

strokes, opened up the coveted glories of one of those famous 'jeweller's shops' where the yellow metal lay in dust, grains, and lumps from the size of a pea to that of an emu egg. The wild inrush of population from the ends of the earth soon drew a population of 40,000 souls to the banks of the yellow Yarrowee. In the mad scramble for sudden and easy wealth, ploughs, flocks, schools, ships, stores, and offices were deserted, ordinary business was paralysed; and there were many who feared that the good fortune of Victoria (the Port Phillip Settlement, as it was then called) would prove, like the luckless gold of Nibelungen, a source of ruin to the colony.

Matters, however, soon righted themselves. For did not people soon discover that gold was to be easily and more surely won by leading, clothing, housing, and generally catering for the needs of the ever-increasing population of miners? The miner, too, if he built up the colony's wealth, did so with a millstone round his neck. This was the digger's license-fee of thirty shillings a month (increased for a time to £3 per month) for a modest claim of eight feet square. The license-fee chafed because the miners objected to the principle of taxation without representation (they had no votes at parliamentary elections); because that heavy tax upon their industry was imposed under the wholly erroneous impression that everyone who went to the goldfields, must necessarily make a fortune, and because of the odious and irritating methods by which the fee was collected. Police and goldfield Commissioners fell into an unpleasant habit of ordering miners to stand and deliver their magic bit of blue license paper, sometimes several times a day. 'Digger-hunting' rapidly developed into a science. There was a little brigade of spies, informers, plain-clothes constables, etc., and fresh ruses were devised from day to day to circumvent the nimble (and sometimes starving) miner whose license-fee was in arrears.

As a rule the battle was conducted in the following way: A detachment of horse and foot, in skirmishing order, surrounded the quarter of the mining-field selected as the objective of the tax raid. They then closed in as rapidly as possible, like a living net, about the miners. The first sight of the uniforms was greeted with the warning cry: 'Trap! Trap! Joe! Joe!' Then ensued a wild hurry-scurry from the raiders on the part of the affrighted gold-seekers who had neglected to provide themselves with the talismanic 'bit of blue,' or to carry it in their pockets. Some of the defaulters tried to get through the uniformed cordon of digger-hunters. Others made for the friendly cover of the neighboring bush, while mounted troopers, with drawn swords, rode at full speed to 'head them off.' The majority sought a hiding-place within the fast closing circle of pursuers. Some concealed themselves under the bunks in their tents; others scrambled down shafts and (as the saying ran) 'pulled the hole in after them.' A goodly batch of prisoners—sometimes sixty or more—was the ordinary result of a digger-hunt. They were handcuffed together, marched off to the police camp, and chained to logs in the open air until brought for trial before the Commissioners. The proceedings were very brief and summary and ended in a fine of £5 or upwards, or in terms of imprisonment with or without hard labor.

As a rule, the treatment of the miners was harsh and exasperating to a degree. The goldfields officials seem to have displayed a lamentable lack of the most ordinary tact in their methods of enforcing an odious and, in the main, oppressive law. As a result, a feeling of marked hostility grew up against the police (white and black) and against the officials generally. Petty reprisals took place from time to time and feeling found uproarious vent in the canvas and weatherboard theatres, in rough-and-tumble anti-police harlequinades, and in the topical songs and metrical gibes of Thatcher.

By 1853 the agitation against license-fees had found organised expression. Some blood shed during a collision between miners and police in Ballarat brought matters near a crisis. The increased acrimony thereafter thrown into digger-hunts strengthened the hands of a strong and active minority who opposed constitutional agitation and held that the time had come to win their rights by armed resistance. Foremost among those was Peter Lalor, a native of Queen's County (Ireland). He was elected commander-in-chief. Verne, a Hanoverian, was next in command. After him came Thomas Kennedy, a Scotsman, whose motto ran:—

'Moral persuasion is all a humbug;
Nothing convinces like a lick i' the lug.'

Among the other leaders of the movement were Carboni Raffaello (an ex-Garibaldian Italian), and James Esmond, the discoverer of the first payable goldfield in Victoria. The 'Ballarat Times' warmly championed the cause of armed resistance to the obnoxious tax. Firearms of every kind were industriously collected or commandeered; pikes were forged; and an elementary and aimless form of drill went on night and day. At the close of November, 1854, shops were closed and business was paralysed in Ballarat. Geelong and Melbourne reacted to the tension of the crisis. Troops were rapidly set in motion for Ballarat. On November 30, at the height of the crisis, the Commissioners, with incredible folly, set out upon one of the most irritating displays of digger-hunting that had ever taken place in Ballarat. It was the last digger-hunt that was ever witnessed in Victoria.

The armed miners were encamped within a rough stockade of slabs, ropes, and overturned carts at the Eureka, enclosing about an acre of ground. They kept guard carelessly, feeling secure against attack till the arrival of Sir R. Nickle's reinforcement of eight hundred men, who were tramping along on their toilsome way from Melbourne. One morning before daybreak—it was December 3, 1854—Captain Thomas, of the local garrison, moved quietly on the Stockade with 276 infantry and mounted men. Martial law had not been proclaimed nor the Riot Act read, comparatively few diggers were within the enclosure, and they were caught napping. There was a short, sharp struggle. Four soldiers were killed and a few wounded. Of the miners, thirty-five to forty were slain and a hundred and twenty-five taken prisoners. The whole affair was over in twenty-five minutes. Verne, the sword-clanker—the second in command of the miners—got safely away rather early in the fray for his reputation as a fighter. Raffaello, the ex-Garibaldian, was captured up the sod chimney of his tent. Lalor, the commander-in-chief, fell severely wounded early in the action. A pikeman concealed him by covering him with slabs. The same evening he was hurried away to the ranges on Father Smyth's horse, his wounds dressed, and his broken arm amputated. A reward of £500 was offered for his capture, but his friends were true to him. The news of the struggle at the Eureka Stockade went like wildfire through the colony. Public sympathy, expressed in mass meetings, surged in a high tide in favor of the miners' demands. When, early in 1855, thirteen of the Eureka prisoners were arraigned in Melbourne for high treason they were acquitted amidst the frantic plaudits of the multitudes assembled inside and outside the court. A general amnesty followed; the monthly license-fee was abolished—in its stead was issued a miner's right at twenty shillings (subsequently reduced to five shillings) a year; and the place of the hated Commissioners was taken by Local Courts, Mining Boards, and Wardens' Courts. The crowning result of the Stockade insurrection was the separation of Victoria from the mother colony of New South Wales and the granting of a new Constitution, which received the royal assent on July 21, 1855. Hume, the leader of the peace party, and Lalor, the Rienzi of the party of armed resistance, were elected as the first representatives of Ballarat.