

Michael Howe

**The Last and Worst of the
Bush-Rangers of Van Dieman's Land**

by Thomas E. Wells, 1782-1833

**Published: 1818
Re-published: 1834**



Narrative of the chief Atrocities committed by this great Murderer and his Associates, during a Period of six Years, in Van Diemen's Land.

Preface

THE following account, of which some portions were published in Mr. Evans's work on Van Diemen's Land, will be read with interest. It was originally printed in the colony in the year 1818.

The bush-rangers of Van Diemen's Land generally consist of men accused of crimes, or of prisoners escaped from gaol, who, retiring to the forests and intricate passes amongst the mountains, often contrive for a long time to elude the vigilance of their pursuers. But they invariably pay the forfeit of their temerity, being either shot in the woods by their pursuers, murdered by their confederates, or executed upon the gallows.

Another class of bush-rangers consists of men who, having been transported to Macquarie Harbour for offences committed in the colony, attempt an escape from that secluded spot to the inhabited parts of the island. Of these, the greater part have perished of hunger and fatigue in the pathless forests and mountains with which that port is surrounded. This also has doubtless been the fate of the military sent in pursuit of the runaways. In one of these expeditions, which originally consisted of six convicts, two out of the three survivors murdered their companion, while asleep, for the revolting purpose of appeasing their hunger, and a few days afterwards, having then wandered six weeks in various directions, they found themselves in sight of the settlement from which they were attempting to escape. Here they surrendered themselves.

They related the extremities to which they had been reduced, with the dreadful consequences, and to corroborate their story, produced a part of their slaughtered companion. Their past sufferings proved fatal; they died after a few days in the hospital, and, utter reprobates as they were, in looking at their sufferings, we must cease to regret that justice was deprived of her victims.

The dreadful fate of these men availed their fellow-prisoners nothing. Another party immediately set out with undiminished ardour upon the same perilous discovery. Others had been disappointed in their efforts to reach the interior by a direct route over the mountains; but these, taking a circuitous passage along the coast to the northward and then to the eastward succeeded in reaching the settlements, and resuming their old habits of plunder were again apprehended.

There has been one instance of a bush-ranger who was long outlawed in the woods, without being suspected of any crime, and indeed, with the credit of being active in its prevention. It occurred during the period of the transactions related in the following pages. He was a seaman, who having formed an attachment for a young woman in the colony, deserted from his ship, fled with her into the woods, where he remained for a period of three years. They afterwards returned to Hobart Town, where he acquired wealth, and I regret to add, that the poor reward he might have bestowed for her fidelity was withheld: he married another woman.

As the country becomes more populous and better explored, instances of a long course of successful enormities become rare. During my residence in the island, many criminals fled to the woods; but their course was generally short, and they were soon apprehended and brought to justice.

Edward Curr
1834

Michael Howe, who acted the principal part in the transactions about to be narrated, was born at Pontefract in Yorkshire in the year 1787, and was bound apprentice to a merchant vessel at Hull; but he served only two years when he ran away and entered on board a man-of-war.

In the year 1811 he was apprehended for robbing a miller on the highway, and tried at the York assizes following; but from an informality in the indictment the capital part of the charge was abandoned, and he received sentence of seven years transportation. He arrived at this settlement in the ship INDEFATIGABLE, Captain Cross, in the month of October 1812.

During his passage from England his habits were rather industrious, and, though always mischievously inclined, he exhibited no symptoms of that daring and wanton conduct which manifested itself in his future Life, unless we may consider as such his leaping overboard whilst the vessel was in port and swimming a considerable distance before he was taken.

As a leader of a band of desperadoes, Howe may not unaptly be compared to Three-fingered Jack, who was so long the terror of the peaceable settlers in the plantations of Jamaica; and who, notwithstanding every exertion to take him, long ranged the woods of that island, committing the most cruel and daring acts of murder and robbery, until, from the large rewards offered by the Government, he was arrested by the hands of justice.

Howe was only a few days at Government public labor before he was assigned, as a Crown servant, to Mr. Ingle, a merchant and grazier; from whose service he eloped into the woods and joined twenty-eight felons at that time at large committing depredations.

With a view of inducing those deluded people to return to their duty to Government, His Excellency Governor Macquarie, on the 14th May, 1814, was pleased to extend to them the Royal clemency for all offences committed during their unlawful absence (the crime of wilful murder excepted); provided they should return to their lawful occupations by the 1st day of December following; denouncing all who should neglect to do so as outlaws.

This banditti, now consisting of twenty-nine persons, amongst whom were Michael Howe and John Whitehead, an equally desperate offender, availed themselves of the proffered clemency and surrendered to Government.

Although Howe and his companions must at this period have been sensible that their lives would have been forfeit to the Laws, but for the mercy extended to them, this reflection did not operate to amend their future conduct; for we soon after find Howe and Whitehead again in the woods with a new set of desperadoes, adding murder to robbery.

After some minor depredations, this band, headed by Whitehead, stripped nearly the whole of the settlers at New Norfolk of their portable property, together with all arms and ammunition; and from thence proceeded to Pitt Water and robbed Mr. Fisk, a new settler at that place.

In the night of March 10th, they set fire to the wheat Stacks, barns, etc., of A. W. H. Humphrey, Esq., Police Magistrate, and of Bartholomew Reardon, district constable, at Pitt Water, within a few minutes of each other; destroying the produce of one hundred acres recently got in. A paper was found near the burnt stacks of Mr. Humphrey, upon which were words of threatening import, and the representation of a gun firing a ball at the head of a man.

It afterwards came out that Whitehead and Garland were the principal incendiaries in this wanton destruction.

On the 25th April 1815, the Band, consisting of John Whitehead, the leader, Richard McGuire, Hugh Burne, Richard Collier, Peter Septon, John Jones, James Geary, a deserter from the 73rd Regiment, and Howe, accompanied by a black native girl named Mary, with whom Howe cohabited, again appeared at New Norfolk, and robbed the house of Mr. Carlisle, a settler there, who immediately communicated the circumstance to his neighbour Mr. McCarty.

The latter being apprehensive for the safety of his schooner the Geordy, lying near in the Derwent with valuable property, determined to meet the robbers; and accompanied by several persons on the spot, who immediately volunteered, commenced a pursuit.

Mr. McCarty's party, consisting of himself, Mr. Jemott, Mr. James O'Birne, master of the Geordy, Keith Hacking, mate, Messrs. Carlisle, Murphy, James Triffit, John Brown, and—Tooms, armed with fowling pieces and pistols, soon came up with the robbers and commanded them to surrender their arms; the gang instantly commenced firing under cover of and through a large hollow tree, and wounded five of the party, who had the disadvantage of being fully exposed to the fire of the former on every attempt to get a shot at them. Carlisle received a ball in the groin and three slugs in the breast, of which wounds he died within an hour; Mr. Jemott was badly wounded by a ball passing through the thick part of the thigh, in which part Triffit was also wounded, and Murphy in the abdomen. O'Birne received a Ball in the cheek which perforated the Tongue and lodged in the neck, causing his death in a few days. The Banditti, availing themselves of the disabled state of Mr. McCarty's party, in turn demanded him to lay down his arms, which was refused, and a slight firing continued until the wounded were removed, with the exception of Murphy, whose state obliged him to remain at the mercy of the Gang, and they were about to add corporal punishment to their victory, but were prevented by their leader Whitehead.

In consequence of these murders, military parties were sent in various directions in search of the banditti. A party of the 73rd Regt. in a few days came so close up with them as to find the remains of their fires and the skin of a sheep recently killed. A party of the 46th was also in pursuit, and a number of the inhabitants of Hobart Town well armed, went in search of the murderers of Carlisle and O'Birne.

Lieutenant Governor Davey adopted measures for their apprehension.

A Proclamation had previously to this been published offering a reward of fifty guineas to any person, free or bond, who would apprehend a bush-ranger and lodge him in safe custody; holding out encouraging prospects to such of the offenders themselves (not personally implicated in any act of felony) as should procure the apprehension of any of their associates; and it having been represented that the bush-rangers derived supplies from settlers, and other fixed inhabitants, a further reward of fifty guineas was offered to any person giving information of such abettors: for without secret assistance these depredations could not long have continued.

On the 10th of May, the band of robbers visited the house of Mr. Humphrey at Pitt Water for the second time.

About seven o'clock in the evening, Whitehead, Septon and Collier, all armed, burst open the door of the servants' hut and rushed in. Whitehead and Septon

immediately presented their muskets cocked to the servants present, and stood over them, whilst Collier made them take off their neckcloths, with which he tied their hands across behind their backs—Whitehead and Septon threatening to shoot them if they stirred or resisted.

Howe then came in and taking a lamp from the hut went, with others who had remained outside to the dwelling house occupied by Mr. Humphrey, which they broke open and plundered, while Whitehead, Septon and Collier stood guard over the Servants.

After packing up every thing they found useful to themselves, and breaking and destroying what they could not take away (which last they said they should have spared had they not perceived two pairs of irons in the house) they departed, threatening if any one stirred out of the hut that he should be shot by sentries which they would place to look out, while the others might get a sufficient distance.

The banditti shortly afterward revisited New Norfolk. Knowing Mr. McCarty was absent, and meditating revenge for the opposition met with in their late encounter, they repaired to his premises by night, and wantonly fired a volley in at the window. It happily did no other injury than slightly wounding one soldier. On this occasion they met with an unexpected reception; for a party of the 46th Regt., who had been stationed in the house, immediately commenced a brisk fire, which killed their leader Whitehead.

The party then rushed from the House to cut off the retreat of the banditti, but from the darkness of the night were unable to do so.

When Whitehead received the fatal shot he ran a few yards towards Howe, crying „take my watch—take my watch“ and then dropped. Howe, immediately took off his head; as well perhaps to prevent the body being recognised by their pursuers as in performance of an engagement which they had made to each other, upon any one of them being killed, a survivor should do this, to prevent, as they said, any person from benefiting by rewards for taking in their heads.

The head of Whitehead was a considerable time afterwards found in the woods—the body was brought to Hobart Town and gibbeted on Hunter’s Island.

From this period Howe was considered the leader of the band.

In the early part of this year Lieut. Governor Davey established Martial Law in the Colony; which was kept in force till repealed by order of Governor Macquarie; soon after which, a party in quest of the banditti, in the neighbourhood of Tea-tree Brush, descried their place of retreat from a smoke which they had made. Near the hut, from which it proceeded were McGuire and Burne (the rest being absent) who immediately darted into a thicket and disappeared eluding all search.

In the hut was found a number of articles belonging to various individuals whom they had at different periods plundered; besides ammunition, musket balls, fire arms and several kangaroo dogs.

This discovery caused the separation of McGuire and Burne from the rest of the banditti, and their speedier fall; for after wandering several days in the woods they applied to a settler near Kangaroo Point to procure them a boat for the purpose of proceeding to Bass’s Straits; for which they promised the reward of a watch. The settler pretended to come into their views, and left them with the assurance of going in search of the boat; but he privately repaired to Hobart

Town and informed the Lieut. Governor of their intentions. A party of the 46th Regt. was immediately despatched who surrounded the place of their concealment and captured both. Burne was the most aged of the gang, and was severely wounded in endeavouring to escape from the party. They were brought before a General Court Martial, charged with being two of the banditti who murdered the unfortunate Carlisle, were convicted and received sentence of death. They were accordingly executed and their bodies gibbeted on Hunter's Island, near to that of Whitehead, their leader when that murder was committed.

The banditti were now reduced to Howe, Septon, Jones, Geary and Collier.

From the information of one of the gang, who had been taken in the woods and afterwards admitted an evidence for the Crown, a discovery took place of some of the abettors of the bush-rangers in the robbery of Mr. Fisk; in consequence of which William Stevens, a crown prisoner, and two youths born of European parents at Norfolk Island, (who were stock-keepers near to the place where the robbery was committed and in whose possession some of the stolen property was found) were all apprehended as being concerned with the Bush-rangers in that robbery; of which they were afterwards convicted by a General Court Martial and sentenced to death. Stevens was executed, and the two youths respited under the gallows, which was fixed near to the gibbets on Hunter's Island; and the body of Stevens was buried within a few yards of the same place.

In October following Martial Law was repealed by order of His Excellency The Governor in Chief.

These awful examples had no tendency to correct the vicious course of the remaining hardened offenders. They committed many acts of plunder in the September following—they robbed the House of Mr. Stanfield at Green Point of every movable—they also rushed into the house of Stines and Troy, settlers at the plains of the Coal River, and with horrid menace, commanded every person to remain quiet in the dwelling while they rifled it of every portable article, and a tradesman, who was at work on the premises, and who some time before had been of the party in pursuit of them, narrowly escaped being shot.

After this month they retired again to the woods and were not again heard of till the 7th of November, when they assailed the residence of David Rose Esq., at Port Dalrymple. Their conduct while plundering here was aggravated, as on other occasions, by every wanton atrocity.

Upon this the Commandant repaired to the woods in person, accompanied by a strong party of the 46th Regt., and the Chief Constable; they searched the interior of the country several days, but were unable to come up with any of the Gang.

These miscreants were next visible at the farm of Mr. T. Hayes at Bagdad, within eleven days and at the distance of 100 miles from the scene of their last outrage. Mr. W. T. Stocker, a person in the habit of trading between the settlements, had halted at Hayes' for the night with a cart load of property of great value, the whole of which the banditti forcibly carried off. It is to be supposed that they had previously been informed of Mr. Stocker's journey.

The property taken from individuals by this lawless gang must by this time have been immense, and it is not to be conceived how it was appropriated but by their having confederates in society, though unsuspected, who not only purchased their booty, but were channels of information, as to the passing

events in which they were interested—and indeed we may safely ascribe the long period in which they eluded every exertion made to capture them to this secret support.

Soon after this, the banditti, increasing in hardihood in proportion with the number of atrocities as yet committed with impunity, assumed a lofty tone, and addressed a letter to Lt. Governor Davey, replete with ignorant and insolent threats. They, however, complained of being much harrassed by the pursuing parties from the settlements, and the perseverance used to take them. In addition to the old gang the letter was signed by six felons, who had lately absconded, named Chapman, Coine, Parker, Keegan, Browne and Currie. Two native black girls, armed as well as the men, accompanied them.

At this period a most vigilant and persevering search was continued in all directions by parties of military from Hobart Town and Port Dalrymple. Captain Nairn headed a detachment of 20 privates of the 46th Regt., and continued an indefatigable pursuit, night and day. All efforts, however, were as yet unavailing.

The following information taken before A. W. H. Humphreys Esq. J.P. as it shews their state of feeling, and having reference to the letter sent to Lt. Govr. Dewey, may be perused with some interest.

„John Yorke being duly sworn states—About 5 o'clock in the evening of Nov. 27th I fell in with a party of bush-rangers, about 14 Men and 2 Women; Michael Howe and Geary were the only 2 of the gang I knew personally. I met them on Scantling's Plains—I was on horseback; they desired me to stop, which I accordingly did on the high road; it was Geary that stopped me; he said he wanted to see every man sworn to abide by the contents of a letter.—I observed a thick man writing, as I suppose to the Lt. Governor.—Geary was the man who administered the oath on a prayer book, calling each man for that purpose regularly; they did not inform me the contents of the letter—Michael Howe and Geary directed me to state when I came to town the whole I had seen and to inform Mr. Humphrey and Mr. Wade to take care of themselves, as they were resolved to take their lives, and to prevent them from keeping stock or grain, unless there was something done for them—that Mr. Humphrey might reap what grain he liked, but they would thrash more in one night that he could reap in a year. They said they could set the whole country in a fire with one stick. I was detained about three quarters of an hour, during which time they charged me to be strict in making known what they said to me, and what I had seen. On my return from Port Dalrymple I called at a hut occupied by Joseph Wright at Scantling's Plains:—William Williams and a youth were there, who told me the bush-rangers had been there a few days before and forced them to a place called Murderers' Plains which the bush-rangers called the Tallow Chandler's Shop, where they made them remain three days for the purpose of rendering down a large quantity of beef fat which Williams understood was taken from cattle belonging to Stines & Troy.“

On the 25th February following, the commandant of Port Dalrymple, sent out Ensign Mahon and a party of the 46th Regt., in pursuit of bush-rangers; and after several weeks in the woods they fell in with Chapman, Parker and Elliott, lying in ambuscade at York Plains. On being called upon to surrender,

Chapman snapped his musket at the guide and with the rest ran off. Three of the soldiers then fired; Chapman was shot through the back and soon after expired; Parker was slightly wounded but fled into a thicket and escaped; Elliott was shot by Ensign Mahon, and died instantly. The heads of Chapman and Elliott were taken off and sent into Launceston, and the bodies interred on the spot. Parker was afterwards apprehended near the same spot in a wretched state.

In the early part of March it appears that some jealousy of Howe began to manifest itself in the old gang—they conceived, from the circumstance of his being absent at intervals without their knowledge, or assigning any reason, that he meditated betraying the rest. Howe was aware of their suspicions, and, feeling no longer secure among them, suddenly eloped, taking with him the native girl before mentioned.

In April, 1817, Lt. Governor Sorrell arrived, and assumed the government of the settlements on Van Diemen's Land; and about this period Howe and the native girl were pursued in the neighbourhood of Jericho, by a small party of the 46th Regt.

His wantonly cruel disposition was strongly manifested on this occasion; for being hard pressed, in order to facilitate his own escape, he fired at this poor female companion, who from fatigue was unable to keep pace with him; she received, however, little injury, and together with his blunderbuss, knapsack and dogs, fell into the hands of the pursuers.

This native girl afterwards became particularly valuable as a guide to the military parties, from the quickness and sagacity peculiar to the black natives in tracing footsteps where Europeans would not suspect them. She led the party first to some of the places of the banditti's resort at the River Shannon. While employed in burning their huts in this quarter, Howe, Septon and Geary were seen at the other side of the river; the appearance of the military party, however, gave them no alarm, as they knew the river could not be immediately crossed—the banditti had therefore another opportunity of escape.

Continuing their search, the soldiers next met with 50 sheep in a remote place, stolen from Mr. Stanfield, and concealed by the bush-rangers for future supply.

After the loss of his knapsack and dogs—his confirmed breach with the rest of the banditti and his late narrow escape, Howe, now entirely alone, appears to have determined upon carrying into execution a design which, according to the report of the native girl, he had for some time contemplated—viz, that of chancing an extension of mercy upon surrender.

He accordingly found means to convey to Lt. Governor Sorell a letter offering to give himself up to an officer, as well as to furnish important information of the friends and supporters of the old Gang, and become the means of their final capture, upon His Honor's assurance of present personal safety, and a favourable representation to His Excellency the Governor in Chief, with a request for pardon. The Lt. Governor immediately dispatched Capt. Nairn of the 46th Regt., to a place named, with an assurance to that effect, and this officer on the 29th April conveyed Howe to Hobart Town and lodged him in the county gaol. He now underwent various examinations by the magistrates.

In the meantime the military parties remained in pursuit of the robbers still at large.

On the 10th of May the party commanded by Sergt. McCarthy arrived in Hobart Town, after an arduous and persevering pursuit under circumstances of peculiar hardship and privation they had procured information of and tracked the banditti for several days, until the loss of their flour in fording a river, and a total want of provisions, which reduced them to eat the skin mocassons from their feet, compelled them to give up the pursuit for a time.

On the 19th of the same month the party stationed at Pitt Water, commanded by Lt. Nunn, received intelligence that the banditti were robbing the premises of Edward, Lord Esq. at Orierton Park. They hastened to the spot; and on their appearance the banditti fired several shots, and slightly wounded Lt. Nunn.

Some soldiers stationed at another part of the settlement were now seen by the bush-rangers approaching upon which the latter fled, leaving behind them some flour which they had stolen from Mr. Lord.

About the end of June the Government long boat, employed on the Port Dalrymple River in carrying provisions between George Town and Launceston, was carried away by the bush-rangers, with five more men and several stand of arms; but in consequence of bad weather their design of escaping to the islands was frustrated; and they were compelled to return. After burning the boat and other articles they were driven again to resume their former habits in the woods.

The old gang might now be considered to have received considerable accession; the number at large having amounted to twenty, in the absence, at this period, of The Lieut. Governor at the other settlement.

On the 5th July, a meeting of the principal inhabitants of Hobart Town was held, under the sanction of His Honor, in order to facilitate the views of Government, by raising a sum of money to be applied in rewards for apprehending the banditti then at large, when five hundred and twenty guineas were immediately subscribed. Upon the result of this meeting, and the recent intelligence of the plunder and excesses at George Town, The Lt. Governor issued a Proclamation, holding out the following rewards for the apprehension of the old Gang. For Geary 100 guineas. Septon; Jones; Collier each 80 guineas. Browne; Coine ea; 50 guineas. and at the same time was offered a reward of 80 guineas for George Watts, an old and mischievous Bush robber under Colonial Sentence to the Coal River, but who had only associated with Garland (also an offender in the woods, and who was engaged with Whitehead in burning the stacks at Pitt Water) supposed to be drowned in an attempt to cross the Derwent.

Two days after this Proclamation, the banditti appeared at the Black Brush, and on the following day were traced by Serjeant McCarthy's party to a settler's house at the Tea-tree Brush, where they had dined. On perceiving the military, they ran out of the house and posted themselves behind trees, where the timber on the ground was very thick. An attack commenced on both sides, and though the banditti had certainly the advantage of position, Geary their leader, by a well directed fire was wounded, and fell; he died the same night. Smith and Tall, runaways from Port Dalrymple, who had joined the gang only a few days, were also wounded and taken.

This success would doubtless have been followed up by greater in the military party, but from its laboring under the disadvantages of great fatigue, from incessant pursuit, and that of a heavy rain which prevented their muskets from going off. The whole of the knapsacks and dogs of the banditti, however,

fell into their hands; and it ought to be noted that this little party were at the moment totally unacquainted with the recent Proclamation and offered rewards—from the latter of which they were, however, not allowed to remain long without benefiting.

In the meantime Howe continued at the gaol of Hobart Town; but His Excellency the Governor in Chief having received favorably the request made by The Lieut. Governor, in pursuance of the terms of Howe's surrender, he could not altogether be considered a prisoner for close confinement; upon which account, and his health being reported to be much impaired, he was occasionally permitted to walk out in charge of a constable.

His examinations by the Magistrates were frequent, and his depositions voluminous and tedious; but notwithstanding his promise of a full disclosure of the supporters of the bush-rangers, little information of worth, or utility, could be gained from him.

It might have been expected that Howe would, at this period, have placed some value on his improved situation; being in fact considered a pardoned offender, to whom was afforded a last chance of atoning in some degree for his past crimes by an amended life; and having the prospect of speedily returning to Society: but a life of crime obtained with Howe a preference to all others; and on the 26th July, by some means eluding the vigilance of the Constable, to whose care he was entrusted, he again escaped to the woods.

He now felt himself too much a traitor and a villain for the safe admission of a companion, or confederate, and never after joined his old associates. He had indeed before him a well-founded apprehension of the consequences of his treachery, even from those stamped with similar crimes, should he be found once more in their power.

Thus we find the crimes of this man lead him on, step by step, till he is reduced to prefer the desperate situation of standing opposed to all mankind—compelled unceasingly to watch for his life—certain of seeing an enemy in every human face—certain that to suffer himself for a moment to sleep might terminate his miserable existence; certain, too, that in that sleep his enormities would at least visit him with horrid retrospective visions, anticipations of torture—despair and death—and certain that reality promised no other end:—preferring all these, to the opportunity given him of a life of penitence, and a death at all events not hastened by the hands of justice.

Let us now turn to his old associates in guilt; whom justice seemed now to be quickly overtaking; for there remained at large, besides Howe, of the original gang who ran from the Derwent, only Septon, Jones and Collier—Coine and Browne, who were implicated in their recent robberies, were runaways from Port Dalrymple.

In a few days after the affair in which Geary was killed, the banditti robbed several stock-keepers at the Carleton.

On the 3rd of August the little force of Sergt. McCarthy, which had been unremittingly scouring the woods in all directions, observed the print of feet on the beach, and traced and discovered the banditti at Swan Port on the eastern shore.

As soon as they perceived the soldiers, they fled with precipitancy. One of the party fired and shot Jones, their chief, through the head; who instantly died. His body was buried on the beach, after being decapitated, and his head sent to Hobart Town.

Whilst the party proceeded to intercept the retreat of the remainder the fire of the banditti wounded Holmes (a runaway who had lately joined them) and he was taken; but from the intricacy of the woods and his wounded state he was with difficulty brought to Hobart Town.

We next find discontent and treachery among themselves hasten the destruction of the remainder of the banditti; for on the 25 of August, a horrible transaction occurred at a Hut behind Gordon's Plains near Launceston.

They had on that day effected a robbery at the farm of Mr. Brumby, in which it appears Wright and Hillier, runaways from George Town, had joined them. On that evening Wright left the rest, and gave himself up at Launceston; but Hillier conceived the horrible project of murdering his companions, Septon and Collier, while asleep at this Hut (it appears Coine and Browne were absent at this moment) imagining, as he afterwards said, that he should receive the rewards offered by Government, and screen himself from the punishment of his own crimes, which he apprehended would speedily overtake him.

In the middle of the night, this monster, watching his opportunity, with a razor cut the throat of Septon from ear to ear, causing his immediate death. He then turned to perpetrate the same act on Collier, who, it seems, had been slightly disturbed; he effected only a trifling wound on the neck of the latter, who made his escape out of the hut; Hillier, however, having previously secured possession of the arms, seized Septon's rifle gun and fired at Collier, shattering his hand severely.

A more treacherous assassination has seldom been heard of.

Hillier was soon after taken; as was also Collier, in an enfeebled and helpless state. The former was sent to Sydney to take his trial for the murder of Septon, in the ship PILOT with Collier, who was sent to the same tribunal, charged as one of the eight engaged in the murders at New Norfolk, when Carlisle and O'Birne were killed; and he was the only one reserved to make a public expiation.

Upon intelligence of this last dreadful affair, The Lt. Governor issued a further Proclamation, and offered the following rewards for the only three bush-rangers at large on the 1st day of September, viz. For Howe 100 guineas. Watts 80 guineas. Browne 50 guineas, all of whom were known to have no connection or communication with each other.

In this Month, Browne surrendered to Government; Coine and Keegan had done so some time previously; and though capital punishment might have been inflicted on these last three, yet as they had no connection with the heinous Murders committed by others of the banditti, Government forbore to bring them before a Criminal Court. These men were chiefly companions of Parker, who was taken as before noticed, and with him were convicted by a Bench of Magistrates of various robberies, and sentenced,

Browne 150 Lashes and 4 years to Newcastle.

Parker; Coine; Keegan 100 lashes and 2 years to do.

We have now only Howe and Watts at large, and it seemed ordained that the greater should be reserved for punishment of the lesser villain, before called upon to receive the just reward of his great and manifold crimes.

On the 10th of October, Howe again appears on the scene, adding to the catalogue of murders already recorded one of the most savage character, which will long be in the recollection of the inhabitants of the colony.

A person named William Drewe, alias Slambow, had charge of some sheep in the vicinity of New Norfolk, for his master Mr. Williams of Hobart Town. Drewe had occasionally corresponded with Howe, and had agreed, along with his Master, to take him on the first opportunity.

Howe had lately been at Williams's hut with a letter for the Lt. Governor; and soon after Watts, who it should seem had some design upon Howe, called to enquire of Drewe if he had seen him. Drewe informed Watts that he had seen Howe, and was to meet him at sun-rise the following Friday, when, he said, if Watts would come, he would take him. On the Thursday Watts took away a boat from New Norfolk, in which he crossed the Derwent, and concealed himself near the path where Drewe had appointed, till the next morning. At sun-rise, Drewe arrived, and told Watts that he was to meet Howe at a place called Long Bottom. They proceeded thither, and Watts requested Drewe to conceal his Gun, as probably Howe would not come up to them if he perceived it. Upon arriving at the spot, Drewe called several times, and was answered by Howe from the opposite side of the creek. When Watts came within 90 yards of Howe, he desired him to knock out the priming of his gun, promising to do the same: this was accordingly done by both, and after proceeding 30 or 40 yards, they made a fire. Soon after which, Watts caught hold of Howe and threw him down; Drewe tied his hands, and took from his pockets two knives. Watts and Drewe next prepared breakfast, but of which Howe refused to partake. Before they proceeded to Hobart Town, Drewe proposed to take his master's gun and dog to the hut; which was agreed to by Watts, who desired him not to mention the occurrence of the morning to Williams; the latter had arrived the evening before at the hut to shear his sheep. Drewe met his master, who becoming, by the absence of his man, alarmed for his safety, had proceeded in search of him; upon Drewe's running towards him with his gun and dog, Williams enquired the cause; Drewe replied that George Watts was stopping with Howe, whom they had taken, whilst he came to acquaint his master, and deliver his musket, as he had got Michael Howe's, and Watts had his own; he also shewed Williams the two knives he had taken, but declined the offered assistance of the latter, as Howe was secured. Upon Drewe's return to Watts and Howe, they all proceeded towards Hobart Town; Watts, with his gun loaded, walking before Howe, and Drewe behind. After walking about 8 miles, Howe found means to disengage his hands, and in an instant stabbed Watts, with a knife which he had remaining secreted about his person. Watts fell and dropped his gun, which Howe seized at the moment, and with it shot Drewe dead. Watts now dreaded a similar fate; for on asking Howe if he had killed Slambow, he replied „Yes, and I'll serve you the same as soon as I can load the piece.“ Watts then ran about 200 yards, and lay down amongst some brush, being faint and cold from loss of blood. As soon as he was able to walk, he contrived to reach a settler's house not far distant, and, after being put to bed, told the owner that he had been stabbed by Howe, requesting the district Constable might be sent for, to take him to town. Upon the arrival of the latter, Watts could only utter his own name; but the next morning he told the Constable that Drewe was killed. The body was found about half a mile from the house where Watts lay, and was conveyed to Hobart Town for a Coroner's Inquest, whose verdict was „That the deceased William Drewe was murdered by Michael Howe.“

Watts was conveyed to gaol in a weakly state; he was a runaway from Newcastle, and was sent to Sydney in the Pilot, but under no criminal charge,

where he died in the General Hospital, of the wounds received from Howe, in three days after his arrival.

As soon as the melancholy circumstance of the murder of Drewe was communicated to The Lt. Governor, he issued another Proclamation, promising, in addition to the former reward of 100 guineas. for the apprehension of Howe a strong recommendation for a free pardon and passage to England, to any Crown prisoner who would be the means of apprehending that great Murderer. He was, however, not again seen for some time.

On the 25th of October, Collier was tried before the Criminal Court at Sydney, and convicted on the clearest evidence of being one of the murderers of Carlisle and O'Birne; he received sentence of death, to be executed at Hobart Town and his body to be dissected. In December he was sent back to this settlement and suffered the sentence of the law on the 26th of January 1818. From the moment of this man's being taken, he professed to entertain no hope of mercy, but to prefer death, to the life he had lately led: he died penitent.

The once formidable gang, and the system of bush-ranging as an armed banditti, producing in its progress great terror and mischief to the community, checking the views and paralysing the efforts of the settlers of this infant colony, might now be considered annihilated; for though Howe the most hardened (and sanguinary of the whole) still remained to be taken, yet he was cut off from association with man.

After the murder of Drewe, he was supposed to have buried himself in unknown and inaccessible parts of the woods; the necessity of procuring ammunition and supplies to prolong his wretched existence, compelled, however, an occasional appearance; and these supplies he obtained by robbing distant stock-keepers' huts; when he generally bore away with him as much as he could carry, threatening instant destruction to any person who would attempt to follow him, or trace his steps.

But his race was nearly run; and, though after the murder of Drewe and Watts few would choose to risk a personal encounter with him, yet the confidence was pretty general that he could not long exist under his present circumstances.

One or two fruitless attempts were made to take him by strategem. In the month of September, however, McGill, who was the previous year emancipated for services against the bush-rangers with the 46th Regt. and who at different periods continued an assiduous pursuit after him, came so closely upon him that, in his hurry to escape, Howe left behind him his arms, ammunition, dogs and knapsack, which fell into the hands of McGill, and were brought to Hobart Town.

The loss of his pistols on this occasion was a serious and irreparable one to Howe.

In his knapsack was found a sort of journal of dreams, which shew strongly the distressed state of his mind, and some tincture of superstition.

From this little book of kangaroo skin, written in kangaroo blood, it appears that he frequently dreamt of being murdered by natives, of seeing his old companions, Whitehead, Jones, Geary, and Collier, of being nearly taken by a soldier; and, in one instance, humanity asserts itself even in the breast of Michael Howe, for we find him recording that he dreamt of his sister.

It also appears from this memorandum book, that he had always an idea of settling in the woods; for it contains long lists of such seeds as he wished to have, of vegetables, fruits, and even flowers!

After this period, but one or two trifling Robberies are heard of, in one of which he furnished himself with a gun, and anxiously enquired for pistols, before we come to the closing scene of the career of this desperado.

In the month of October, a person named Warburton, in the habit of hunting kangaroo for skins, who had occasional opportunities of seeing Howe, communicated to a Crown prisoner, named Thomas Worrall, stock-keeper to Edward Lord Esq. a scheme for taking him. Worrall agreed to the trial, and with Private William Pugh of the 48th Regt. a man of known courage, and recommended by Major Bell for this service, determined to lay in wait at a hut on the Shannon River, likely to be visited by Howe for supplies. Warburton was to look out for the approach of Howe, and to induce him to come to the hut, under a promise of ammunition; at the same time to signify his approach by a whistle. This plan proved successful. On the 21st of October Howe met Warburton near the place already mentioned; he, however, exhibited much distrust of the intention of the latter, and great hesitation in advancing near the hut—often disappearing to see if any one were watching him. At length, after three hours indeterminate consideration, allured by promises of ammunition, which Warburton said was in the hut, he ventured to enter the door, his musket cocked and levelled; when Pugh instantly fired, but missed him; Howe simply exclaimed „Is that your game,“ and precipitately retreated, but at the same time fired and missed also. Pugh and Worrall immediately rushed out to run him down, and the latter fired, but none of the shots took effect. Pugh and Worrall gained upon Howe; and now he must for once have felt appalled—deprived of his pistols shortly before, no time allowed for a second charge, and his pursuers gaining ground—nothing but a miracle could effect his deliverance. Pugh and Worrall had now come up with him; a severe encounter ensued; and finally, from well-directed blows on his head with their Muskets, fell and expired without speaking—the last of a lawless, murderous Banditti!—Exhibiting in his career and end the strongest proof of slow but certain retributive justice; which, though it was baffled for a season, in the end overwhelmed this wretched violator of its most sacred laws with more striking vengeance; after making him directly or indirectly the instrument of destruction to those connected with him in his dreadful outrages, he himself closed the scene!—an awful example, which cannot be too strongly impressed upon the minds of all those who are inclined to prefer to the wholesome and mild laws of civilized society, a licentious life of unrestraint; which can only be maintained by robbery and violence, and which will surely end in murder and an ignominious death.

Howe was of athletic make; he wore at the time of his death a dress made of kangaroo skins, had an extraordinary long beard, and presented altogether a terrific appearance. His face, perhaps in some degree from associating with it the recollection of his crimes, exhibited strong marks of a murderer. During his long career of guilt, he was never known to perform one humane act. His body was interred on the spot where he fell; his head was brought to Hobart Town, and suffered to be seen by the people, to whom the end of this monster afforded an inconceivable degree of satisfaction.

The reward due to the zeal and bravery of the persons engaged in ridding the world of this murderer was universally acknowledged to be well merited. His Honor Lient. Governor Sorrell issued a Government and General Order, in which he strongly commended the activity, intelligence and spirit of Private William Pugh, whom His Honor recommends to His Excellency the Governor in Chief for the greatest favor he can receive. The deserving conduct of Thomas Worrall His Honor also brings under the notice of His Excellency, accompanied by a strong recommendation for a free pardon and passage to England, in pursuance of the terms of the Proclamation.

The reward for Howe's apprehension was adjudged to be divided in the following manner; to Pugh £50; to Worrell £40 and to Warburton (who was not personally engaged) £15.

The following account of the unhappy end of Edward Edwards and John Bowles, and the sudden disappearance of Thomas Davenport, all Crown servants, as connected with Howe's crimes, and adding to the number of those who fell by his murderous hand, proceed from the same authority:

After the banditti, in an early stage, had taken a Government boat from Port Dalrymple, they robbed Captain Townson of a cask of pork, and went to King's Island, where they hid a Box of Tools in the sand: they next went to Cape Barren, where they disagreed and separated—a further dispute arose, when Howe, it is stated, deliberately shot Edwards, in the presence of Jones and Whitehead.

On a subsequent occasion, at a creek on Salt-pan Plains, Bowles having sportively discharged a pistol over Howe's head, the latter in a wanton and cruel manner tied Bowles, hand and feet, and then coolly shot him dead.

Thomas Davenport, who was an assigned servant to Mr. D. Stanfield obtained his master's permission to hunt kangaroo in the interior of the country, taking with him a musket, dogs and other necessaries. He had not been absent more than three days, when his dogs returned without him; this circumstance created much anxiety, which was increased by Davenport's not being heard of, and all enquiry after him proving unavailing for some time. At length Warburton (mentioned in the foregoing narrative) in a conversation with Howe was told by him that Davenport was killed by the native. The general belief, however, is that Howe had met Davenport, and in some way been the cause of his death—perhaps sacrificed him on a refusal to join in his enormities.

The public have thus a brief narrative of the chief events of the last six years of Howe's life; comprising a series of crimes committed with the coolest indifference. Many of less enormity have been omitted, and most of the information given by himself disregarded as proceeding from such a man.

The bush-rangers had no fixed place of general rendezvous, or any regular system—they were of necessity consequently moving about the Woods, frequently without the common support and necessaries of life, and exposed to much hardship. They could never have become formidable, had not the peculiar circumstances of the colony admitted of their becoming better acquainted with the interior than other Men, and it is nearly impossible that any bands of future bush-rangers will be formed, or, if formed, that they can exist so long unsubdued as those now happily exterminated.
