

THE STRANGE CAREER OF WILLIAM BERESFORD by G.C. Bolton

He must have been a memorable character, because yarns about him were circulating for years after he died. Gilbert Parker, the eager young Canadian journalist who traversed Australia in 1889, heard stories about the ex-convict journalist Beresford who had been an aristocratic clergyman in the Old Country and spent his old age as tutor to a settler's family in the York district.¹ W.B. Kimberly in the astonishingly far-ranging collection of information which he picked up in 1897 for his *History of West Australia*² also made some mention of Beresford. But the goldfields' generation of Western Australians soon forgot the ex-convict past, and Beresford remained largely unremembered until the early 1960s when Beverley Smith drew attention to his vigorous journalism as one of the founders of the ex-convict Fremantle newspaper, the *Herald*, in the late 1860s and 1870s.³ William Beresford was particularly notable as the first of Western Australia's columnists, writing under the pen-name of 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter'. Under the guise of a shrewd if semi-literate working man Beresford tilted at the pretensions of Western Australia's ruling class, those officials and merchants and graziers who cherished their invitations to Government House, those would-be colonial politicians who with the coming of representative government vied to cut a figure in the Legislative Council. There was an irony here because Beresford was neither semi-literate nor a working man. It was known that he was transported from the York assizes in 1855 for forgery, that his profession was described as 'clerk', and that he was in reality a clerk in holy orders, a clergyman gone to the bad.⁴ One account stated that he had been Anglican Dean of Cork, and he was often referred to as 'the Honourable and Reverend William Beresford'. But even Beverley Smith managed to reveal little of his past, and so the question remained to excite one's curiosity: How did a broken-down aristocrat grow into 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter'? What events in William Beresford's past shaped the sort of character whom he became in Western Australia?

Despite all the conjecture there was surprisingly little material to build on. The Beresfords were and are a numerous family without a great deal of imagination in their choice of Christian names, and it was a little difficult to determine which of several William Beresfords who lived in the 19th century would have been our man. There was no Honourable William Beresford in the right period. There was indeed a Right Honourable William Beresford who was a member of the House of Commons in several of Queen Victoria's early Parliaments, became a member of the Privy Council, and edited some of the family correspondence, but he lived and died in England without a breath of scandal. A more hopeful candidate appeared to be a William Beresford who was born in 1799 and died in 1881, the son of the Honourable and Reverend George Beresford, and himself a clergyman; but according to *Burke's Peerage* this man was the vicar of St Chad's church in Stafford, which appeared to rule him out.

But *Burke's Peerage* is wrong. The vicar of St Chad's turned out to be a much younger man who led a blameless existence as a Staffordshire clergyman highly regarded as an expert on bell-ringing.⁵ How he came to be confused with the William Beresford who died in 1881 and who was, in fact, 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter' remains unknown. It was only after disposing of this false trail that it has been possible to piece together the somewhat astonishing career of our Beresford. There are still significant gaps in the story, some of which could probably be resolved by diligent research in Ireland. What follows is in the nature of a report on progress.

The Beresfords are a notable old Anglo-Irish family, numbered among the most great and powerful of the Protestant Ascendancy who controlled Ireland between the 17th and 19th centuries. At the height of their power in the 18th century it was alleged that the Beresfords controlled one quarter of the official positions in Ireland, and although this was an exaggeration, they were remarkably influential. After a modest beginning the family entrenched its fortunes in 1717 when Sir Marcus Beresford married the heiress of the ancient Irish family of de la Poer (or Power), earls of Tyrone. Sir Marcus was created Earl of Tyrone, and the Earl and Countess became parents of eight daughters and three sons. George, the eldest, succeeded to the family estates at Curraghmore in county Waterford and was created Marquess of Waterford in 1789. John, the second, was a Member of Parliament for forty-four years and as Chief Commissioner of Revenue from 1780 to 1802 exercised great influence among the governing circles at Dublin Castle. William, the youngest, became the clergyman of the family.

Each of the three brothers had a large family. The Marquess of Waterford however became the victim of a spectacular family curse. It is said that he ordered the eviction from his estate of a gipsy woman with a dying child, and in revenge she swore that the eldest son in every generation of the landlord's family would meet a violent end. The curse of an Irish gipsy is potent. His eldest son, a singularly promising and handsome boy of twelve, while out riding set his horse at a low fence which normally should have been the easiest of jumps. The horse stumbled and the boy was killed. The second Marquess, being a younger son, survived; but the curse recurred with his eldest son, the third Marquess, a spectacular eccentric given to elaborate practical jokes. (He once caused a donkey to be placed in the bed of a drunken friend who was sleeping off a hangover; on another occasion he offered one of the first Irish railway companies a large sum if they would allow two locomotives at full speed to meet in a head-on collision so that he and his guests might observe the effects.) The 'Mad Marquess' eventually broke his neck hunting, leaving the title to his brother, a clergyman; but that brother's son, the fifth Marquess, shot himself in a fit of depression brought on by injuries sustained in the hunting field. The sixth Marquess drowned in crossing a stream at night, the seventh Marquess reverted to tradition and was killed while hunting. The eighth Marquess, who succeeded to the title at the age of one year in 1934, has survived to hold the estates longer than any of his predecessors.

John Beresford, the second brother, had twenty children by two marriages, and these included the ancestors of several Beresfords now living in Western Australia. Our concern is with the youngest brother, William. Born in 1743, he was trained for the church, and with the family influence behind him became a bishop at the early age of thirty-seven and Archbishop of Tuam in 1794. Like most of the Beresfords he was a handsome man. Contemporaries used to call him 'the Beauty of Holiness'. He too had a large family — seventeen children in all. In later life he spent much of his time with his family enjoying fashionable life at Bath.⁶ Despite his absenteeism he was anxious to establish his branch of the family

among the Irish nobility, and in 1812 succeeded in persuading the authorities to grant him an Irish peerage as Lord Decies. He died in 1819.

The archbishop's eldest son, John, led an agreeably idle life as a bachelor around Bath and for a number of years showed no sign of settling down to family responsibilities. But the second son, George, married young and became a clergyman. George Beresford's wife came from a County Meath family named Gorges who possessed a somewhat wild reputation. Two of her sisters are known to have run away from their husbands, and the menfolk were noted gamblers and duellists. It was a dangerous genetic inheritance to mix with the arrogant Beresfords. The oldest child of this marriage, born in 1799, was William Beresford, the subject of this paper. For the first eleven years of his life he was his grandfather's heir, and he would have been old enough to be aware of these expectations. But in 1810 his uncle John married an heiress from Northumberland, and the following year produced a son. It would be his child, and not William Beresford, who eventually inherited the Decies title.

Uncle John's marriage did not turn out happily, and although he and his wife had three more children, all daughters, they eventually split up. John became the second Lord Decies and spent the rest of his eighty years hanging around Bath. He grew somewhat miserly in later life. One of his relatives recalled that 'Lord Decies was always hanging about my grandmother's house, enjoying her dinners and whist (both of which were of best quality)'.⁷ His son went into the army but remained to all appearances a confirmed bachelor, not always enjoying the best of health. Consequently William Beresford's whole life was overshadowed by the consciousness of having been displaced from his early role as heir, and by an awareness that if his uncle and his cousin died he might yet become Lord Decies and heir to the archbishop's estates. His younger brothers, who could not share the same expectations, went into the army and made successful careers for themselves. But William Beresford's career would be distorted by his great expectations.

He was an able youth, and it was hardly surprising that, like his father and his grandfather before him, he should seek his fortunes in the church. He entered Trinity College, Dublin, at the age of sixteen in 1815 and graduated B.A. in 1820. By this time his grandfather was dead, but a kinsman, Lord John Beresford, was shortly to become Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland; and the family's command of patronage was still sure enough to secure him a lucrative post. Shortly after his ordination in 1824 William Beresford was appointed Protestant rector of Inniscara, County Cork. Inniscara was a small market town about 25 kilometres west of Cork city, with a Protestant church and school, though the small congregation were much outnumbered by the Roman Catholic peasantry. However the post carried a salary of £600 a year, and Beresford may have accumulated more small benefices since in the 1840s his income was stated to be £1,000; perhaps equivalent in terms of today's purchasing power to \$50,000 a year, and certainly more than the Governor of Western Australia received as a salary at that time. In short he enjoyed a well paid sinecure with minimal responsibilities.

In his early years at least, he was not an absentee, as in December 1826 he was present to cast his vote at a memorable parliamentary election for Cork County on the eve of Daniel O'Connell's great agitation for Catholic emancipation. It was the sort of election which is regarded as 'typically Irish' as the Whig candidate was a Protestant landowner who favoured giving Catholics the vote and the Tory was a lapsed Catholic who bitterly

opposed it. There was always a lively possibility of riot as each voter had to declare his choice in public. As a sound member of the Beresford family the rector of Inniscara naturally voted for the Tory but his candidate was narrowly defeated. There was no sign of the radicalism of 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter' about the young William Beresford.⁸

In 1830 Beresford married Sarah, widow of Daniel Simpson and daughter of John Bull. She brought him a considerable fortune and in order to safeguard her interests Beresford was required to take out a substantial life insurance policy whose premiums became an annual charge on his income as rector.⁹ It is likely that much of her wealth came in the form of West Indian property, but after the abolition of slavery in 1833 the value of such properties slumped into a trough from which they would not recover for decades. There is no evidence that the Beresfords ever visited the Caribbean or indeed how they spent their time in the 1830s. They had only one child, a daughter born in 1840. Probably they were seldom in County Cork. Beresford's name is absent from the records of local intellectual societies and other organisations where one might expect to find a country clergyman of his education. Beyond doubt the Beresfords made the money fly. He borrowed from a Mr Wise, repaying him by an annual charge on his income as rector, and he sold the right of collecting the income from the glebe house to a Cork attorney. After living off capital in this way for some years he came to the end of his rope in 1842. In the August of that year we find him in King's Bench, the London detention centre for debtors, throwing himself on the mercy of the Archbishop of Armagh, the Primate of All Ireland — who happened to be a Beresford. Lord John George Beresford was the cousin of William Beresford's father and an extremely formidable old prelate, every inch a prince of the Church. William Beresford used every resource to impress him:

*My living is sequestrated; My West India Property gone; and the interest money paid by Lord Waterford reduced from £500 to £400. — My furniture sold by auction, and all the fearful Consequences of debt — My English Creditors have proceeded to outlawry against me I have surrendered and am so circumstanced that unless I can make them a payment I must take the benefit of the insolvent act, and take a public examination ... I have appealed to others without success, and unless Your Grace can assist me I must submit. My continued clerical difficulties and the total ruin of colonial property have been the original cause of my ruin ...*¹⁰

Then came the bite; if the Archbishop sent him a small sum such as £300 he could fend off his creditors and save the Beresford family and the Irish Church from the poor publicity of seeing one of their number humiliated by bankruptcy. Something must have been done for him as six years later he was at large and still sponging off his relatives. A widowed aunt of his, Mrs Elizabeth Mellifont, had recently remarried a Yorkshire landowner and industrialist, Ellis Cunliffe Lister-Kay of Manningham Hall near Bradford. Beresford, now apparently without his wife and daughter, gained an invitation to stay at the home of the elderly couple. Next he went on to spend a few days with his host's son by an earlier marriage, John Cunliffe Kay of Fairfield House. He seems to have spent a good deal of his time there chatting to his host about his hopes of inheriting the Decies peerage. He even told John Cunliffe Kay that his uncle and cousin might be dead within six months so that 'he would be Lord Decies in the spring'. And while the two men talked in the rainy Yorkshire autumn

Beresford formulated the scheme which was to lead to his downfall and ruin.¹¹

Beresford had in his possession a bill of exchange for £100 which had been drawn by his younger brother, Marcus Beresford, on the London firm of Samuel Hibbert and Company in Billiter Square. Marcus Beresford was a professional soldier serving most of his time outside England, and it was not unusual for officers to have an arrangement with a London firm under which they might make payments in the United Kingdom. Presumably he sent William the money to help him over a time of financial crisis. Around the end of October 1848 William Beresford took the bill of exchange to the Bradford Banking Company and asked the manager, a Mr Samuel Laycock, to discount it — that is, to let him have its value in cash less a small fee for the expenses of the transaction. Laycock told him that before doing so an endorsement would be needed from some person of standing whose credit rating was known to the bank, and when Beresford suggested the Lister-Kay family, agreed that either the father or the son would be acceptable. Beresford then approached the son, John Cunliffe Kay, but the answer was a refusal. In fact he disliked the look of the bill so much that he took the trouble of cautioning his father's bank in Bradford about it. He never explained his objections. Possibly his seedy guest had worn out his welcome with his talk of his great expectations; perhaps it was simply that although Marcus Beresford was a senior officer of unquestionable standing Kay had never met him and had no notion of his financial soundness. After all, if he was as big a spendthrift as his brother ... So he refused.

Beresford left Fairfield House, but a day or two later John Cunliffe Kay received a letter from him:

My dear Friend,

If the weather has not washed you away I assume you are at Fairfield. I have missed a letter which I suspect will be found under the cushion in the bedroom, among the flies. Pray let me have a line, directed to the Post Office, Bradford, to say whether you can find it.

As Beresford had planted the missing letter in the bedroom before his departure it was not surprising that Kay soon found it and sent it on with a covering note to which he signed his name. Now Beresford had an example of Kay's signature from which a copy could be made. On 4 November he turned up again at the office of the Bradford Banking Company with his bill of exchange showing the signed endorsement of John Cunliffe Kay. Laycock, the manager, was at first dubious about the signature, but when Beresford explained that Kay had been ill in bed at the time of writing his doubts were quietened. After all, Beresford was a clergyman with aristocratic connections, and should not be lightly offended. So he paid over to Beresford the sum of £99/6 — fourteen shillings having been deducted for commission. Beresford thanked him and left, and was seen no more in the neighbourhood of Bradford.

A Bench warrant was taken out against him, but the authorities do not appear to have searched after him at all diligently, nor did the Kays trouble themselves in the matter. Perhaps John Cunliffe Kay hesitated to distress his stepmother; we do not know. As it was, Beresford lived unmolested with his wife and daughter in the city of London in Austin Friars, not far from Threadneedle Street. It was not a fashionable neighbourhood, and he reputedly made a living as a billiard-marker, keeping the score and arbitrating in disputes at a commercial billiards saloon. It is quite possible

that he was the William Beresford who in 1850 with two partners — Edward Baylis and Edwin Paul — launched a project called the Waterloo Life Assurance Company. A prospectus survives somewhat grandly entitled 'A treatise on the new application of the principles of life assurance'. It is a pretty unconvincing proposition, of which the most original feature is an offer of special terms for clergymen of the Church of England, and it would not have been out of character for Beresford to be involved in such a scheme; but it did not flourish. Instead he was getting into increasing trouble because of his prolonged absence from his parish of Inniscara.

The district had been hard hit by the terrible famine of 1846-47 and its social problems were numerous. Early in 1853 Beresford wrote to the Bishop of Cork asking permission to resign his rectory at Inniscara but the church authorities were afraid that if this was allowed they would continue to be responsible for the debts which he was servicing from the parish income. Accordingly they refused his request. In February 1854 he renewed the application, this time taking it to the Archbishop, Lord John George Beresford; but after inquiring into the circumstances, he also refused and made it perfectly plain that he never wanted to hear from his errant relative again. However as William Beresford's years of negligence had caused great decay in the Church's fabric and driven several respectable Protestant families to Roman Catholicism, a curate was appointed. The Archbishop's only hope and concern was that this young man might 'by his influence and diligence ... in some degree repair the mischief done.'¹²

Beresford was up against it, and the Decies inheritance was more than ever his only hope of a lifeline. At the beginning of 1855 his uncle died, and Beresford was now immediate heir to his cousin, who at forty-four still seemed a confirmed bachelor. But Nemesis was about to catch up with him. On 10 April 1855 William Beresford was walking along Regent Street when he heard a voice call, 'Mister Beresford?' 'Yes'. 'I am afraid I shall have to place you in the hands of the police.' 'Who are you?' asked Beresford. It was John Cunliffe Lister-Kay. 'Have mercy upon me,' exclaimed Beresford, 'If you go to Mr Moss the money will be paid into the bank.' Kay was unmoved. 'I can do no such thing,' he retorted, and gave Beresford into the hands of a police constable who had been attracted to the scene. Later in the day Beresford's friend Mr Moss called at Kay's hotel but Kay refused to see him. Despite the lapse of six and a half years he found it impossible to forgive Beresford for cheating him, and as his father and stepmother were by now dead he may have felt less inhibited about prosecuting. It remains a coincidence worthy of Victorian melodrama that on one of his comparatively rare visits to London this Yorkshire landowner should have caught up with his unsatisfactory guest.

So it was that at the York assizes on 11 December 1855 'William D. Beresford, 56, a fine-looking man apparently in bad health, and meanly dressed, was indicted for uttering, at Bradford on the 4th of November 1848, a forged endorsement of a bill of exchange for the payment of £100 with intent to defraud Samuel Laycock and others.' The prosecution's case mainly rested on Kay's evidence. Marcus Beresford was in India and could not be called to authenticate the bill of exchange, and Samuel Hibbert the banker refused to appear to a subpoena, possibly not wishing to offend the Beresford family. But the evidence was damning, and the speech made by the counsel for the defence, Mr Hardy, suggests a somewhat desperate making of bricks without straw:

Mr Hardy commented on the length of time which had elapsed

since the commission of the offence, which had deprived the prisoner of the opportunity of answering the charge, which he might have had. The prisoner was a clergyman, connected with one of the highest and noblest families in Ireland, and living in London accessible to anyone who would search for him. He had a wife and daughter, and everything that could make life satisfactory and pleasant to himself and those about him. He implored the jury to take a fair and charitable view of the case, looking at the deplorable consequences of a conviction, not only to the prisoner, but to his family, on whom a verdict of guilty would affix a stigma of shame. He contended that the openness and boldness of the whole transaction led to the strong impression that there must be circumstances in the case which, at this distance of time, the prisoner was unable by evidence to explain ...¹³

and a good deal more to similar effect. But if he had any effect on the jury it was soon undone by the judge. Sir Samuel Martin, a Baron of the Exchequer, had been a slightly younger contemporary of Beresford's at Trinity College, Dublin, but it was vain to hope that this would make him sympathetic to a fellow collegian fallen on hard times. On the contrary he saw Beresford as something of a traitor to his caste:

*The judge requested the jury to dismiss from their minds very many of the topics addressed to them on the prisoner's behalf, for if they were allowed to weigh with them persons in a different station of life from the prisoner would have great reason to complain.*¹⁴

After a short consultation the jury returned a verdict of 'Guilty'; and then Mr Justice Martin pronounced sentence:

It would be a subject of well merited complaint if the prisoner were to be treated differently from the meanest individual. The prisoner was a gentleman of education and station and he must know that the prosperity of this country depended on keeping inviolate the credit of bills of exchange, or business could not go on. So strong had this feeling formerly been that the prisoner, as sure as he stood in that dock, would have been executed for this offence. But the law had since been altered, on the understanding that the judges would severely punish all offences of this kind brought home to a man.

The sentence of the Court was that he be transported for the period of his natural life.¹⁵

According to *The Times*: 'On hearing the sentence the prisoner seemed astounded; he staggered, and was removed from the dock supported by the officers'. Once a tall and distinguished-looking man with a fine head of grey hair, he now seemed a wreck who would not long survive his conviction. But there was to be a surprising sequel.

Beresford served the first two and a half years of his sentence in Pentonville gaol. He seems to have lost contact with his wife and daughter; at least there is no evidence that they ever had anything to do with him. It is possible that family influence was used to ease his captivity, although on the other hand he was a well-conducted prisoner who earned maximum privileges. On one score however the family was adamant. There could be no risk of the Decies title passing to a convicted felon. Accordingly the third Lord Decies, Beresford's cousin, was eventually persuaded that it was his duty to marry. Married he was in 1860 at the mature age of forty-nine. In the course of time he became the father of five sons and three

daughters, the last of them born when he was sixty-seven years of age. Eventually the atmosphere of a household full of growing children must have become too much for him. He left home and took up residence at the Great Northern Hotel in York, where he lived for eight years until his death at the age of eighty-two in 1893. He had not sacrificed his bachelor comfort in vain as the succession was well provided for. Perhaps for William Beresford it was a surprisingly liberating experience when the title ceased to be within the reach of yearning.

At any rate some interesting transformations took place in his character after he was transported to Western Australia in 1858. He arrived on the *Edwin Fox* and was almost at once granted a ticket-of-leave. Four years later his life sentence was commuted and he was once more a free man on a conditional pardon. If it is true that he spent some time as tutor to a family in the York district it may have been at this period during the early 1860s. Because of the enterprise of the Monger family, York at that time was the main centre of the sandalwood industry in Western Australia, and it seems likely that Beresford observed the characters who served as models for 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter' while living in that district.

Perhaps it was here too that he developed his well-known sympathy for the Aborigines, for as Kimberly relates, 'many were the hungry natives who received plenty from his simple charity.'¹⁶ If only he had been as attentive to the wants of the peasantry of Inniscara! Presumably it was also in those years that he developed his admiration for the experienced and successful old settler, Nature's gentleman, as against the vulgarian upstarts who found their way into the Western Australia ruling classes largely by virtue of possessing wealth. Beverley Smith sees this as evidence of democratic sympathies, as well it might be, but there could also be a touch of the aristocratic consensation of a Beresford who knew himself to be better born and bred than Governor Hampton or any of the lesser lights who frequented Government House. It was a combination of qualities which would make a shrewd social critic of him.

In February 1867 he joined with another ex-convict ex-clergyman, James Roe, and a self-educated emancipist of humbler origins, James Pearce, to set up a weekly newspaper the *Herald*. Based in Fremantle, the *Herald* from the outset took up an attitude of critical and sometimes radical disrespect for the ruling classes of Western Australia. Not that the two Perth newspapers, the *Inquirer* and the *Perth Gazette*, lacked their moments of editorial self assertion; but they were managed by members of the town bourgeoisie who liked to live in comfort with their neighbours, and they often pulled their punches. No such inhibitions restrained the trio who ran the Fremantle *Herald*. It was a paper written by ex-convicts, if not for ex-convicts, at any rate for those who wished to protest at some aspect of the *status quo*.

The *Herald* tended to take the part of the working man against the employer, the private citizen against officialdom, the country settler against the town 'nobs', and anybody in opposition to the ruling clique at Government House. Beresford's particular contribution was as columnist. He created the *persona* of 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter' — a practical old colonist, not very well off, not very educated, but apparently on conversational terms with all the leading citizens of the colony, and always able to score the last point in an argument. This type of character — the shrewd working-class observer of the foibles and follies of the ruling classes — was not uncommon in Victorian literature. Thackeray made his reputation with his footman's-eye views of polite London society.

Another model may have been the American humorist Artemus Ward, whose misspelt articles giving what would now be called an 'ocker' view of the United States during the Civil War, were enormously popular during the 1860s in Britain and Australia as well as in North America. Beresford certainly knew the work of Artemus Ward, and he often milked the device of illiterate spelling, though not without occasional lapses into the vocabulary of an educated man. What was new about Beresford's 'Old Sandalwood Cutter' was that for the first time Western Australia had a resident satirist who produced regularly and whose shafts were consistently on target. 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter' soon had a regular following. The respectable detested him, but many people read him nevertheless.

In his early articles Beresford went to some trouble to stress the working-class origins of his character, and in doing so introduced a number of touches which must have been the product of his down-and-out years in London. 'I ain't a educated man' he wrote in his introductory column, 'cause when I was a youngster there wasn't no national schools like there is now where a poor lad may get a fair education for a penny a week'.¹⁷ In another column he makes the 'Old Sandalwood Cutter' write:

*When I was a little boy gettin' up at five o'clock in the mornin', walkin' five miles to work and workin' in a brickyard up till dusk in summer and winter, then walkin' five miles home and gettin' three shillin' a week ...*¹⁸

And later in the same article there is a real touch of social indignation for the plight of the poor:

*... puttin' 'em to work in dark coalfields and wet brickfields and when they're crippled or nearly dead as to be useless for work put 'em in a workhouse, to die and when dead be thrust in under ground, and in hideous mockery read the Bible over 'em our dear departed brother or sister as the case may be ...*¹⁹

Not that Beresford was rejecting the church in which he had passed thirty years of his career. Only a few months earlier than the previous article he had written an introductory paragraph which is startling in its orthodoxy:

*I'm a great lover of the church (and clergy) in which I was christened; and no one-ll stick up more for both than me so long as I see all things going on right — the gospels preached — the sufferin' and sick helped and consoled — the clergy generally doin' what it is their special business to do — to lighten the cares and troubles of the poor and to encourage 'em in their daily struggle ...*²⁰

And he spoke of the role which the clergy could play in preaching to the unfortunate about 'the hereafter where distinctions between rich and poor do not exist'. Most infidelity occurred, he said, because ministers did not practice what they preached. It is an odd production coming from the rector of Inniscara whose performance had been so sternly criticised by his archbishop.

Yet in general he was on the side of the common people against the powerful. After criticising Governor Hampton trenchantly he came to the conclusion that even he was not as trifling a character as Governor Weld. At least he was more accessible.

From what little I have seen of Mr Wel I don't hesitate to put him

*down among the Stuck-Ups — and them's a class of people as ain't much respected by anybody, least of all the old settlers and you'll generally find that they (the Stuck-ups) don't suffer from havin' too much brains.*²¹

He was no more charitable towards most of Weld's senior officials and eventually goaded the Colonial Secretary, Frederick Barlee, into dropping his usual ingratiating manner and telling the Legislative Council at its first session in January 1871 that the *Herald's* controllers were 'commonly reported convicted felons of the colony'. He also accused Pearce and Beresford of setting class against class — at all times one of the most extreme accusations in the Western Australian political vocabulary.

But he had stepped too far. The question of convict origins was by common consent regarded as too sensitive to bring into parliamentary debate. Pearce and Beresford wrote a long and dignified letter of protest to the Colonial Office, and in June the Secretary of State gave Barlee a gentle rap over the knuckles for his indiscretion. No apology followed; probably none was expected. Beresford continued to lampoon Barlee and his colleagues with unabated pungency. On the other hand, as well as praising the honest old settlers who had borne the burden and heat of the day, 'Old Sandalwood Cutter' had several good words to say for the rising generation of the colonial-born who in the early 1870s were just beginning to come to the fore: John Forrest, for instance, or Stephen Henry Parker whose side he naturally took in 1870 during Parker's notable confrontation with Chief Justice Archibald Burt. Beresford's portrait of Burt drew interestingly on his background reading: The judge, he wrote ...

*... was as cold and damp as a frog. He was perched in a chair with a short back like the chairs in the picture where you sees a popish priest is sittin' with a long face and a long hat and quietly observin' one or two Protestant Bishops toastin' at a fire.*²²

One wonders what would happen if the *Fremantle Gazette* or even the *West Australian* went in for that style of reportage today?

Beresford's social attitudes indeed were as much those which might be expected in an aristocrat as in a democrat. The bourgeois gentility of Western Australia's ruling class was what most excited his scorn, and he was particularly hard on upstarts who looked down on those who had been less prosperous:

*... most of 'ems what I say, mean skunks, who ain't half so respectable in their fine cloes and umbrellas and visitin' Government House as they was when they wheeled a barrer, wore moleskins, wattertight, a check shirt open at the bosom, and the sleeves rolled up, and said sir to the landlord of the Jolly Waggoner.*²³

Money did not make for worth, and nor did an excess of education.

There's more real dunces in my opinion as can spell and say grammer than can't. Plenty of clever men as has left somethin' for the world to think about after their death wasn't up to much spellin' or grammer either.

There was 'too much fuss by agitaters as makes eddication a perlitical stalkin' horse.'²⁴ These are conventional populist attitudes, and similar sentiments could be found a generation later among many of the founders of the Labor and Country parties; and in some of Beresford's comments

his Protestant Anglo-Irish Tory origins are still plain to see. Although in general sympathetic to convicts and ex-convicts the *Herald* has hardly a good word to say for the Fenians sent out from Ireland in 1867-68 for their conspiracies against British rule. And his comments about Disraeli revealed the kind of anti-semitism which one would expect of Harry Flashman:

I don't think old Dizzy would a wrote his last novel unless he'd a been quite sure it would be sold. Ain't he just like all his race? he must do a little 'parginin' and as the Prime Minister of England couldn't well sell cheap Jewellery, or fried fish, or coconuts, or oranges, or old cloes, he does a little in the secondhand book line. I was thinkin' the other day that if ever Dizzy does take a title the Lord of Nimble Ninepence would suit him to a shadder.²⁵

That isn't the way 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter' would have thought, but there might well have been similar comments when the port went round the second time in one of the big houses in county Cork.

For he never forgot his origins. In 1869 when Queen Victoria's second son, the Duke of Edinburgh, visited the colony in the *Galatea*, one of his ship's officers was the young Lord Charles Beresford, later to have a distinguished and controversial career as an Edwardian admiral. Years later Lord Charles reminisced about his meeting with his exiled kinsman:

At Perth I visited the convict settlement; and there I found a relative or connection of the Beresford family, who had been so unfortunate as to be transported for forgery. He appeared to be a most respectable old gentleman, and (with permission of the governor) I presented him with a small cheque. Alas! Incredible as it may seem, the sight of my signature awoke the ruling passion; and my gentleman promptly forged a bill of exchange for £50 and (as I found when I came home) got it cashed.²⁶

Lord Charles Beresford's yarns were often considerably exaggerated, but clearly at least he must have known about William Beresford and made contact with him. But as Beresford moved into his 70s his vigour inevitably waned. Weeks sometimes went by in the early 1870s when the comments of 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter' were missing from the columns of the *Herald*. As late as 1876 when he was seventy-seven years old, he was still capable of contributing some notably forceful pieces, but after that there was silence. The *Herald* was becoming progressively more respectable in its tone as the years of convict transportation slipped further behind Western Australia. It is hard to judge the merits of Gilbert Parker's story that Beresford was reduced to working as rouseabout at a bush camp. J.T. Reilly, who knew him well, simply says: 'Unfortunately, however, his declining years were spent in comparative poverty and as he advanced in age his cynicism became more pronounced'.²⁷

This certainly sounds compatible with the tenor of his writing. It is unlikely that an elderly man who had spent a long period in Fremantle would have ventured far from familiar surroundings, and we may accept W.B. Kimberly's story that he spent his last years 'an enfeebled, battered old man in an invalid depot'.²⁸ Yet he was not quite friendless or destitute, and when he died on 19 May 1880 at the age of eighty-one there were funds available to insert obituary notices in two newspapers, the *Herald* and the *Inquirer*.²⁹ In both, his full aristocratic name was spelt out: William De la Poer Beresford.

It was a far cry from Inniscara, and even further from the archbishop's grandson who had begun a promising career at Trinity College, Dublin. Yet there is a fascination about the career of the aristocratic spendthrift who, having been an inefficient pastor and in the end a disgrace to his family, found the resilience to make a distinctive contribution to the land of his exile. It is remarkable that, coming from a High Tory privileged background, his sympathies broadened so that he was able to adopt the mask of 'An Old Sandalwood Cutter' and to write with sympathy and some insight about the values of the old colonials, the welfare of the Aborigines and the underprivileged, and the qualities of the coming generation of Australian-born. And it is a pity that the loneliness of his last years leaves us with such an incomplete record. William Beresford might not have been the sort of old man to whom one would lend money, beyond perhaps the occasional shilling for a drink. But what a conversationalist he would have been!

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