

History of West Australia/William Edward Clare

WILLIAM EDWARD CLARE.

A CERTAIN very clever writer once described a newspaper as the sounding board which made audible to its readers the voices of all the world. Then he went on to say that it was the great magician which annihilated the separating power of space, and made its readers in Australia the spectators of a battle in Central Africa, or of a shipwreck in the Mediterranean, or filled their ears with the echo of a debate in the House of Commons and the tumult of a presidential election in the United States of America.

There is no enterprise in the world so fraught with vicissitude and novel experience as newspaper management. We are all familiar with Mark Twain's inimitable sketches of journalistic experiences in America, and his Tennessee troubles have caused many people to seriously doubt, in honest scepticism, his many adventures in the newspaper world. But we have in the biography of Mr. William Edward Clare a narrative, firm in fact, unique even in journalism, and rugged in picturesque experience.

William Edward Clare is a native of St. Helens, Lancashire, and was born in 1863. Leaving school, he decided to enter the ranks of journalism, and became attached to the staff of the *Birkenhead News*, upon which he remained until he was twenty-one years of age, when he embarked for Australia from Tilbury Docks. On arriving at Melbourne he spent several months in holiday-making, and deciding to go to Tasmania, he cast in his lot with the *North-Western Chronicle*, published at Latrobe, on the north coast. He remained here about eight months, and returned to Melbourne. In 1892 he came to Western Australia, and soon after Arthur Bayley discovered the sensational Reward claim, he set out for that glorified arena. It was no popinjay's mission; rather was it one requiring nerve and resource. Taking the train as far as York, he engaged a teamster to carry his swag, while he trudged along beside the dray. It was a wearying pilgrimage of five week's duration. Round the small tents forming Cool-

gardie were gathered men of all grades, bent on winning fortune at almost any cost. Mr. Clare did not waste any time, for his treasury could only boast of two shillings and twopence, and he immediately set to work "dry blowing" the alluvial patches round Bayley's Reward. His returns were not commensurate with the energy expended, and he obtained an engagement on the Reward mine soon after Mr. Sylvester Browne purchased it. At about this time Hannan's—now the world-famous Kalgoorlie—was founded by Patrick Hannan. Upon a well-remembered Saturday night Hannan entered Coolgardie, and the news of his rich alluvial discovery was soon circulated among an emotional population. Mr. Clare read, during the same evening, Hannan's notice, posted up at the Warden's tent, of an application for a reward claim at a spot about thirty miles north-east of Coolgardie, and in the first peeps of the ensuing morn, arrayed in all the primitive paraphernalia of the prospector, he was heading his course for the scene of the new find. Thanks to misdirection he was "lost" in the waterless bush—a terrible experience, appreciated only by those who have been in a similar predicament. After much dispiriting groping in the desolate wilderness, he reached his destination at nine o'clock on Monday night, when he presented a woe-begone appearance. But next morning he went out "specking," and for the day's work obtained fourteen pieces of gold, the largest of which weighed eleven pennyweights. Soon after this he pegged out a claim below the Maritana Hill, thus following the prevailing fashion, for all the ground around Hannan, Cassidy, and Flannagan was pegged and re-pegged a dozen times over in the stampede-like rush which had set in. After much laborious effort Mr. Clare reached in his claim a depth of eleven feet, where, to his intense pleasure, he struck a two-ounce piece; but, alas, in the first stages of luck the unkindly hand of fever smote his prospects. A faintness came over him; he struggled to his unpretentious little "camp," and consciousness forsook him. When he regained his senses he was in the tent of Police Constable McCarthy, in Coolgardie, down with typhoid. He had been con-

veyed to Coolgardie by the large-hearted Tom Colreavy, the discoverer of Golden Valley, the pioneer field of the immense Yilgarn district, indeed of all the eastern goldfields. He then passed through those indescribable, and too common, sufferings from fever in a weary land, where physical endurance must fight its own battle without the ameliorating conditions of good nursing and comfortable quarters. Many a time Mr. Clare's life "hung in the balance," but his splendid vitality overthrew the fever, else this story would not have been written.

But his illness had absorbed every shilling he possessed. He returned to Bayley's Reward, and worked as a miner. Here he and his mate established a record, for one hour's work in the cut yielded them eight dishes, containing 300 ounces of gold. Many interesting experiences had Mr. Clare in the matter of gold finding on this famous claim. On another occasion, while working with Mr. Gorrie, who pegged out Bayley's No. 1 South, he came upon a beautiful pocket, which held in its treasure-chamber a piece of quartz fully charged with gold, and returning thirty ounces. Again, on the same day, while turning over some solid bodies of stone, he discovered twenty ounces of rich "flaky" gold, making fifty ounces for his day's work. Perhaps there was an element of romance in this gold digging, especially when one obtains the rewards, but the heavy manual toil was more than Mr. Clare's reduced constitution could bear. The turning point of his goldfields career came with a conversation with Captain Begehole. Said Mr. Clare, in homely language— extquotedblI am full up of this sort of work. I'm a journalist, and am unused to it." Replied Captain Begehole— extquotedblWhy, look at the way this place is growing—a paper would pay here." It was as seed sown in volcanic soil; the idea germinated at once. Mr. Clare expressed a desire to found a newspaper, and the good-natured captain merely said— extquotedblYou can 'knock off' work now and go and interview some of the storekeepers, with the object of forming a syndicate to start a paper."

Mr. Clare was only too glad to avail himself of the opportunity. He threw away his pick, and started on his errand. The old goldfields' people were not in the least negative in their virtues, and the idea of having a newspaper among them was mightily pleasing. Mr. Clare knew how to stir them up; a sub-committee was formed, and on a Sunday morning the promoter of the scheme met them in free and easy conclave, and supplied the details of the journalistic infant. It was impossible to give anything like a correct estimate of cost, for in the matter of carriage alone there were at times diurnal fluctuations in

the price per ton of from ten to twenty pounds. Eventually it was agreed that Mr. Clare should go to Perth, but a serious difficulty arose; the teamsters were "out" on strike. There was nothing before him but a walk to York, and that was quite enough. Owing to the strike, food supplies in Coolgardie were very short, and our journalist stoutly began his 280 miles walk over a foodless wilderness with five pounds of flour, a two pound tin of oxhead brawn, and a water-bag containing a gallon of condensed water. After many days and nights in the depressingly dull and desolate bush, he reached Merridin in a state of exhaustion. The solitary march was relieved only by an occasional few words with some miner on the path, from whom he obtained rations from time to time. At Merridin he needs must sell his catskin rug in order to purchase "tin dog" and flour. There was here a "Shanty on the Rise," and its inmates, with that fine fellowship characteristic of lonely people in the Australian bush, were glad to give him an unlimited stock of directions as to the track, and the water holes to be found upon it. Away there in the monotonous solitudes your travellers welcome the stranger and exhibit a primitive curiosity concerning him, and, in a rugged manner, show respect and regard for those so unfortunately situated as themselves. Mr. Clare was directed to a watered track which had been used in former days, and which ran through, perhaps, the longest-wooded stretch in Western Australia—Tootalgin forest. If he had had a depressing journey before, he was destined to experience another even more abandoned. For eight successive days he tramped through the dispiriting bush, seeing no human being, and not even the proverbial "gohanna," merely meeting a few white ants, companions which count for very little, except that, like himself, they were alive. While plodding along he remembered that there was a plug of tobacco and a pipe in his pocket. He had never smoked before, but while resting in the lonely night he produced them with the idea of getting the soothing effect which my Lady Nicotine seems to possess. Poor Clare had struck a particularly ghastly brand of tobacco, but he wrestled with it most heroically. With sand as a luxuriant mattress, with the stems and thin leaves of tenacious gum trees as bed-posts and draperies, he lay on his back and very promptly watched the "everlasting stars," thinking, the while, whether there really was anything in the poetical platitudes concerning the charm of the weed which he was so devotedly consulting. His wavering views were soon determined, and he adjourned himself *sine die*, and after very slight meditation came to the conclusion that the poets were all wrong, and that the man who had sold him the tobacco had de-

signs on his life. Since that night he has not touched that particular brand of tobacco.

His provisions were now done, but meeting a native Mr. Clare magnanimously exchanged his tobacco for some kangaroo flesh, and, though it was not particularly dainty, he ate it with considerable relish. Then he struck the homestead settlement of one Flyme Martin, and when he had said that he was a wayfarer from Coolgardie, all the inmates gathered round him, whilst he told, in Goldsmith fashion, of the richness of Bayley's Reward and Hannan's. He was made an honoured guest, and when his fund of information on his travels had given out, the host told a story of "as how they knew there was gold in Coolgardie nearly seventeen years before." He then went on to tell Mr. Clare how a syndicate to go and explore the golden region was formed, "but," said he, with swelling indignation, "a crazy 'blanky' poet killed the whole affair." Mr. Clare was anxious to discover a poet's powers of syndicate annihilation, and asks, "How did he do it?" extquotedbl retorted the *raconteur*, "why, he simply went and wrote some poetry about it, and it killed our syndicate. I tell you I might have been a rich man if he hadn't written that blooming verse." "Let's hear it?" extquotedbl and Flyme then gave, with melodramatic effect, "the verse that ruined him."

"Let Stirling guide, and Flyme gas, and Cuttening give the figures,
But when they get to Coolgardie the ground is only fit for niggers."

Mr. Clare wondered no longer; he was satisfied that such a "verse would kill anything but the man who wrote it." He left the disgusted Flyme next morning, after being presented with a bottle of pickled radishes, which he feelingly abandoned a few miles away on the roadside. When some miles distant from York he grew hungry, and meeting a teamster he asked him for something to eat, and the jolly waggoner drew forth the gaunt remains of a ham bone, which Mr. Gaunt attacked with undisguised enthusiasm. That night he camped with the teamster on the banks of the Avon, but on the following evening he did himself the honour of sleeping in a house. On the outskirts of the town he saw a baker's shop, with a captious legendary sign, "Accommodation for Travellers." It was a pleasant Sunday night, and in meeting the proprietor, Mr. Clare pointed out that, as "a change," he would like to sleep under a roof, explaining that he had come from Coolgardie. He was ushered into a large dining-room, where he was eagerly questioned, and subjected

to quite a severe scrutiny. Asked what he would like to eat, Mr. Clare, who was famished, airily offered to take "anything." The hostess put a plate of ham and eggs before him; and never was dish more welcome. But he found that sleeping under a roof may have its disadvantages; he was ushered to a bench in the bakehouse. At two o'clock a.m., after a well-deserved repose, he was rudely disturbed by the bakers coming in to knead their dough. He was roused from his couch, and shown to a corner, from which he watched, with heavy eyelids, the interesting ceremony of bread-making, occasionally relieving the tedium by telling the powdered officials impossible stories about Coolgardie. In the morning he took train for Perth, where he was compelled to remain for some time before he could obtain a printing plant. This was eventually got together, and was sent per rail to Burracoppin, where a teamster, with three horses and a dray, had agreed to meet him to carry the machinery to Coolgardie. When the carrier arrived, it was found that his dray could only accommodate a portion of the consignment. Mr. Clare decided to take the most important part first, and arranged that the rest should follow. It will be readily understood that the return journey was tedious, and it was rendered more so by the teamster, who exhibited no "distressing haste." At Burracoppin Mr. Clare met Mr. Moran, the present member for East Coolgardie, who was pursuing his political campaign for the then huge electorate of Yilgarn. He was asked to take the chair at one of the candidate's meetings held on the wayside. It was a novel election meeting, and the "chair" consisted of a tree stump. The free and independent electors of Yilgarn were represented, says Mr. Clare, by about a dozen teamsters, several "swampers," a boy, two dogs, a dusky daughter of the soil, and a couple of nondescript individuals, whose chief accomplishment was an infinite capacity for drinking. The meeting was at first noisy, but eventually peace prevailed, and Mr. Clare and the teamster were able to get on their way. The teamster often showed eccentric behaviour, and camped in the most ridiculous places on sand plains without water for the horses. Mr. Clare frequently expostulated with him, and urged him to proceed more expeditiously. At Boorabbin the waggoner was still more eccentric, and finally threatened to kill Mr. Clare, and chased him with a huge piece of iron, which was successfully warded off. At Woolgangie the man exhibited unmistakable signs of insanity. He was taken in charge, and removed to the Fremantle Asylum, where he died some months after—a raving lunatic. Mr. Clare now took charge of the horses and dray, and slowly approached Coolgardie, on one occasion being almost lost

in the bush while endeavouring to find water.

When his strange travels were ended, Mr. Clare exhibited his printing plant to the populace, who evinced a lively interest in it. The physical travail ended only to give place to the mental. After two months all the plant arrived, and was expeditiously set in order. Then there was "hurrying in hot haste," and when Mr. Clare said he would produce the first number of the paper, appropriately christened the *Coolgardie Miner*, on the following Saturday, many laughed at the idea, for it was only on the Tuesday that all the machinery came to hand. The experiences of pressmen on American fields were repeated, and the new printing shanty was a hub of excitement. Inside, a couple of compositors worked with their noses in the space-box, sundry people were writing up copy, and Mr. Clare hurried hither and thither in the circumscribed space of the "office." He had difficulty in getting copy; several people volunteered to write up "something," and—did not keep their promises, and it seemed as if the "Long Felt Want" would not appear on the date announced. A couple of Hebraic gentlemen "opened a book" on the event, and several wagers were made in different directions. On Friday night Mr. Clare went round the "town" searching for some one who could set type. Finally he enrolled the services of the local captain of the *Salvation Army*, a trooper, a chemist, and the manager of a business place in Bayley Street. The assistance of the explorer, David Lindsay, was invoked to produce an article, and he turned it out in two columns. The matter was obtained, but on Saturday morning no *Coolgardie Miner* appeared. In accordance with the wagers, the paper had to make its journalistic *débüt* by one o'clock. It was 12.25 and still no paper, but at 12.30 an exultant shout heralded the first issue, which sold faster than the machine could print the copies; the "Aching Void" in the district had been filled.

Mr. Clare's troubles did not end with the publication of the paper—on the contrary, they only began. The employees had the educated thirsts peculiar to newspaper offices, and they followed the pernicious habit of getting hilariously intoxicated at intervals, especially on auspicious occasions. Then there was a strike on the part of the compositors, and sundry other annoyances tended to break the monotony of existence. Of the first number of the *Coolgardie Miner*, 1,200 copies were printed and sold at sixpence each, many of them fetching as much as half-a-crown, and five shillings in the "out back" districts. The succeeding story needs no telling here. Born in tribulation, like the jarrah forest, the *Miner* became a sturdy giant, opposed to parasitic nuisances. It became

the champion of the goldfields' interests, and, perhaps, the strongest newspaper in Western Australia. It evolved into a bi-weekly, and then a daily, with a circulation extending over thousands of miles of local territory, and even into the other colonies and to Great Britain. It has been the nursery of goldfields journalists. From it sprang the *Pioneer*, a weekly production, without a peer in the colony. Happily, Mr. Clare has had an experience which, probably, no newspaper proprietor in the world can lay claim to; in three years he cleared a comfortable fortune. In company with others, he is about to launch the *Westralian Star*, a new evening journal, at Kalgoorlie.

Mr. Clare's generosity and kindness of heart are known all over the fields, and many an impoverished person in Coolgardie has to thank him for his liberality. He can fairly lay claim to being a pioneer of one of the greatest goldfields in the world, and before his visit to England in December, 1895, he was banqueted by one of the most representative gatherings of colonial pioneers that ever assembled to pay parting respects to a friend. Mr. Clare is interested in a large number of Westralian mines, and has his name on the directorate of several. He was the prime mover and instigator of the memorial fund to Arthur Bayley, the pioneer, and organised entertainments on behalf of the fund. He is possessed of splendid commercial abilities, and Coolgardie and Perth people will testify to his social qualities. He and his paper have ever fought the fight of right, and both personally, and through his bright journals, he has been a tower of strength in Western Australia. To his endurance and daring enterprise Coolgardie owes the birth of a powerful journal. And when one glances retrospectively on the many vicissitudes that he encountered in his struggle to gain his end, encomiums for his pluck should be strongly couched. His experiences of the early days of Coolgardie, if recorded, would form an interesting volume, and act as a valuable contribution to the historical sequence of the goldfields. His name is indissolubly linked with journalism in Western Australia.

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