimant was seen as a poor man being denied his rights by a conspiracy among the rich, and religious prejudice was joined to the political. The trials were fashionable entertainment of their time; on one occasion the Prince and Princess of Wales sat on the Bench. There were public appeals for funds and for witnesses, and a special "Tichborne News" was published. Even after the final verdict, the friends of the claimant were not satisfied; they appealed for fresh evidence, which was forthcoming, and in a special newspaper with a circulation of 140,000 they published the proofs of his innocence.

The family insisted that Roger Tichborne, heir to a baronetcy and an income of £20,000 a year, had died when the Bella disappeared at sea in 1854, and only an empty long-boat was found. Roger Tichborne had been travelling from South America to

# The Man from Wagga Wagga



Mexico, part of a world tour. He disliked life in England, where his half-French mother was making family relations difficult. She had succeeded in keeping her son with her in Paris until he was sixteen, when his father had sent the French-speaking boy to Stonhurst College. There he stayed without interest for three years before taking a commission in the 6th Dragoon Guards the Carabiniers, with hopes of an overseas posting. When this did not happen, he left the Army to travel alone.

When the Bella was reported missing, the family accepted the tragedy with the exception of Roger's mother. After her husband's death she advertised in the papers and acting on a rumour of survivors picked up by a ship bound for Australia she sent to an Australian agency for tracking missing persons. In Wagga Wagga a lawyer spoke to a butcher who had mentioned connections in England, and the man, Thomas Castro, admitted reluctantly that he was the missing heir.

Before going to London with his wife and child, the claimant was recognised

by two ex-servants of the Tichbornes. One Edward Bogle, had been with Roger's grandfather 35 years, until he was pensioned off and went to Australia. He now returned with the claimant to London. In Paris the Dowager Lady Tichborne unhesitatingly pronounced the claimant her son, and this she continued to believe until she died, a year later. She was not the only one who recognised the claimant. The family doctor, several other servants, his fellow-officers in the Carabiniers and some neighbours also met him and after long conversations said that they could still recognise their friend, although his weight was rapidly increasing. (It reached 27 stone at the time of the trial.)

This was four years after the claimant's arrival. Meantime the family sent investigators to Australia and to South America, and so did the claimant's lawyers. Finally commissions were sent to collect evidence, for the reports that were coming to London were more than a little confusing.

The claimant said he had taken the name Castro from a family he had met in Melipilla, a small town between Santiago and Valparaiso. Roger Tichborne had travelled several times between these towns; but although some few people cast doubt on the evidence procured, no one in Melipilla remembered a rich young Sir Roger. Several did remember Arthur Orton, a penniless young ship's deserter. This Arthur Orton had come from Wapping, had returned to England from South America, and gone to Australia in 1853.

There the confusion continued. The claimant had been in Australia, and so had Arthur Orton. The account of Thomas Castro's life was found to overlap that of Arthur Orton; Australian witnesses were found who identified the claimant's photograph as Orton. Later, others were found who said there had been two men, friends who used each other's names and were at one time bush-rangers together. In these Australian days men frequently changed names and no one asked any questions. It was not until the trial was over that a Mrs Alexander wrote from Gippsland that she had known Roger Tichborne in Hampshire and had met him again as Castro in Australia; several other witnesses said that Castro had spoken of a wealthy family in England whom he preferred to forget.

The evidence produced at the trials is presented in the latest of the BBC Famous Trials series, *The Tichborne Claimant*, which will be heard next week in Sunday Showcase. This evidence had been collected over four years; the two trials cost the family some £92,000, and they lasted from May 10, 1871, to



THE CLAIMANT, from a photograph taken about 1872

February 28, 1874, when the claimant was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

The sentence was long and bitterly argued. If the claimant had had the financial resources more witnesses could have been brought to London, and a more competent lawyer could have been found. At the first trial, the family's second lawyer remarked that if he had been for the claimant the claimant would have won.

During the first trial the family swore Roger was tattooed. Unfortunately this influenced the jury, but some fellow-officers of Roger later swore he had no tattoo. Arthur Orton's sisters and brothers were never called; they had refused to identify the claimant as Orton; and in 1883 Edmund and Charles Orton identified as their brother a man called William Cresswell in the Parramatta Lunatic Asylum, a man the warders said had been known as Orton.

On the facts that were presented to them the juries answered reasonably, as will be heard, and the claimant himself remained the chief agent of his own undoing. He was untruthful, unscrupulous, and self-centred, and many of his actions seem incomprehensible from any angle. Even so, on later evidence it seems that a verdict of "not proven" would have been more just than the given sentence. The real identity of the man known as Thomas Castro in Wagga Wagga seems lost completely in the mid-Victorian Australian bush; to us he remains merely "the Claimant."

*The Tichborne Claimant*: ZB Sunday Showcase, November 8.

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"THE OLD MAN OF THE SEA."

PUNCH indicated the measure of public interest in the case by this fullpage cartoon of November 18, 1871