

John Grierson 2nd (1820-1905)

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THOUGHTS.

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(By MERNDA) [Walter Thomas]

Continued.

It is due to one who filled so large a place in his day in the affection of the people of the district as Dr. Ronald did, to devote a time to an account of the position held by him in the district, and the equally important position occupied by his wife, Mrs Ronald, also their niece, Miss Merrilies. The doctor, at all times, was ready to visit the sick, and money was no object to him. The doctor has been known to pass by a good paying patient to attend one where it was a doubt as to whether he ever would be paid at all. In thoughts about these old friends of my youthful days, I am carried back to the time when I was young and perchance not as careful as I should have been, but I ever found true friends in the doctor and his family. The doctor himself was full of humour, and in proof of this I can give one or two instances of it. In my youthful days my brother, myself, and a young companion took a fancy that we would be more manly if we indulged in smoking, and as we had no pipes or tobacco, we explored a sand pit near where we lived at Mernda, and got three roots as near like pipes as possible, and lighted them and proceeded to draw and puff away vigorously, and whilst busy at the game who should come along but my father. He smiled and said : my lads, don't smoke roots, they will give you heartburn ; come inside and I will give you pipes. Of course, we were delighted and readily followed my father in, and as he at that time kept a hotel, he had a supply of old black clay pipes on hand and also a good supply of the old-time tobacco, called Barrett's Twist. Well, he took three of the oldest pipes, set the cutter to work, and we filled the pipes and set to work to enjoy ourselves. Well. my brother Jack and my friend George did enjoy themselves and puffed away very contentedly, but for me it was a case of the best laid schemes of a boy going wrong. I had not taken a dozen puffs before I was sick and I wanted to knock off, but my father had what they call in Scotland the taws, and taws being a stick about one foot long with a leather strap fastened to it with five tails hanging to it. Well, I was informed that I had started for my own pleasure, and that now I must keep on for his, or he would have most reluctantly to use kind John, yclept the taws, for my own good. The result was that I kept on a while longer, after which taws or no taws I was done with tobacco for good. Well, my father told our dear old friend, the doctor, about how he had cured me of wanting to smoke, the result being whenever the doctor called to see us, which was pretty often, he always asked for me to light his pipe for him, and your readers can easily imagine bow I detested the job of lighting the doctor's pipe. It turned out my brother and our friend were old hands at the game, hence they were able to keep on, but I often think, with gratitude, of the lesson my father gave me re smoking. Anent smoking. In the fifties Mr John Higgs, then in charge of S.S 488, Morang, one of the most capable teachers in the colony, gave his 6th class the following sum to work out, viz.:-If a man smoked a quarter of a pound of tobacco per week, and it costs 1s per quarter, and he does this for 70 years, what does it amount at simple interest and compound interest? It amounted to something over £3000 put away in smoke,. Kindly think of it, O ye smokers! But to hark back to our friend, the doctor. The doctor was a magistrate, and he was noted for being merciful in his dealings with those brought before him; but on one occasion he

surprised everybody present by the severe sentence that he passed on the prisoner. The culprit had taken a saddle and bridle off another J.P.'s horse and planted it where it was found by the police, who laid in wait and watched to see who came to remove it. Well, they caught the thief and sent for the doctor, who came the next day to try the case, and as there was only one magistrate present, the prisoner was asked the question: " Was he willing to be tried by the doctor ?" He said " Yes" with surprising alacrity, no doubt thinking that he would be let off lightly by the doctor, but in an evil hour for him, when asked the question of what defence he had to make? Among other things he claimed acquaintance with the doctor in Tasmania, where the doctor had been practising as a surgeon. He said the doctor knew him there and what a good life he had led there. The doctor said "Yes, I knew you very well; six months' imprisonment with hard labour." Everyone present was astounded but the doctor, and he was right, the man deserved all that he got; but, all the same, he had just as well not claimed old acquaintance with the doctor. I can well remember the doctor, the late Moses Thomas, the late Mr M'Laughlin, and the late **John Grierson** dancing a Scotch Reel at the opening of the new flour mill erected by Moses Thomas on the Plenty, and when I look back and think of all the old faces now passed away, it makes me feel sad, but they each in their day did good work and left their mark in the place where they lived. My remarks about the dear old doctor would not be complete without a reference to his wife, who was one of the finest ladies it has been my lot in life to know. The deceased lady had a trying position to fill; she was the doctor's bookkeeper, and as such had to keep, at times, his large practice together, the doctor himself being a generous man, his good lady had at times to use a controlling hand to keep things together; but she was a splendid citizen, a firm and true friend and genuinely tried to leave the world better than she found it. Miss Merrilies, their niece, who is still living, was as capable in many cases as most doctors; she was a splendid assistant to her uncle, Dr. Ronald, and universally esteemed and respected in the Whittlesea district. The three were all prominent persons for many years in the valley of the Plenty, and it is not always easy to replace them when people of their calibre pass away. Reverting back to the early days, there was a gentleman who took a prominent part in helping the district on, viz, the late John Wilton, J.P., of "Wilton Vale." In the early fifties Mr Wilton made his home at " Wilton Vale," where for many years he resided. Mr Wilton was an Englishman, and was very much esteemed during his residence in the valley of the Plenty. He was the first Chairman of the old Morang Road Board, and a good Chairman he made. He had for his colleagues the late Messrs M. Thomas, J. F. Boadie, J. Hutchinson, R. Slessar, W. Patterson, and A. Nelson, and one or two others, whose names I do not remember. The first Secretary was the late Mr Daniel, who was succeeded by Mr Moses Thomas as Secretary and Engineer. Some lively meetings were held about the time I speak of. . Our municipal doings now seem tame in comparison, and the elections were fought out with vim and determination. I remember on one occasion there were a lot of bills out, the candidates being the late Joseph Hutchinson and Robert Slessar, who were Thomasites, and the late Andrew Nelson and James Morris, who were called Morrisites. Well, along came Mr Nelson pasting up bills, the evening before the election, about dusk, followed a little later by Jammie M'Gill, who pasted Hutchinson and Co.'s bills neatly over Morris and Co.'s. He was followed about midnight by Mr Morris, who neatly covered the other bills over, and he in turn was followed in the early morning by Mr Hutchinson, who covered the lot up. One had to rise early to beat Mr Hutchinson. A prominent supporter of the Morrisites was the late John Abbott, of the Limb Inn. Two of the Thomasites called on a lady, who is still alive, and got her to make some extra

good paste with glue in it ; they did not say what they were going to do, but they proceeded to the Limb Inn, interviewed Mr Abbott's quiet cow, and pasted her from head to tail with the Thomasites bills, also, pasted the windows and doors over with bills, and tried to get at the buggy horse but did not succeed. When Mr Abbott got up the next morning and saw what had happened he proceeded to Mr Thomas's residence and said to him: "Did you paste my cow with your bills, also my house and sheds?" Of course, Mr Thomas knew nothing about it, but to please Mr Abbott he went up and had a look at the cow. All he said was: " Well, Abbott, they have done it well; look at the holes for the ears, the horns and the tail." Mr Abbott's reply was: "I will offer £5 reward, and make those sit up who did it." He offered the reward, but never knew who did it. He knew that It took him a long time to get the bills of the cow and house. It was kept very quiet for many years as to who did the trick.