

FREMANTLE—PORT TOPICS.

ESCAPE OF FENIAN PRISONERS.

It will probably be interesting to many of your readers to peruse an account of the escape of these men which was effected in a rather ingenious manner. It is remarkable that some of them had nearly completed their sentences and would in a short period have had their liberty. In prison they conducted themselves so exceedingly well that all of them won the good opinions of the authorities, and accordingly, it appears, occupied the position of constables, one of whom was in the accountant of stores' office where he had discharged his duties so well and acted with so much approved propriety that he was treated most liberally by the prison authorities ; and it is said was allowed to go in and out of the prison without the *usual pass*. Taking advantage of this indulgence on Monday last, while most of the people of the Port of the city were devoting their attention to the Regatta, he left the prison with a key swinging on his finger and proceeded down to the South Jetty where a party of convicts were quarrying and dressing stone for dock purposes ; he there accosted a warder in charge of the men, informing him that the superintendent desired him to ask for two constables (fenians) to accompany him to Government House, to assist in the removal of some furniture. The warder demurred at first, but being assured by the constable with the key on his finger, that the men would only be away a short time, the warder, nothing doubting, allowed the two constables of his party to proceed in accordance with what he considered a verbal request from "Head Quarters" to perform a *bona fide* service. It is reported that the Superintendent told the chief warder that as the accountant of stores office would be closed the prisoner Cranstan was not to be let out that day (Monday). In consequence of this order the man with the key on his finger (whose name is Cranstan) was searched for, but was not to be found ; it then became known that not only he but a number of Fenian prisoners were missing. Search was

Fenian prisoners were missing. Search was at once begun, but without success; in a short time, however, a faint gleam of light dawned upon the authorities, as they remembered a whaler had recently put into Bunbury and might probably, in some way, be connected with the escape prisoners, but an application at the telegraph office discovered the fact that communication by wire had been stopped. While they were cogitating upon the next best move to make, a man named Bell came galloping from Rockingham, and informed the police that he had seen an American whale boat, manned and armed with rifles, take on board from the beach nine men, some in prison clothes, and pull off from the shore. The police boat was then manned with five of her crew and two land police, all armed. Coxswain Mills was put in charge and the boat proceeded along the coast; this happened about midday. Towards the evening the mail steamer was chartered by His Excellency, a party of pensioners, with Major Finnerty, under the charge of Mr. John Stone, Superintendent of the Water Police, proceeded on board to follow the vessel and if possible recover the prisoners.

On Tuesday about 4 p.m., the "Georgette" returned and reported having spoken with the whaler lying about nine miles off shore. It is stated that Major Finnerty enquired for the master of the American craft, when the mate, after some prevarication, replied that the vessel was waiting the return of her boat, in which the skipper had gone to Fremantle. The Major is then said to have asked "Can I come on board"; to this the Yankee mate answered "I guess you wont, I have orders from the skipper not to allow any one on board." The boat's crew under coxswain Mills then watched the whaler while the "Georgette" steamed back to Fremantle. There is no doubt a great mistake was made here. The whale boat was not in sight; there is no doubt she had run in under the sand hills out of view of the "Georgette", and therefore the steamer should not have left the spot. The police boat could have been sent to Fremantle to request a party of men to be sent along the beach, and by this means the prisoners and

the beach, and by this means the prisoners and the Yankee skipper could have been caught. The "Georgette" arrived in Fremantle about 4 p.m., on Tuesday very, much it is said to the annoyance of the Governor.

About 8 p.m., the police boat returned and reported that the whale boat with the prisoners came in sight soon after the "Georgette" got well away. There were about 18 men altogether armed with rifles. Mills pulled towards them, and as he did so the barque "Catalpa" (American Whaler) rounded, and came between the two boats; before the police boat could get round the vessel, the prisoners and Captain had scrambled up her side and got on board. Mills, who was in an open boat, was given to understand he had better leave, if he wished to preserve his life; he saw his helpless position, and wisely considered discretion the better part of valour, and accordingly made tracks for Fremantle, where he arrived as above stated. At 7 p.m. His Excellency gave fresh orders, and the mail steamer "Georgette" took in extra coal and an armstrong gun. This done, Major Finnerty again proceeded on board with a party of pensioners, under Mr. Jno. Stone, and about 11 p.m., started a second time in chase of the "Catalpa", and overhauling her to the Southward compelled her to "heave to" by firing one shot over her bow, when the Captain was asked if he had the prisoners on board. In the mean time he had hauled up the American flag, and denied he had any one except Americans on board; he ultimately confessed the escaped prisoners were there, but refused to give them up. The prisoners came on the deck of the "Catalpa" and were recognized. Cranston was among the

number in the prison constable's dress with the stripe on the arm. The "Georgette" again returned without the prisoners, and it is reported the Government does not intend to send out after them again.

It appears a person who had been staying for a short period at Moloney's Hotel, and who was known there as Collins, provided clothing for the Fenian prisoners, and hired

clothing for the Fenian prisoners, and hired traps and horses to convey them away. Another man named Jones, though never seen speaking to Collins, and lodged at a different hotel, is also connected with the affair, but all have got away together.

The traps and horses were turned loose in the bush and afterwards recovered. In one of the traps a revolver and 100 rounds of cartridges were found.

The Home Government have themselves to blame for escapes of this description, and as there is now no doubt as to the necessity for a man-of-war cruiser being always on our coast, it may possibly be deemed prudent to station one here to prevent a repetition of this unparrelled piece of Yankee impudence.