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THE HOMECOMING

(XII) THE HOMECOMING



SECTION VIII described how George Loveless, in the spring of 1836, was employed on the farm of Major de Gillern, at Glenayr, near Richmond, some forty-five miles from Hobart, Van Diemen's Land. He was considerably treated now that he was a "free" man—in so far as one could be free who was utterly destitute of material resources, and who was not permitted to return to England.

George Loveless now a "free man"

His thoughts were far away across the ocean in the quiet countryside from which he had been torn, where dwelt his loved ones. How were they faring? Had they been left at the mercy of his oppressors, to starve, or to be driven to the poorhouse? He could not believe that his brothers of the Trade Union Movement would be indifferent to their needs. He felt the confidence born of being a member of that great human brotherhood, pulsating with desire to make the lot of him and his like the more worth living.

The country round him was wild and inhospitable to his English eyes. Plains, hills and mountains covered with lofty trees were all around him. Nowhere could be observed the soft and fertile valleys of his earlier memories. It seemed to him as though even in nature itself there was a reflex of the dreariness and drabness which governed the lives of the unhappy convicts. He missed the notes of the English birds, and the brilliant plumage of the feathered world seemed to him little compensation for the absence of cheery song. Birds which did not sing and flowers from which no fragrance seemed to radiate were a strange anomaly to him. The hot north-west wind stifled his breathing, just as the cruel hand of authority had stifled his freedom of action.

Wild and inhospitable country

Major de Gillern perceiving that Loveless was a man of high intelligence and sympathising with his longing to get news of England, brought him from time to time the newspapers which he himself received from the old country.

Loveless writes that in September, 1836, he read in the *London Dispatch* that Lord John Russell had stated that the Dorsetshire Unionists were not only to be set at liberty but were also to be sent back to England free of expense and with



every necessary comfort. He evidently meant the *Weekly Dispatch* and the debates in the House of Commons, which took place on March 3 and 14, 1836. The statement

which Loveless had seen in the newspaper was reproduced in the *Hobart Town Tasmanian* a little later.

At that time there was a considerable agitation taking place in Tasmania against what was considered the severity and the maladministration of the Governor. A number of newspapers regarded Colonel Arthur as little better than a tyrant and were demanding his recall. The *Chronicle*, in particular, was extremely outspoken. The Editor of the *Tasmanian*, Mr. R. L. Murray, was opposed to this campaign, and as evidence of the Governor's kindness he said that "orders had been sent from the Home Government to work the Dorchester Unionists in irons on the roads." This order had not been carried out by the

Agitation
to recall
Governor
Arthur

SUPPLEMENT.

GOVERNOR GEO. ARTHUR

Is Ordered

H O M E !

LORD GLENELG closes his Despatch as follows :—" I have felt it my duty, to advise his Majesty, that you should be IMMEDIATELY RECALLED; and I have to convey to you, his Majesty's commands, that, on receipt of this Despatch, you will, with as little delay as possible, repair to this Office. (" Signed) GLENELG."

TO-MORROW OUGHT TO BE A DAY OF GENERAL

THANKSGIVING!

For the deliverance from the iron-hand of GOVERNOR ARTHUR. We have now a prospect of breathing. The accursed gang of blood-suckers will be destroyed. Boys will hence no more upon Police Benches, to insult Respectable Men. Perjury will cease to be countenanced; and a gang of Felons will be no longer permitted to violate the

LAWS OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY.

COLONISTS.

The dismissal of Arthur from the Governorship of unhappy TASMANIA, is a BLESSING, that will be felt by the worthy, and be duly appreciated. The Impounding Law, which was made to benefit the great Members of Company will be abolished. The Turkey and Private Act will meet with the same fate; and the Acts of obnoxious practice by the hirelings, and secret emissaries of the Government, upon the People, will no longer be countenanced.

REJOICE!

FOR THE DAY OF

Retribution

HAS

ARRIVED.

WILLIAM GOODWIN, PRINTER, GEORGE STREET. "CORNWALL CHRONICLE"

May 22 1836

POSTER EXHIBITED BY "CORNWALL CHRONICLE," TASMANIA

Governor. He also remarked that no doubt Colonel Arthur had already sent the Dorsetshire labourers back home.

Loveless waited for three weeks and then wrote to the Editor of the *Tasmanian* in the following terms:--

SIR,

Of late, frequent mention has been made in the *Tasmanian* of the men known as the Dorchester Unionists, and of the home government in reference to them. Last week you mentioned the subject again, and observed, "no doubt that Colonel Arthur has sent the whole of the men home before this time." I do not know whether Governor Arthur has received orders from home;

Loveless
writes to the
Tasmanian

I should like to know. If his Excellency has received intelligence to that effect, I hope he will have the goodness to communicate that knowledge to me before he leaves these shores. I hereby offer you my sincere thanks for the sympathy you manifest towards the fate of some half-dozen humble individuals, who, in 1834, were transported to these colonies for unwillingly and ignorantly giving offence. Few can imagine—experience alone teach—what it is to be bereaved of, and torn from, those who are dear to us; and who are still dearer to me than could possibly be all the treasures of the world—wife and children.

“A DORCHESTER UNIONIST.”

Shortly after this, Major de Gillern received a letter from the Governor asking that if Loveless was still living with him he should be told that the Governor wished to see him at Hobart Town.

The Governor inquires about Loveless

This was evidently in consequence of the despatch which had been sent by Baron Glenelg, as under:—

No. 128.

Downing Street,

SIR,

24th March, 1836.

With reference to my dispatch No. 56 of the 11th November last, with which I transmitted to you a Conditional Pardon for George Loveless, one of the persons convicted at Dorchester of administering unlawful oaths, I have now the honor to enclose to you a copy of a letter which has been received from the Home Department, together with a Free Pardon, which His Majesty has been pleased to grant to George Loveless, and to desire that you will give him the benefit thereof.

I have further to desire, if George Loveless should wish to return to this Country, that you will provide him with a free passage by the first favorable opportunity, the expense of which will be defrayed from the funds applicable to Convict Services.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient, humble

Servant,

(Sgd.) GLENELG.

L. Governor Arthur.

Allowing four months for this to reach him, the despatch must have been in his possession about six weeks before writing to Major de Gillern.

Unfortunately, in communicating this message to Loveless, his employer did not tell him that the Governor wished to see him, and some delay elapsed before he was aware of this. At last, on



GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TASMANIA, HOBART, 1834

October 6, 1836, he was notified by the Governor that he could have a free passage to England by the “Elphinstone,” which was sailing shortly. This news, welcome as it was, raised a very awkward problem for Loveless. At the request of the

Governor he had sent to his wife, nearly nine months previously, asking her to join him in Tasmania. He had not been able to receive a reply to his letter as it took approximately from four to five months for a letter to travel from Tasmania to England, and a similar time for a reply. It would be a terrible position for his wife to be on her way out to him and he to pass her on his journey home.

Awaiting a letter from home

He, therefore, asked permission to remain in Tasmania until he had heard from his wife. In the event of her not coming he would expect a free passage back to England by another ship. In a curt note which he received from the authorities he was told that unless he accepted the passage in the "Elphinstone" offered to him, the Government would not be able to give him a free passage later. Loveless, with characteristic persistency, then called to see the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Montagu, in Hobart Town. He stated his case respectfully but firmly, and said he was under the impression that the authorities had had a free pardon for him in their office for a considerable time before they let him know.

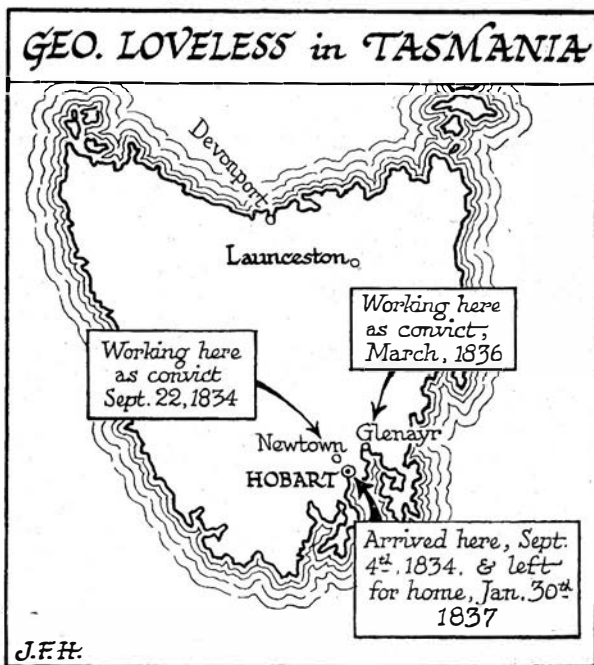


"Yes, my good fellow," remonstrated Mr. Montagu, "but the reason of that was that we did not know where to send to you."

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Loveless, with quiet insistence, "that could not be the reason, as the place I called my home was registered in the Police Office by order of the Governor."

Mr. Montagu began to get impatient. "The order is you are to be sent home immediately," he said shortly.

But Loveless was not to be silenced. "You say, sir, the King's pardon for me is in your office, and yet I am to be sent home as a prisoner. I was sent out a prisoner, contrary to my wishes, and with a free pardon I am to be sent back a prisoner, contrary to my wishes. I hope Mr. Montagu will place himself in my situation a few minutes. I know he is a husband and a father."



This appeal penetrated the official exterior. "Well, Loveless, what do you want?" Mr Montagu asked in a more kindly tone.

"I want a promise from the Governor," replied Loveless, "that I shall be indulged with the privilege of stopping a few months until I shall receive a letter from my wife, and if she is not coming to Van Diemen's Land, to have something to show that I may claim a free passage to England."

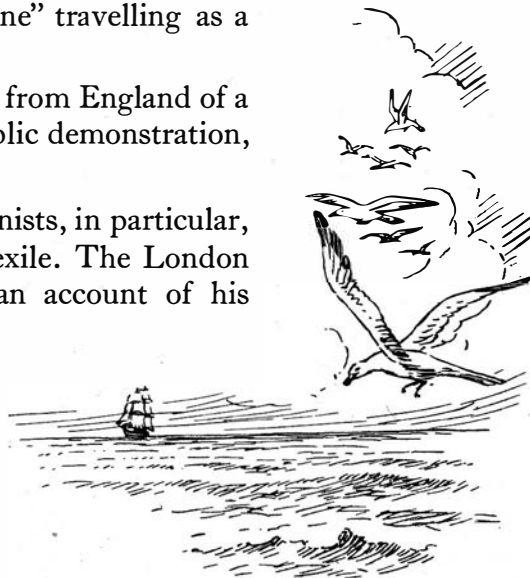
George Loveless returns in the "Eveline," 30th January, 1837

"I will draw up a memorandum myself, and see what can be done for you. You shall know the result in a few days," Mr. Montagu assured him.

Mr. Montagu was as good as his word, and on December 23, 1836, Loveless heard from his wife to the effect that she did not intend to come to Tasmania. He, thereupon, claimed the free passage home which had been promised him. This was granted, and he finally left Hobart on January 30, 1837, by the ship "Eveline" travelling as a steerage passenger.

He arrived in London on June 13, 1837, after an absence from England of a little over three years. He appears to have avoided any public demonstration, preferring to await the return of his comrades.

His story naturally excited great interest, and Trade Unionists, in particular, were eager to know of the happenings during his years of exile. The London Dorchester Committee suggested that he should write an account of his experiences which would be issued to the public. Two months later, whilst the indignities and hardships to which he had been exposed were still vividly in his mind, George Loveless wrote from his cottage at Tolpuddle, a pamphlet entitled *The Victims of Whiggery*, sometimes called George Loveless's diary, which was widely distributed by the London Dorchester Committee.



* * * * *

We must now return to New South Wales, to see what was happening to his comrades there. We left the two Standfields, together with James Loveless and James Brine, in the barracks at Sydney at the end of January, 1836. After remaining there a few days they were put to work with one of the gangs. They were kept at the barracks for about a month without any reason being given to them as to why they had been brought there. Then, one morning they were called into the office of the principal superintendent, Mr. Brennan, and were told that a conditional pardon would be granted them after they had been in the Colony three years.

The Standfields, Brine and Jas. Loveless at Sydney

This was only partially correct, as may be seen from the dispatch sent by Lord Glenelg to Sir Richard Bourke, dated June 12, 1835, in which he authorised the Governor "to grant a Pardon to Thomas Standfield, John Standfield, James Hammet and James Brine, on condition of their continuing to reside in the Colony for the term of two

Lord Glenelg
sends a
Conditional
Pardon

years from the date of their arrival, and to grant a Pardon to James Loveless, on condition of his continuing to reside in the Colony during the remainder of his Sentence."

According to this dispatch, all except James Loveless should have been set at liberty at once, although they would not have been allowed to return to England for a further eight months, as their two years' residence in the Colony did not expire until September, 1836.



SIR RICHARD BOURKE

For some reason, however, the authorities were reluctant to liberate them. What was the explanation of this? It may be found in a subsequent dispatch marked "private and separate," dated July 7, 1835, in which Lord Glenelg explained to the Governor that since the Government had decided to grant a conditional pardon, they had found under an existing Act, 2 and 3 Wil. 4, C.62, "that the Prisoners are wholly excluded by the terms of that Act from receiving any indulgence whatever, until after the expiration of four years from the period of their transportation, except by virtue of a Warrant under the Royal Sign Manual."

This meant, of course, that the only means open to the Government, except by violating the Act, was to induce King William IV to grant a free pardon which would enable the men to return at once. The Government, however, did not want to do this, and instead, they asked Sir Richard Bourke to report upon the conduct of the men so as to see whether they were "fit objects of mercy." The Government were in an evident difficulty as is seen by the language of Lord Glenelg, when he wrote:—

"I, therefore, do not conceal from myself, that I impose upon you a duty which may possibly be in some degree at variance with the terms of the Statute to which I have referred. Convinced, however, as His Majesty's Government are, that such a case as that to which this Correspondence refers was not contemplated by the Authors of that Statute, and that the Letter of the Law is, from a most improbable combination of circumstances opposed to the claims of Justice, humanity and sound Policy, I have not scrupled to sanction the measures directed in my Public Dispatch of this Date.

"I trust, however, that it may be in your power to accomplish the immediate release of these Prisoners from Penal Labour without involving yourself and the Government in a responsibility, which, it must be confessed, is not to be lightly undertaken.

I am, etc.,

GLENELG."

Responsibility
put on Sir
Richard Bourke

To put the matter more plainly, the responsibility was put upon Sir Richard Bourke of finding a way round the Act of Parliament. He got out of this quandary not by

releasing them, but by ordering them to the penal settlement in Port Macquarie, New South Wales, for twelve months, until His Majesty's further pleasure should be known.

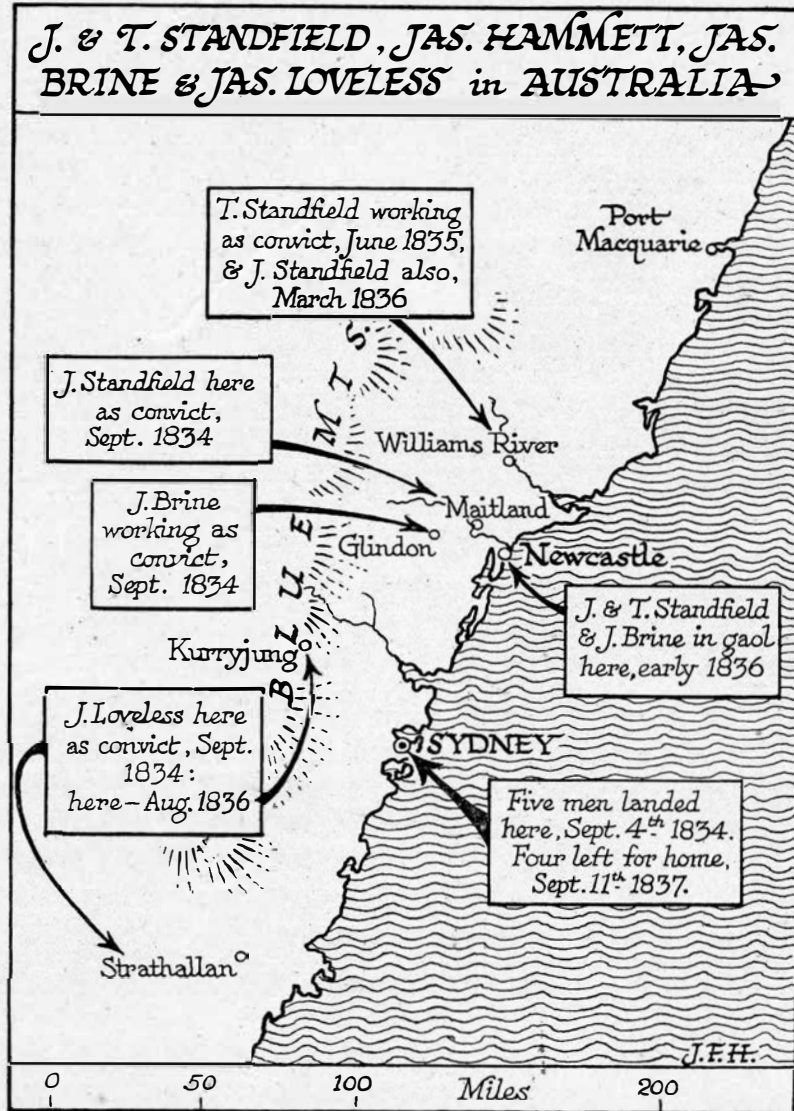
What he intended should happen to them while they were at the penal settlement it is impossible to conjecture.

This settlement must not be confused with Macquarie Harbour, Van Diemen's Land, where conditions were horrible in the extreme. Still, it is not surprising that none of them liked the idea of going there, as Port Macquarie had an evil reputation. Accordingly, they petitioned the authorities for the order to be modified and for the four of them to return to their former employers.

James Loveless and James Brine elected to go on the farm of the Superintendent, Mr. Brennan, at Prospect, about twenty miles from Sydney. This was granted, but John Standfield and his father went to work on a sheep farm about thirty miles from Maitland. They had to watch the flocks day and night, and after getting the sheep in at sunset, John Standfield had to walk six miles for rations. During this time his father had a severe illness, owing to exposure in the bush.

John wrote to George Loveless in Van Diemen's Land in November, 1837, and, in the reply, which they received from him in January, 1837, he told them that a full pardon had been granted and informed them how they could

Ordered to Port Macquarie



John Standfield writes George Lovelessj

George Loveless
tells Standfield
of the free
pardon

secure a free passage home. No word of this pardon had been received from the authorities, although, of course, they must have known about it. It is singular that the dispatch containing this pardon is missing from the historical records of Australia. It is stated there, however, that the news of the free pardon was communicated to the Governor of Australasia, Sir Richard Bourke, in a dispatch from Lord Glenelg, on March 18, 1836. The authorities must, therefore, have been in full possession of the pardon by August, 1836, at the latest, yet they did not inform the men. John Standfield immediately wrote to James Loveless, informing him of the good news.

James Loveless meanwhile had been moved to another farm at Kurryjung, about fifty miles from Sydney. He learned from a friend in December, 1836, that an account of a full pardon having been granted to him, had appeared in one of the newspapers. He proceeded to Sydney to ascertain the truth, reaching there towards the end of January, 1837. The news was confirmed by the Superintendent, who said it would have been communicated to him earlier but for the mistake of the Secretary. He was informed by his employer, Mr. Brennan, however, that although a pardon had been granted it did not mean that he and his comrades could obtain a free passage to England. They would have to remain in the Colony.

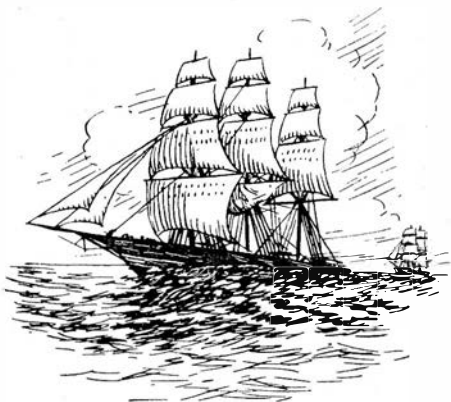
James Loveless thereupon agreed to stay on the farm, but about two months afterwards his employer informed him that a free passage was to be offered to him. Difficulties were put in the way of his departure because of his employer wishing to keep him in the Colony. Finally, however, his persistence was rewarded, and together with James Brine and the two Standfields he sailed from Sydney to England on September 11, 1837, in the "John Barry."

James Hammett did not return with them nor did they know exactly in what part of Australia he was situated. They were aware that he had been sent farther into the interior, and they had no news of him during the whole period of their stay in the Colony.

The "John Barry" was delayed about nine weeks at New Zealand taking in timber, and the four exiles assisted in loading the vessel. They had agreed with the Captain to do this in order to earn a little money to provide themselves with clothing and other necessities.

The voyage home, despite boisterous weather, was much more comfortable than the journey out, as may easily be imagined. As they approached the shores of England they looked forward with eager expectation to the day of their approaching reunion with the loved ones from whom they had been separated so long.

The vessel cast anchor in Plymouth Sound on St. Patrick's Day, Saturday, March 17, 1838, exactly four years from the date of their trial. They came back quietly, without ostentation, but as soon as it was known that they were in the vicinity, the people flocked down to



All except
James
Hammett
return on
"John Barry"
September 11,
1837

the quay to greet them. The jovial landlord of the "Dolphin Inn," on the Barbican Quay, Mr. Morgan, spared no effort to make them feel really at home.

At the
"Dolphin Inn,"
Plymouth

The following day they moved to the house of Mr. James Keast, a prominent Trade Unionist in the building trade, with whom they remained whilst they were in Plymouth. Tired as they were, and eager to reach home, they could not resist the appeal of the workers that they should appear at a public meeting. The town had been placarded with a notice on behalf of the Committee of Trades, announcing a public welcome on Thursday, March 22, at the Mechanics' Institute, Princes Square, Plymouth.



BARBICAN QUAY, PLYMOUTH, 1832

Mr. Keast took the chair at this meeting and there was a large audience, the new arrivals being welcomed on all sides. The following day they departed by coach from Plymouth proceeding to Exeter, where a further public meeting was held.

From thence they journeyed to Dorchester, where they arrived at the "Antelope Inn" on Monday, March 26. The *Dorsetshire County Chronicle* stated that the men "had on new suits of clothes and travelling caps, and the carriage was loaded with portmanteaux and other luggage." The workers of the neighbourhood had made extensive preparations for their reception, but, unfortunately, these miscarried because of a mistake in the date of their arrival. But the travellers were well content. There were only seven miles now separating them from their native village of Tolpuddle.

The arrival in
Dorchester



MR. JAMES KEAST

As they gazed about them they thought how peaceful everything seemed. The same placid High Street, gently sloping to where the river Frome murmured its way under the bridge. Everything looked so different from the wild country in which their last years had been spent. Mine host of the "Antelope" bustled about attending to his guests, of whom not the least honoured were the men who, four years before, had been locked on the coach as felons, and conveyed from the grim prison to the convict hulks. There was food to be prepared and horses to be changed, and then on they went jogging over the rough road, along which they had marched in custody of the constable on the day of their arrest.

Its every detail was familiar and yet, replete with these sorrowful memories though it was, surely no country in the world could appear so pleasant as the trim Dorset fields and hedgerows on that spring morning.



Up hill and down dale sped the coach, until at last they could see the steeple of the village church. How little changed everything appeared! Yet change there was, shown not only in the fervent welcome amidst tears of gladness with which they were received, but in a challenging independence which seemed to distinguish the village labourers. Assuredly, although the process of change might be a long one, the domination of the squire and farmer was not to endure for ever. The martyrs had brought back to Tolpuddle a gospel of suffering and service which was to inspire a mighty Movement.

They were not long allowed to enjoy the quietude of their firesides. After a few days' rest, they were conducted up to London where the London Dorchester Committee had organised in their honour on Easter Monday, April 16, a procession, concluding with a



By courtesy of "Illustrated London News"

DORCHESTER FROM THE ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE

dinner at White Conduit House, at which some 2,000 people were present. Thomas Wakley, M.P., who presided, toasted George Loveless as "the archbishop of Tolpuddle," and Dr. Wade and the members of the Dorchester Committee vied with each other in lavishing kindness and hospitality upon the five men who had endured so much.

George and James Loveless and Thomas Standfield replied in simple, homely language to the felicitations bestowed upon them. Yet even in that moment of happiness, their thoughts turned to the absent James Hammett. Wakley assured them that Hammett might be expected home in a fortnight or so, as the delay had been occasioned by his being too far in the interior of Australia to be reached in time for him to sail with them. Unfortunately, this optimism was misplaced, and a further year or more was to elapse before he landed in England.