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TALLANGETTA,

THE SQUATTER'S HOME.

A STORY OF AUSTRALIAN LIFE.

BY

WILLIAM HOWITT,

AUTHOR OF "TWO YEARS IN VICTORIA,"

&c. &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

In these volumes it has been my object to depict the various phases of Australian life and character more fully than could be done in my "Two Years in Victoria." Perhaps the reader will be surprised to find in the Bush and in the competitive hurry of the new colonial city some of the personages who figure here. But it requires only a brief sojourn in a colony like that of Victoria to remind you that its population is made up of the overflowings of England and many other countries, and that these overflowings have carried with them every possible theory and practice, every idea, feeling, passion, speculation, pursuit, amusement, and imagination which are fermenting in the old countries.

When the reader comes upon a certain personage in these pages, Dr. Spenser Grayson, I beg him not

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to treat him as an imaginary one. If he will turn to a file of the *Times* newspaper of 1853 he will find a letter of Sir William à Becket's, late Chief Justice of Victoria, giving an account of this very man, under one of his aliases, as he came before him; and in the *Melbourne Argus* he would find an additional account, on reprinting Sir William's letter, of the remarkable poetical genius of this man, who, the editor says, sent them by far the best poetry they ever received.

But perhaps no character would be less expected in the gold colony than that of the spiritualist, Dr. Woolstan, or Mr. Flavel, the seer, whom I have introduced here. Yet it was in the far bush that I was first surprised by an exhibition of table-turning, and, what is more curious, we have now, at this moment, an Australian spiritualist in London, astonishing daily circles of the most intelligent and unsuperstitious classes by demonstrations far more surprising than those I have assigned to Dr. Woolstan at Tallangetta.

When that psychological phenomenon — which may now be truly termed a new yet decided feature

of social life — had only advanced to the stage of table-turning, Mr. Faraday thought he had completely laid the ghost of the question by attributing the rotatory motion of a table to the muscular action of the persons putting the tips of their fingers upon it. But a man cannot well have gone much amongst the inquiring classes of society — and I mean private and select society, not public and promiscuous assemblies, where some professional Medium exhibits — who has not seen phenomena which will require not only something beyond Mr. Faraday's theory, but beyond any theorising upon any yet known physical principles, to explain. We are told by numbers of people of first-rate education and talents, people perfectly sane, perfectly honourable, wide-awake as any of us, who hate a lie and despise humbug, that tables do not now merely turn round by the imposition of hands, but heavy ones rise from the floor to the ceiling, leaving everyone's hands below and out of reach, turn over and descend sometimes to the floor, legs uppermost: and these, we are assured, are but of the lowest class of the physical demonstrations of the kind. In numbers of families the daily conversa-

tion with the spirits of their departed friends, as they believe, goes on as regularly as with those still incarnate; painting, writing, speaking by spiritual influence, are freely exercised, and that in the families of men of good status in church, in state, in army, in navy, in literature and science. All round us this state of things prevails, to an extent which few have any full conception of; and I have myself seen, in most trustworthy and distinguished quarters, things which I have no hesitation in pronouncing to be deserving not of sneering, not of huffing off without inquiry, but of a calm yet serious and careful observation, as of a social and psychological phenomenon of singular and impressive features, of wide extent, and rapidly-advancing development. Such careful and philosophical investigation would detect the error if such error exists, lead to explanation if explanation be possible, whilst, if there be a truth in it, however disguised or undeveloped, turning a cold shoulder to the sun does not put it out — it only leaves the sun shining on your backs.

Sir David Brewster and Lord Brougham have dipped their toes in the rising ocean of inquiry; we

yet want those who, with philosophical genius, will apply a philosophical spirit and patience to the subject. In all ages spiritualism has been exhibiting itself in one form or another; and there is a very old adage that where there is smoke there is pretty certainly fire. In the long ages of the sacred history, in the remarkable centuries which succeeded the first spread of Christianity, in the mythic structures and creeds of ancient nations, in India, China (familiar with rapping and table-turning these thousand years), Egypt, Greece, and Rome, under all the distortions and concealments of magic, witchcraft, the Rosicrucian philosophy, and the occult sciences of the middle ages, spiritual agency has been working, according to the firmest convictions of the greatest minds of those countries and times. As Socrates had his "familiar spirit," Numa his Egeria, as the Arabs had their genii, Friar Bacon his brazen head, and Paracelsus his inward illumination, his "Einhauchende Geister," so Jacob Böhme and George Fox, in recent, and Zschokke in our times, astonished their cotemporaries by their revelations.

Certainly, in all ages, there has been a very great smoke in that quarter.

But my business with it here is only artistic. Spiritualism has produced, in America, not merely rapping, but the poems of Harris, one volume of which only I have read,—"The Legend of the Golden Age,"—and which I do not hesitate to pronounce amongst the finest poetry since Shelley and Byron; finest in all the great essentials of poetry, in the power, vividness, boundless sweep and entire originality of imagination, in its plastic energy and affluence of language, and in its bold and unconventional, yet sublime philosophy. The smoke of spiritualism, therefore, is now visible enough; the fire is burning near enough to us to warrant that use of it in imaginative literature which our great dramatists and fictionists, which Shakspeare, Horace Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe, Scott, Beckford, Bulwer, which Goethe in Germany and Poe and Hawthorne in America, have made of the mysteries and the popular excitements of the times in which their fictions are laid. Where I found it I have used it—in the Bush; and that not in the person of a humbug

or a charlatan, but in men educated, scientific, serious, acute in all their relations, profoundly religious, and admittedly honest. I have seized Time by that old forelock of his, at which he has had many a lusty tug, and been one of the first to plant a new element in prose fiction. The philosophy of the question belongs to the philosophers. As for the poets, they have in all times settled the affair in their own way. Milton will have it that—

> "Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,
> Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep."

Philip Bailey, one of the most spiritual and philosophical poets of the age, contends, in "Festus," that by us of to-day—

> "The most material, immaterial
> Departments of pure wisdom are despised.
> For well we know that, properly prepared,
> Soul's self-adapted knowledge to receive,
> Are by the truth desired, illumined; man's
> Spirit, extolled, dilated, clarified,
> By holy meditation and divine
> Lore, fits him to convene with purer forms
> Which do unseen surround us aye and gladden
> In human good and exaltation. Thus,
> The face of heaven is not more clear to one
> Than to another, outwardly; but one,

By strong intention of his soul perceives,
Attracts, unites himself to essences
And elemental spirits of wider range
And more beneficent nature, by whose aid
Occasion, circumstance, futurity,
Impress on him their image, and impart
Their secrets to his soul. Thus, chance and lot
Are sacred things; thus, dreams are verities.
But oh! alas! for all earth's loftier lore,
And spiritual sympathy of worlds!"

I must now state, that a few of the episodical sketches in these pages have already appeared in the "Household Words;" and Mr. Dickens has sent me a letter from Mr. John Fawkner, who has so long occupied a very distinguished position in Victoria, not only as the oldest settler, the "Father of the Colony," as he is styled, but as a patriotic and able member of the Legislature, expressing his unqualified pleasure in their perusal. I may also present the reader with an amusing bit of colonial criticism upon those "Squatter Papers," as the *Melbourne Argus* calls them:—

"These capital sketches are evidently the work of two hands. The stories have been written in Australia by some one knowing the place well, but not brilliant as a writer, and some very first-class writer, probably

Dickens himself, has breathed into them the breath of genius. In some places phrases occur that could not have been written by any one who had ever been in Australia, but which are wonderfully conducive to literary effect; and in others we can perceive unmistakable traces of local knowledge. The polishing process is, however, so skilfully performed, and the general effect is so good, that it is only by close observation that we are enabled here and there to detect the tool-marks."—*Journal of Australasia.*

Let Australasia cherish that critic; he has seen all the way through the millstone, and no man can see further. It is needless to say that no "two hands" have touched a syllable of those papers in the "Household Words" but my own two.

In all that relates to the history, natural history, life, character, and actual personages of the colony which chiefly figure in these volumes, I have adhered as faithfully to the fact as in my "Two Years in Victoria," of which a distinguished officer there said: "Mr. Howitt's volumes are not like the colony,—they are the colony itself." But a still more remarkable testimony to the impression of verisimilitude in the "Two Years in Victoria" is to be found in the

following letter from the popular author of "It is Never Too Late to Mend!" which I print by his permission:—

"6, Bolton Row, Mayfair: March 2.

"DEAR SIR,—Should you ever fall in with a matter-of-fact romance called 'It is Never Too Late to Mend,'—and should you wade as far in it as the Australian scenes, you will not be surprised at this letter from me.

"To avoid describing Hyde Park, and calling it Australia, I read some thirty books about that country; but yours was infinitely the best. In reading you I found I was in the hands of a man who had really been there, and had seen things with his own eyes, and judged them with his own judgment, and, rarer art still, could paint them to the life. Your vivid scenes took hold of me; and your colours are the charm of many of my best pages. I could not tell you all my obligations; but some of them I can. You restored my faith in nature. A pack of noodles had been out there, and came home, and told us the air had no perfume, and the birds no song.

"The real fact is, that there have not yet been in Australia two centuries of poets to tell people what to hear and what to smell. You extinguished that piece of cant. You smelt the land like cowslips ninety miles off; and you not only heard the birds, but described the song and note of each with a precision of detail that were invaluable. That passage of yours was a nugget.

"I made use of it in a full description of the rising

sun; and it is, to my fancy, the light of my whole picture. I had from you, too, the snow-storm, — the flakes as large as the palm of your hand, and the great branches of trees rent from the stems with reports like cannon, by the weight of superincumbent snow.

"Then, in the details of digging, it was you who told me the furtive diggers were discovered by the stream coming down discoloured.

"*Item* — the diggers steeped in cold water from the waist downwards, yet steaming with perspiration from the waist upwards. Two out of three comic advertisements in the mine are also from you.

"*Adde huc* — the thunder of the cradles, the bottles sown broad-cast over the land, with other happy touches of the sort, and one divinely felicitous phrase, — 'the sentences measled with oaths and indelicate expressions.' In short, I have taken from you far more than I could have taken with decency if our two works had not been heterogeneous. As it is, I hope you are too candid and too good-natured to grudge me, who can never hope to see that wonderful land, a few colours from your palette. A traveller with a painter's eye is a rarity. He must make up his mind to teach the artists of the pen as well as the public.

"But though it is not in Nature to refrain from profiting by you, there is one casualty it is my duty to guard you against.

"You are, I hear, about to bring out a cheap edition of 'Land, Labour, and Gold.' Many will make their first acquaintance with your volumes after reading mine.

There must be no doubt as to who is the original where you and I are found in amiable but suspicious harmony.

"To conclude: I wish, my dear Sir, I could make you some return by sending all my readers to your two rich volumes. I can assure them the pearls I have strung from them on my string are surrounded by hundreds of others of equal intrinsic value.

"May you visit many countries, and may I sit by the fire and see them on your glowing pages.

"I am, dear Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"CHARLES READE."

"WILLIAM HOWITT, ESQ."

Perhaps I may save the reader some trouble if I tell him that there are two or three Tallangettas in Victoria; but our Tallangetta is sufficiently determined by the locality; and should any one be unable to recollect the house on that spot, let him understand that I built it since he was there.

A new edition of the "Two Years in Victoria" is in preparation, complete in one volume, which will include the most recent information regarding the colony.

LONDON: *June 17th*, 1857.

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TALLANGETTA,

OR

THE SQUATTER'S HOME.

CHAPTER I.

GOING UP TO THE STATION.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. The sun of early summer, that is, of November in its first days, was descending over the Australian woods after his glowing career of the day, and now had perceptibly abated its fire. Clear and genially it still shone in the cloudless sky, but to the spectator traversing the forest, it appeared at no great height above the lofty trees, and no longer pursued him with its consuming fire. The silence which had lain in the woods through the day, was now broken by the merry cicadas, and the mole cricket in the warm

earth seeming to mock those sonorous insects by a reverberation of their own notes. The warbling crow piped its melodious chant from the topmost twigs of the fragrant peppermint tree, and the lusty laughter of the dacelo, or jolly winged-jackass, was meant for an encore. The breeze awoke and gave still more life and refreshment to the scene; and the cattle, which had hidden themselves in the darkest shade of the wattles, or stood knee-deep in the forest stream, now came out, and grazed tranquilly through the bush.

At this moment two young people might have been seen, had any one been there to see them, cantering briskly along a sort of natural avenue in the woods. The one was a young man of middle height and handsome features, and the other a young lady bearing a striking likeness to him. They were evidently brother and sister. Which was the eldest, it would have been difficult to say; they appeared about one or two-and-twenty. The young man was clad in a light linen coat and trowsers, without any waistcoat, and only a bright blue handkerchief of the finest and slightest fabric, tied loosely about his neck. A handsome straw hat, and light boots of fashionable make, having an unmistakable look of Bond Street or Pall Mall, rather than of the colony about them,

and a handsome revolver at his waist, were clear indications that he was fresh to the antipodes.

The young lady had the same aristocratic well-defined style of features, but of course more delicate. They were at once beautiful, feminine, and spirited; and the young man's handsome, but far from strong brown beard, gave the greatest point of contrast to their faces. She was as lightly clad as her brother; a simple skirt of dark French merino being merely slipped over a muslin morning dress, instead of a riding habit, and a broad white straw hat with a blue veil on it, defending her head from the sun. A mass of rich brown hair was tastefully disposed at the back of her head, and had evidently been shaken by her ride, so as to fall in a rather loose, but beautiful manner on her neck.

The two young people came cantering on, followed by a grand black and white Newfoundland dog, and an active, sinewy-looking, tawny bull-terrier. The woods opened more and more on their left as they advanced, the trees not being altogether absent, but more widely scattered. On the right and again ahead of them the forest continued, to the eye at least, dense and unbroken. But here in the opener part they came at once to a charming little lake, or what in this country we should merely style a large pond or reservoir.

It was partly square, partly circular in shape. The ground all round was high above it, and descended in sudden steep banks to the water. Fine old trees grew here and there in full freedom and picturesque effect on its further banks, and on this which they had reached there stood only one or two, but of gigantic proportions. Extensive masses of reeds and flags occupied portions of the lake nearly all round, except on this side, and the sportsman would at once decide that plenty of water-fowl were concealed there, but at this moment not a sound or motion betrayed their presence. All was profoundly silent, not a ripple stirred the surface of the sunlit water, for it lay too deep below its banks to be touched by the breeze.

"Bravo! This is the very spot for our night's camp," said the young man. "Water, wood, grass, and, if I am not mistaken, fish and wild ducks to boot," running his eye rapidly over the water and the reed-beds.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed the young lady. "What a charming camping place!"

The dogs were already swimming in the water, lapping occasionally as they swam, and seeming to luxuriate immensely after their hot, dusty run, in the pure, deep flood. The two young people led their

horses down a convenient slope, for it is wonderful how nature has prepared these accessible places by her wilderness pools and streams for her approaching family, often with as much care and forethought as man could have exercised, and frequently more than he does exercise after he comes into possession. They then leaped lightly from their horses, the youth giving a hand to his sister, and then proceeding to take the saddles and bridles from the warm steeds, and placing these at the foot of a tree, hobbled the noble creatures, and let them graze at large.

While he was doing this, the young lady, throwing her whip upon the saddles, slipped off her riding skirt, and proceeded in her unencumbered state to collect sticks and dry leaves for a fire. "Where shall we have the domestic hearth, Charles?" said the handsome girl, as she stood a moment with the bundle of sticks in her hands.

"Oh! just far enough from that fallen log, Geordy, so that it may serve for a seat," and as he spoke he came forward, and took out a lucifer box to give her a light. There was soon a famous blaze on a clean, green sort of table-land near the lake, and this served for a directing signal to a carriage which now was seen coming at a good rate down the forest opening. It was a sort of American waggon, long

and light, on springs, drawn by a pair of excellent, strong carriage horses, and furnished with a circular awning of white canvass.

"Well done," cried a tall, gentlemanly-looking man, who sate on the low front of the waggon, driving. "This is a prime place, indeed, for a halt. Why, youngsters, you must have ordered it beforehand."

"Of course," said the young man, "the last time I travelled this road;" and he looked very merry.

"And as the road is so very much frequented, papa," said the laughing girl, "it was quite as well to drop a line by post, to secure lodgings."

"Quite right! quite right!" shouted a couple of female voices from beneath the awning of the waggon. "And so now, perhaps, you will let us out that we may survey our quarters."

At this there was seen a man tumbling out behind the waggon, and in great haste to turn back its canvass curtains and let down a ladder, down which presently descended three of womankind, whom we must more particularly introduce to the reader. The first was a tall, slender figure, whom, at the first glance, you perceived to be a lady by the quiet elegance of her manner, and the cultivated expression of a still handsome face, though she was evidently approaching middle age. Next followed a

little plump round body, with a very round, rosy, good-natured countenance, and of apparently the same age, who advanced towards the two young people who were still busy at the fire, the young man having run for a kettle of water, and set it close to the fire to boil, while the young lady was folding up her riding-skirt and laying it aside in more orderly fashion under the great tree. This little cosy body, we may inform the reader, was aunt to the young people, and went in the family by the familiar name of Aunt Judith; and we suppose the sagacious reader has already divined that the tall gentleman and tall lady were the father and mother of the young ones. The third woman was no other than Peggy Wilks, who, in England, had occupied for many years the post of laundry woman to the family, and was here as maid of all-work, in her fortieth year, accompanied, nevertheless, by her husband, the quondam gardener, but now miscellaneous man — Abner Wilks, the same strong fellow who was just seen tumbling so precipitately out of the waggon.

Here you have the whole group, and let me tell you such a group as you do not light upon every day in the Australian bush. If you had been told that this was the governor and his family taking an ex-

cursion up the country, you would have said, "just so, I see it, it can be nobody else," for neither squatter, merchant, commissioner, nor digger carry about with them that unassuming prestige of rank and station. Gentlemen you would find amongst these classes, real gentlemen and many, and amongst commissioners a great deal of pretence, and a morbid love of gold lace and parade dreadfully demonstrative of the parvenu. But in this family you saw no pretence; you felt that there was the reality, and only wondered what had brought them here.

Listen, and I will drop a word or two into your ear. Sir Thomas Fitzpatrick was heir to a noble property in the north and midland counties of England. Like many another country gentleman, he had his tastes for horses, racing, and sporting in various ways. His property became embarrassed, and when he was in difficulty up started a kind cousin, Sir Patrick Fitzpatrick, and laid claim to the estate. Astonishing as was the fact, totally till that moment undreamt of, yet Sir Patrick commenced a suit for the recovery of the hereditary family estates, and won it. What was most strange of all too, he won it by proving, to the satisfaction of a jury at least, that Sir Thomas was illegitimate. Illegitimate! Why nobody, not Sir Thomas by any means, had ever

thought of such a thing. However, odd enough, when Sir Patrick asserted and proved, on the evidence of letters and an old servant of the family long ago dismissed by Sir Thomas's father, that Sir Thomas's father and mother never were married, Sir Thomas found himself totally unable to prove the marriage. It had been a hasty one, contracted abroad at Florence, unknown to the relations of the family on either side, at the ambassador's. But the ambassador was long dead; and being then a single man, at the time this took place his family could produce no record of such a transaction. The chaplain, too, had gone afterwards to India, and no inquiries could trace him beyond a certain point.

Here was a dilemma! No certificate of her marriage could be found amongst the papers of Sir Thomas's mother, nor yet amongst those of his father; yet during their lives, and for years afterwards, not a doubt had ever been whispered by any party whatever of the *bonâ fide* marriage of these most respectable and honourable people. What had put Sir Patrick on this scent? How had he stumbled all at once on such a discovery?—for such it must have been, and a late one, or he would not have suffered Sir Thomas to enjoy the estates for a single day—he was not that man.

But he asserted his claims and he made them good, ay, again and again. Sir Thomas, for want of further means, had been compelled to yield to his adversary and retire from the field. His lot was such as is common on all such occasions; he found not a single friend to stand by him. On the contrary, he saw all his once numerous clan of friends, so called, and acquaintances who had feasted and fluttered round him, suddenly flock over to the enemy, and feast and flutter round him in the same hall and rooms; the same worthy people who had at first expressed their unbounded astonishment at the audacity of Sir Peter setting up so burlesque a claim, now, in the same sympathising zeal, expressing their equally unbounded astonishment at the rascality of the *pretended* Sir Thomas so long coolly keeping Sir Patrick out of his own.

Yes, there was one friend who stuck by them, and that was Aunt Judith. But then Aunt Judith, Sir Thomas's sister, was included in the same category and branded with the same stigma. Poor Aunt Judith, who was generally good humour itself, had been violently indignant at the aspersion on her mother, and on her brother and his family; but as to her mother's marriage, she said they might just as well tell her that Durham Cathedral was a pickled

onion as that her mother was not married. Why, she had heard her mother talk of the marriage a hundred times; and all the hurry and fright and strange accompaniments of it. And how they had lived in a little cottage at Capri, and afterwards at Naples; and of their climbing Vesuvius, and of their happy but uneasy life till they had news and full forgiveness from England. Not married, indeed! If ever there was a pure-hearted and happy-minded woman, as far as her own position went, it was her revered mother. No cloud, no obscurity, no mystery ever hovered for a moment over her name or her angelic brow. She was the soul of piety and domestic love. Luckily for Aunt Judith and Sir Thomas, the virtuous and triumphant Sir Patrick could not touch her property, and it was handsome. It had not come by inheritance, but had been bequeathed. With this she had supported Sir Thomas in his struggles against the new claimant as much as she could without leaving the family without resources; and to withdraw them all for a time from the scene of defeat and mortification, she had proposed to spend a few years in Australia, where, with her sufficient remaining means, they could secure a station, and live a new life till things took a turn.

"And they will take a turn," Aunt Judith con-

tended most undauntedly. "The whole thing," she protested, "is a hoax, a lie, a villany. That wretch of a lady's maid must, by some means, have got hold of her mother's marriage certificate, and carried it off to make a trade of, but, as to the letters produced on the trial, they were forgeries, infamous, diabolical, detestable forgeries. Ah, well!" she would add, "wait awhile, wait awhile, we shall see. These things do n't go on for ever. There is a righteous God yet, and He will find them out. That fiend of a maid one of these days will most likely be terrified at the approach of death, or something of the kind, for a bad conscience is worse than a bad cancer, and when it gives an awful pang some day the wretch will cry out unawares. Yes, mark me, that will be it — does she think God can't find her base, shallow tricks out? Poor foolish thing! as if she could cheat the Almighty! Only wait; all will be right!"

We shall only here say further, that these strange circumstances had not passed over the present party without extreme and violent suffering. Sir Thomas's hair had grown very grey, and the stamp of fierce alternations of passion and unlooked-for affliction had left their traces on his fine countenance, in a requently clouded and often dejected expression,

though he, at times, now again wore his former cheerful and even sportive manner; for he had always been of a frank, mirthful, though unfortunately ardent and headstrong temperament. Lady Fitzpatrick had suffered severely in health and spirits, but now she was much restored by the pleasant affection and indefatigable endeavours of all around her to contribute to her consolation. As for Aunt Judith, if she could be satisfied for her dear relatives, she would be as perfectly happy here as at home in their most prosperous days. Her life was so centred in the lives of those her dearly beloved relatives, their happiness was so completely hers, that she had refused all offers of marriage, as wanting nothing more than her independence and their society. The children seemed quite as much her children as anybody's, and everything pleasant in the family seemed especially hers. Lady Fitzpatrick was not merely her sister-in-law, but her very dearest friend, who relied on her judgment more than on all the female world besides. And then she had such a love of the country, of trees, plants, flowers, birds, insects, all sorts of living things, that to be wandering here through those boundless forests, and seeing and hearing something new continually, were to her a perfect dream of delight. She entered into all the

spirit of this vagabond life, and helped to cook, and make beds, and do a hundred things that, from their novelty and from the utter impossibility of their ever doing them at home, produced a constant succession of fun and laughter which made her almost, and sometimes altogether, forget the past and its troubles.

And so I think that is enough of knowledge of our travellers for the present, except that they had resolved to drop all title while in this colony. "I will be no pretender," said Sir Thomas; "if I cannot win my old title I will not wear it. Therefore, they were plain Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick and no more, except in the eyes and mouths of Abner and Peggy Wilks, who continued to treat them with the same marked deference, and to blunder out continually their old titles. They had been now several days on their journey to their station, and found it quite delightful. Out of this tilted waggon came speedily a variety of articles and apparatus for the evening's meal and the night's accommodation. First a tent, which Charles Fitzpatrick and his father very soon had erected, while Abner unharnessed the horses and turned them out, hanging the harness on the waggon-pole, and throwing over it a rug to defend it from the night dew. Then came out four pointed stakes and a board, and the four stakes being driven firmly into

the ground, and the board laid upon them, behold the supper table.

That done, there was Georgina, or, as she was more commonly called, Geordy, with a fine white table-cloth to spread upon it, while Aunt Judith was progging in a basket for the necessary cups, saucers, and plates. "La!" exclaimed Aunt Judith, holding up sundry fragments of crockery, "another smash I declare. It is all through those dreadful gullies, they are enough to break anything. I am sure I think they have broken my back a dozen times to-day. Why do n't they make bridges, I wonder?"

"For the same reason, I suppose," said Mr. Fitz-patrick, "that they do n't make earthenware here-abouts, or we might buy some. That is, because there is nobody to make them."

"They would not be a very good investment, I expect," said Georgina, "just yet."

"They would be quite as profitable," said Aunt Judith, pulling out a cream jug without a handle, and with only half a spout, and saying parenthetically, "Lord bless us! another. They would be quite as profitable as that investment of jolts in my backbone that I've got. But goodness! what's that?"—Turning suddenly at a great rushing and pother at the fire.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Georgina, "it is the kettle

boiling over. Peggy, Peggy, bring the tea." Whereupon Peggy, looking very broiled, appeared from the tent, and diving into a box of sundries by the waggon, approached with a packet of tea.

"You look hot, Peggy," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick.

"Hot, my lady! yes ma'am, I mean; its these flies, drat 'em. They're at me just as they've bin since I set foot in this fly-blown country. It's no Christian country, anybody may see by that. Why do n't they christen it, my lady, ma'am? well, its no manner of use, my lady, it must out. But if they 'd only christen the country and drive the flies into the Red Sea, it would be a blessing. I hit here and there, and it's of no use; I only hit my own nose and mouth; and as for Abner, he has got all the skin burnt off his nose with wearing that silly bit of a cap instead of a good rational hat; but he says he does not like to do that, because it 's making himself even with Sir, that is, Master and Mr. Charles."

"Oh, by all means let him wear a hat if he have one," said all the ladies together.

"Thank you, my ladies," said Peggy, "it will be a comfort. As for me, I have got one fly down my throat, and two up my nose, and one acchully into one of my ears, and its going boo-woo-woo, just like a mill wheel, contindjally, the mischief on it!"

"Poor Peggy!" said Aunt Judith, "if it 's not out after tea we 'll try to drown it by pouring some water into the ear. But see, tea is ready. Pray call the gentlemen!"

The gentlemen meantime had been very busy carrying beds and bedclothes into the tent, which was the sleeping apartment of the ladies and Peggy; while Mr. Fitzpatrick and Charles had mattresses laid in the waggon, and Abner one spread under it, where the dogs took up their quarters near him.

All now was arranged, and on the tea-table appeared a substantial meal of a cold parrot pie and various cakes; the pie being a present at a station where they dined that day, and Peggy was at the same time busy over a panful of energetically frizzing and crackling beef stakes; and Abner coming from the lake with some of the coolest water he could procure, by dipping with a weighted dipper into its deepest and shadiest part, to put the butter in, which manifested a strong tendency to run into oil. The tea-table was surrounded by a number of folding chairs, which our party now took possession of, and the table, with its snowy cloth and neat apparatus and rich provision, surrounded by the travellers, presented in that pleasant wilderness a very unique and pleasant spectacle.

As they sate at their tea-supper, our travellers looked about and expressed to each other their enjoyment of the scene. Two laughing-jackasses came, and settling on a tree near them, face to face, and raising their heads as high as they could, laughed into each other's faces, in the most obstreporous, chuckling, rattling, hoo, hoo-ing laughter imaginable. You would have said they had just seen something most prodigiously ludicrous, but it was merely their way of saying good night to each other, for they were about to go to roost, as they saw the sun was setting. Then flew past a number of those beautiful black-and-white dove-like birds, called magpie larks, crying "chain, chain;" and the next moment Aunt Judith cried out, "Oh, look! look, what a beauty!" and all eyes following saw a little bird with a most glowing scarlet breast and brilliant blue back, sitting on the pole of the carriage. It was the Australian robin, which, much more magnificent than ours, yet has all the same quiet manner, and love of haunting human neighbourhood.

A far more striking spectacle, however, drew the eyes of the party another way. On their left hand a grand-looking fellow of a wild bull advanced through the forest at the head of a noble herd of cattle, and arrested by the sight of the party and their fire, the

stupendous fellow stood and surveyed them for some minutes with a solemn look, as questioning whether they meant any mischief to himself or company, and then stalked calmly on, followed by the whole herd.

"How grand!" exclaimed Aunt Judith. "Do n't the proud creatures seem to enjoy themselves in these wilds? They clearly feel their natural rights and independence here. They are the sovereigns of the wilderness, and we are only intruders."

"And, by the bye," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, starting up, "let us intrude, Charles, on the wild-fowl in the water here, before it is dark."

They snatched up their guns, taking each a side of the little lake. Bounce, the great Newfoundland, and Club, the little tawny bull-terrier, were speedily swimming eagerly in the water, and disappearing amongst the flags and reeds. At once there were sundry startled quackings of wild ducks, and up rose a cloud of them with a stunning noise of their wings. Charles and his father knocked down about half-a-dozen of them with each a single shot, and waited for fresh appearances. They did not wait long; two or three blue herons, and what was more attractive, a flock of large wild geese, rose from the reeds, and two of these last were brought down. While the

gentlemen re-loaded, Abner Wilks encouraged the dogs to bring out the fallen game, pointing them in the right directions, and ever and anon throwing a stick to where there lay some one of the dead birds. When these were secured, they set the dogs to explore the reeds afresh, but no further fowl arose; a wounded duck, however, was driven out, and continued for some time to dive and scuffle about, till a shot finished it, and little Club brought it to land.

Here was rich provision for to-morrow's larder, and the company now all betook themselves to their several beds, for it was growing rapidly dark, and they meant to be stirring with the earliest dawn.

With that dawn the travellers were all on foot. Abner had hunted up the horses, and Peggy was busy frying a couple of wild ducks, already cut to pieces, for there was no time to cook them whole, and soon the breakfast table was covered by the ladies with ample provision of tea, coffee, and cakes and bread from their stores. The horses came and looked on as expectingly as the dogs, and Mr. Fitzpatrick carved up a good large loaf, and gave them each repeated slices, which they devoured with manifest satisfaction, while Bounce and Club were as liberally supplied with bones and other morsels from the table. Breakfast over, amid abundance of pleasant chat, the tent

was struck, the table and beds packed in the waggon, the horses put into harness and saddle, and the ground being carefully hunted over to see that nothing was left, the party once more set forward.

The day soon grew very warm, but the journey through the woods was delightful. Charles and Georgina rode on in advance, still, however, keeping generally within sight; and the party in the waggon came on as the ground permitted them. Sometimes they rode for miles through the woods, the ground being level, and a simple track of wheels being their guide. All around them the earth was strewn with huge fallen trees and dead branches, and masses of the evergreen gum-tree leaves dried on their boughs in their greenness, ready kindling matter for the travellers' fire. Sometimes they passed over very sterile ground, where yet grew huge trees, and under their shade various acacias, some in bloom and some gone out, and often the golden wattle, showing its last yellow flowers, and lumps of transparent gum-arabic sticking on its crimson branches. Sometimes their way led them over dry stony hills, where the whole ground seemed formerly to have been on fire, and still retained a reddish hue, the stones grinding up under the wheels into the appearance of brick-dust. On these barren ranges the lofty iron-bark trees,

with their great black boles deeply ploughed into furrows, gave a peculiar character to the scene. Then they travelled along green valleys with beautiful slopes on each side, thinly sprinkled with trees, and offering abundant grass to their horses. Up many a hill, and through miles of forest, the travellers descended and walked, ever and anon attracted by some new and beautiful flower, by the singular grass-tree, with its tall flowering rod, or by the volumes of golden mistletoes which hung from the trees, resembling lions' skins at a distance. The gay flocks of parrots and paroquets, the snowy flocks of white cockatoos, the rush and clatter of a vast crowd of black magpies, or the quaint notes of lesser birds, conspicuous above them all being the droll mimicries of the leatherhead, kept them continually amused.

In the afternoon they came suddenly out upon a great plain, and its appearance called forth instant exclamations of delight and astonishment from the ladies. The plain was many miles in length, and three or four miles across; but the whole surface of it was one blaze of gold. It was like a billowy sea of gold, as the breeze rolled over the splendid flowers of which it was composed, and sent towards the travellers a rich fragrance. All round the aureate plain was hemmed in by the dark forests, and over

them, in various directions, showed airily the blue summits of distant mountains.

"We thought you would be rather amazed here," said Mr. Fitzpatrick and Charles, who had themselves been up to the station; and indeed their amazement and delight were unbounded. They all descended, both from carriage and horseback, and ran into the prodigal flower ocean. The scene was in truth remarkable; the flowers consisting principally of two kinds,—a fine large and fragrant hawkweed, and a plant which sent up a dozen or more clean straw-like stems of a yard high from each root, on the summit of each of which was a solid globe of vegetable gold, an inch or more in diameter. Interspersed amongst these were large purple vetches, or Swainsonias, of a most delicious vanilla scent, and various kinds of white and yellow everlastings. The whole were planted by nature on raised beds of a loamy mould, kept as clear from other plants or grass by the same wonderful power, as if it had been done by an army of gardeners; and between these innumerable beds were walks of solid turf, but half hidden by the luxuriant billows of the golden efflorescence.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" exclaimed the ladies, who walked enraptured about in this glorious garden of nature up to their very waists in the fragrant sea,

and gathering handfuls of the superb blossoms as if they could never have enough.

"But you do not see the grandest thing of all," said Mr. Fitzpatrick. "What is that?" asked the ladies. "What can be more enchanting than this scene?"

Mr. Fitzpatrick pointed, with a face full of significant pleasure, to a hill on the opposite side of the plain, and said, "Tallangetta!"

"Tallangetta!" exclaimed the ladies in one breath, and in the liveliest tone; and they stood in silent delight, as riveted to the spot. The scene, indeed, was well calculated to call forth their admiration. They beheld a range of bold hills,—bold in altitude, but soft and delicate in their outlines. They were covered with grass, and dotted over with trees of a peculiar character—the Casuarinas or Shiacks—part of which, with their more rigid and outstretched branches, resemble pine trees, and others, with theirs drooping gracefully, resembling large trees of broom. None of the ordinary gum-trees grew on the slopes of the hill, but their thick masses appeared here and there peeping from their summits. By places stony crags shot up on these summits, varying the softness of the scene; and to the right swelled up a more lofty hill, the upper parts of which were already scorched by the sun to the pale hue of sere grass.

Half way up this hill stood a white house, consisting of two ranges of buildings, united by a colonnade, and around it extended a considerable space of gardens and vineyards, enclosed in a ring fence.

"That is Tallangetta; that is the Squatter's home," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, evidently delighted with it himself, and seeming at the moment to forget his once far nobler house at the foot of the Cheviots, or the pleasant old brick manor-house on the banks of the Trent.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" again ejaculated the ladies, but in a softer tone, and with tears in their eyes. "Thank God!" said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, "for such a home in such a place." "Yes, thank God indeed," said Aunt Judith; "and you too, dear brother, and my dear Charley, for having chosen such a one. But where is the lake?"

"There!" said Mr. Fitzpatrick, turning and pointing in a direction opposite to the house; and there, at some miles' distance, they saw the waters glittering in the sun over the golden wilderness, and a row of dark trees, seeming to grow in the water as mangroves grow in the sea.

"Let us mount and get on," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, "for you will see from the house not only the whole of the lake, but all this wonderful panorama of golden

prairie, boundless breadth of surrounding forests, and mountain summits in the far distance." The whole party were in haste to proceed, their eyes still, however, on the opposite hills, which they perused feature by feature, with all their hollows and projections, their dark green trees, and sprinklings of cattle and of flocks. Still more did their gaze rest on that home which was to be the scene of their pains and pleasures for years to come. But they had not proceeded far when they caught sight of a long train of loaded drays, drawn by teams of many bullocks.

"Upon my word," exclaimed Mr. Fitzpatrick, with an air of indignant vexation, "those lazy bullock-drivers have not yet reached the station. A whole fortnight have they been in making a hundred miles, at this time of the year, and the roads so good."

All heads were stretched from the waggon, and eyes directed from horseback, and there indeed they saw six great drays loaded with their furniture, effects, and stores. These they confidently expected had arrived some days ago, and been unpacked; but as they approached the train they began to see cause for the slow progress. Here were these heavily-laden waggons moving, or attempting to move, over the deep, soft, volcanic ground. The wheels sunk almost to the axles, and ploughed up the ground as

they went in wondrous furrows. Most of the drays appeared stuck fast, defying all the efforts of the cattle to move them, though there were from eight to twelve huge strong beasts to every dray, defying them, and all the swearing, and bawling, and hallooaing of the drivers, and that amounted to a most Pandemonean din. The only way of making any progress was by uniting two or three teams, and tearing along by main force for a short distance; then another waggon was brought forward in like manner, and so on in succession. Thus were the men progressing at a tortoise pace, and with a most astonishing labour. As the party drew near, Mr. Fitzpatrick, who was prepared to be very angry, became cooler and cooler the more he saw. He merely remarked, stopping a moment, "that he hoped to have seen them on their return."

"Return!" said the fellow whom he addressed, with true Australian bluntness, "return! but it is n't hopes as draws over ground like this. It is next to more than bullocks can do, let alone hopes. D'ye hear that, mates? The gentleman talks of hopes dragging these tarnation loads of goods through these bloody bogs. Why, if we had much more of this, we should never be there these next hundred years. But, thank Goodness, there is but a little

more; but then there's the hill, and so we must camp at the foot to-night."

Mr. Fitzpatrick drove on, and soon they wound up the hill. "Not a soul is to look round," he said, "till we are at the house, and you will see the whole at once." Charles and Georgina hastened on, and when they arrived they were on the terrace in front of the house to receive them, accompanied by two or three men and a maid-servant. One of the men was the overseer, and another the cook. When the ladies got out of the carriage, they were more than ever enraptured with the view. Below at some distance in front lay the lake, several miles in extent, everywhere surrounded by green, mound-like swells, and then by the wide golden-flowered plains. Few trees grew about the lake, except a row on this side, growing, as they had appeared to do at a distance, in the water, showing that they had sprung there when the lake was less full than at present, and probably marking the course of a stream which issued at the near right-hand corner of the lake, and ran down the valley in a broad shallow expanse amongst trees and bushes. All round showed the vast forests and the distant mountain ranges.

The house itself looked more akin to the bush than it did at a distance. There it had a com-

manding aspect. Here it showed rather homelike than grand. It was white, with stuccoed walls and shingled roofs. The two oblong, square blocks of which it consisted were connected in front, as we have said, by a colonnade, but the pillars on which this rested were merely of white gum-trees, cut just when they had shed their outward bark, and therefore were as round, clean, and white as marble. The roof of the colonnade was also of shingles, and the whole pile was rustic, though ample and comfortable. The buildings with their colonnade enclosed a court which, at the back, was terminated by a lower range of building, forming the kitchen and servants' apartments. There was a small quantity of furniture still in the house, which was intended to supply the overseer's hut, which stood with other huts of stockmen, &c. below, near the lake; and it was only by contrivance that the family could manage to get tea and pass the night. But their goods were at hand, and, with the chairs and mattresses which they had brought with them, they might have been far worse off for the first night in the bush.

The house faced the south-west, and as they sate in a large room at their evening meal they saw the lake, lying with its unruffled but now sombre surface, beneath them, and the sun, huge and red, descend

upon the misty ridge of distant mountains, giving a feeling of wonderful solitude to the whole scene. A deep silence fell over the party. It seemed as if that spectacle, sublime as it was, of the ensanguined luminary disappearing over all that world of lonely woods, had brought with it a sense of their real distance from their past life and haunts; as if it called up the memories of those things, brilliant and dear, and sorrowful, between which and themselves a world had interposed itself, and made them feel, as it were, for the first time in its full extent, their vast sacrifices and their utter isolation. With a deep sigh each arose and withdrew, fearing to tell his fellow the sadness which oppressed him, yet summoning as much of cheerfulness as they could command into the wished good-night.

CHAP. II.

SETTLING DOWN.

Our friends at Tallangetta rose early in the morning, refreshed and full of new spirits. The sadness of the previous evening was gone with it, and the beauty of the place in which they found themselves inspired them with lively thankfulness for so sweet a home in so superb a scene. The sun, as they almost simultaneously issued from their rooms, had not yet risen over the eastern shoulder of the hill on whose slope their house stood. The braes around, as the Scotch would call them, lay in shadow, and sprinkled with cool dews. But far away they could see the tops of the mountains bright with the sunshine, and the wide woodlands illumined like a sea by it. The lake below lay partly in shadow, and partly dazzling in radiance, and the smoke was curling up greyly from the huts at the stockyard or village, as it might be termed, at the right-hand corner of the lake. They could see two or three large flocks proceeding in different

directions from it, appearing to roll over the plain like a white mist, followed by the shepherds, and accompanied by their dogs, whose gladsome barking reached them clearly. Large flocks of wild-fowl were travelling towards the lake from their different nocturnal feeding-places, and ever and anon they could see the flash of the water as they dashed down into it. Below to the right extended that magnificent prairie whose golden-hued surface was now sobered down by the absence of the sun, and around stood the primeval forest, dark and solemn.

From this splendid prospect the delighted group turned to take a more near survey of their dwelling. A sort of natural terrace had been seized upon for the standing of the house. In front this level left ample space for walking, and this was occupied by grass, and the outskirts of it with beds of mingled shrubs and flowers. The hill then descended at its regular declination, and a considerable piece of ground was enclosed as a vineyard by a hedge of cytissus, looking most agreeable to the eye, with its light green foliage and yellow racimes of flowers. The vineyard was descended by a sort of broad steps, three or four feet wide each; and the vines occupied terraces, all neatly stocked and trimmed as by a French or German vinedresser. At the bottom was a broad

grass walk, at each end of which was placed a bench, overshadowed by the silvery grey foliage of quince trees richly hung with young fruit.

As the party returned towards the house they were again struck by the fitness of the building, which, while it was capacious and handsome, certainly was Australian, and not English. It was but of one storey, yet tolerably high, and the end rooms had broad bay windows, as if to catch every possible portion of the noble view they commanded. That open colonnade, with its shingled roof and deep eaves, and its clear, straight, and beautifully cylindric stems, white and smooth as marble, stood out well against the court, lying deep in shadow. An archway at the back of the court led them into a sort of back court or yard, having on each side sheds under which horses and carriages could stand occasionally, though the true place for such things was down at the huts. Separated by a light pallisade from this yard appeared a young orchard, extending some distance up the hill, in which not only many kinds of European apples, pears, and plums were flourishing, but peaches, nectarines, and apricots, as standard trees, showed the most vigorous growth, and were amazingly hung with green fruit. "Here," said Aunt Judith, "is promise indeed for autumn,

Why, what preserving there will be! I hope the sugar wo n't fail."

"Well, I hope not," said Mr. Fitzpatrick. "I think there is a ton coming just now, and perhaps that may serve your conservatory passion, Judy."

"Well, perhaps it may," said Aunt Judith; "but really, if we eat, and preserve, and bake, and do all sorts of things with these peaches and apricots, I do n't see the end of them, except we do as the Americans, feed the pigs on them. But Demby and Gremby, you 'll help us all you can, wo n't you?"

Demby and Gremby promised most merrily; and it may be as well to let the reader know that the personages thus addressed were no other than Charles and Georgina. Our friends were a family who, in their familiar intercourse amongst themselves, were greatly given to dubbing each other with nick-names, and not an individual amongst them but had one. Aunt Judith was very naturally called Judy, and as Mrs. Fitzpatrick and she were almost inseparable, they were soon named Punch and Judy; and Aunt Judith, being once pestered by the two children for some of her preserves and marmalades, told them they were as bad as Demby and Gremby, two very troublesome people of their acquaintance;

and Demby and Gremby were voted by acclamation as their pet titles. There wanted but a by-name for the paterfamilias, and that soon was Nimrod, from his hunting habits, and cut down by degrees to Nim.

"Oh, mercy on us! what have we here?" shrieked Aunt Judith; and at the same moment, half galloping, half flying, two stupendous birds, whose heads, set on long necks, seemed quite as high as Aunt Judith's, and, opening enormously long beaks, and making the most uncouth cries, came rushing upon them, spreading and flapping their wings with an expansion enough to enclose the whole party.

"Ha! ha! my old fellows! ha! ha! Gog and Magog!" said Charles, catching the gigantic birds each by the neck, and rubbing their long beaks together. "Ha! ha! old fellows! Why, Judy, these are the native companions I told you of. They won't hurt you. They are as gentle and as good as Desdemona herself. They only want to make your acquaintance."

The ladies had shrunk together in alarm at this sudden onset, but they now recovered their composure, and admired the noble birds. They were of the crane species, with bodies in which black, azure, and grey prevailed, and on the back part of their heads they

had a bright crimson patch like a cap. They followed the party with their long, active legs, and every now and then made a leap and a flap of their large wings, as in delight. You might see that they would soon be great favourites, especially with Aunt Judith.

There was now a call to breakfast, and the birds followed them, and took their stations under the breakfast-room window, where, evidently, they had been fed. "Oh! let me have some bread; I must feed the brave Gog and Magog," said Aunt Judith; but, on opening the window, she started back in amazement. "La! what is that? Those are not the birds!" Instead of the long-beaked companions, there stood two still larger creatures, with small heads, short beaks, but very large dark, intelligent eyes, and broad backs clothed with dark, lustrous feathers. Charles burst into hearty laughter at Aunt Judith's wonder; for, as Aunt Judith entered the house, he had enticed Gog and Magog into the hall, and shut them in, while he ran and lured these superb creatures with a piece of bread from the other side of the house.

"Oh! beautiful, beautiful things!" exclaimed Georgina. "Why, they are ostriches!"

"Emus, Geordy, emus, Australian cassuaries!" said Charles. "Are they not glorious fellows?"

The whole party were in raptures with the possession of these grand fowls of the Australian wilderness, and showered out a plentiful supply of bread for them.

"If the companions are Gog and Magog," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, "pray what are these?"

"Oh! these are Brob and Naga; that is, Brobdignag and Brobignaga," said Charles; "but you will find them always about; so now let us have some breakfast."

At breakfast Charles told the ladies that they must make a visit with him down to the huts; there they would see a plentiful family of fowls, ducks, geese, turkeys, and pea-fowls. He wanted to show them the huts and their inhabitants, Purdy the hut-keeper, and Barks the drayman, and their wives, and the great wool-shed, and the great kitchen garden down by the creek, and a near view of the lake with all its wild ducks, geese, teal, widgeon, ibises, shags, and black swans.

"Black swans!"

"Yes, black swans, plenty of them; and in the plains wild turkeys, and in abundance." Charles was running on in delight about all the game, kangaroos in the hills, and wombats, and a world of birds, when a thundering succession of cracking

whips and shouting men announced that the drays had mounted the hill, and the goods were arrived. Out rushed the whole party, and breakfast was left unfinished.

We may imagine the bustle and the pleasure of many days to come — the unloading and unpacking of furniture. There was soon a perfect confusion on the terrace of men and pieces of furniture, and mats, and cords, and straw which had enveloped them; of great chests of linen, and books, and china, and all sorts of things. Then there was a great unrolling and laying down and fitting of carpets, and carrying of furniture, and admiring it, piece after piece, as each took its place. The room in which they had breakfasted was fitted up half as library, half as drawing-room, and the corresponding room in the other wing as the principal drawing-room; so that they could use each as it was coolest from the absence of the morning or evening sun upon it. Behind the library lay the dining-room, with a cross passage between them opening out into a broad verandah on the east side of the house, affording a pleasant shade from many hours of forenoon sun. Under the shingle roof of this verandah were clustered scores of nests of swallows, stuck compactly side by side, and each having a projecting circular

entrance like the neck of a bottle. Aunt Judith contemplated this populous swallow city with vast delight, especially as she could watch their proceedings from the library window, though they soon found out that she was no enemy to them, and came flying in and out just as freely when she sat in the verandah.

But we must not stay talking about swallows while all the furniture has to be got in. In the west wing, but backward in the court, was a large store-room, into which the numerous packages, and bags, and tubs of stores were carried, to be arranged at leisure. All the best rooms were on the ground floor, as there was no other floor; and therefore, after all, there was not too much room in the house for the family and occasional visitors. But there was a large room adjoining the store-room which after-experience occasioned them to call the barracks. This was fitted up as a smoking-room; and there were arranged all the guns and apparatus of the chase, including pistols, revolvers, rifles, bullet-moulds, wad-cutters, and all sorts of implements for cleaning and rectifying these arms, as well as a good supply of ammunition under lock and key. This room, however, no long time demonstrated, was required as a general sleeping-room for gentlemen visitors, who

could not be accommodated with separate apartments; and here at any time a whole array of folding iron bedsteads, with mattresses and requisite bedclothes, could be carried in at shortest notice.

In a few days the house at Tallangetta displayed an internal beauty and richness, if not splendour, which certainly no squatting station in the colony could at all approach. Handsome cabinets and wardrobes, tasteful chairs, tables, cheval and pier-glasses, a superb collection of books, no inconsiderable number of fine engravings, and several excellent though small pictures on the walls, with all sorts of drawing-room and other room embellishments, curtains and sofas, presented a scene which would have been termed elegant in a country residence in England, and certainly stood quite *sui generis* in the Australian bush.

Any one seeing the completeness of this house internally, and the grandeur of the scene without, the resources for sport through wood and plain, river and lake, and the almost boundless nature of the estate, stocked with sheep, cattle, and horses, would have found it difficult to conceive that any man of healthy tastes could desire anything more or regret anything different. But the Fitzpatricks had in their own bosoms cruel remembrances and the

consciousness of rude and wrenching privations of property, and environments become to them as part and parcel of their existence. Yet even they, when they looked round them, could not but feel a sensible pleasure and pride in their present abode and estate, and a new spirit of enjoyment evidently took possession of them.

Abner and Peggy Wilks were located down at the huts. Abner was to resume his old employment as gardener, and Peggy as laundry woman. They had a comfortable slab hut in the garden, which was ample, and abounding with growing crops of all kinds of vegetables, pumpkins in numerous variety, melons and water-melons, with abundance of fig, and medlar and quince trees, cherries, loquots, quondongs, gooseberry, strawberry, and raspberry trees, as fine as any garden could show, including sundry productions which Abner surveyed with wondering queries in his own mind what they could be intended for. Purdy the hut-keeper, and Barks the drayman,—especially the latter, whose bullock-driving services were only now and then required,—were to help Abner in digging and hoeing when necessary; and their wives were to equally assist Peggy in the laundry labours. There was an excellent and spacious wooden laundry just outside the garden, and capital drying-ground. The water

of the lake was of that soft, detergent quality, that the washing was done with singular ease, and the sun there made still more expeditious work of the drying.

A grand discovery that the Wilkses, the Purdys, and the Barkses were all from the neighbouring counties of Derby and Nottingham, in which latter shire the Fitzpatricks had had an estate, created a great league amongst these worthies, and a common zeal in serving their employers, then a too rare circumstance.

The settling down in the house being complete, one morning after breakfast the whole family set out down to the huts, for a regular survey of this wooden hamlet. It was a curious-looking place to eyes new to the colony. A good half dozen of wooden huts, roofed in with huge sheets of stringy bark, and some of these roofs secured by stout poles lashed down upon them, stood here and there in most independent defiance of plan. Each of these had a broad, low chimney, tapering considerably upwards, and from several of which rose actively-aspiring smoke. Small windows peeped out of them, generally two, like two little eyes out of a heavy head. Besides these huts there were wooden erections of greater extent, which turned out to be stables and cowsheds, and one very large building, evidently erected with more care, and

with much greater symmetry, though only consisting of one immense quadrangle. Its walls, however, were of clapboard, so as to prevent the entrance of driving rain, and its roof of compact shingles. This was the wool-shed, a most important item in the buildings of a station. Here there was a pallisadoed enclosure, into which the sheep were brought at shearing time, or at any other time, to examine and dress them for foot-rot or scab. There was a capacious apartment at the end opening into this enclosure, where the shearers clipped the sheep, and then the large wool-shed or warehouse itself, in which the wool was pressed into huge canvass bags by a hydraulic press, and piled up till conveyed away down to Melbourne for shipment.

The whole of this building was floored with stout planks raised on sleepers, and with sufficient interstices to admit plenty of air, and the space under this floor was a grand retreat of wild cats, as Club very speedily discovered, and grew outrageous to be at them. Whenever Charles was desirous of a good wild cat hunt, he had only to bring hither Club, and Purdy, and Barks, and taking up a plank here and there, all of which were loose, there was instantly a grand rush of those spotted and bushy-tailed creatures from the building on all sides. But that in

after days; at present the party were too much interested in their visits to the huts. They found them very simple affairs, with mud floors and huge wide fire-places, the most rudimental chairs and tables, and just an extra room for sleeping in. There was Jack Barks, a tall, powerful fellow, in a pair of linen trowsers of a stupendously large check pattern, and long hair hanging from beneath his cabbage-tree hat; and Sam Purdy the hutkeeper, who prepared the meals and kept in order the huts of two shepherds who brought their flocks nightly to the head station, a lean, brown-complexioned fellow, with a treble voice, and closely-cropped dark brown hair. Barks seemed a bold, jovial, off-hand sort of fellow, with considerable of the dare-devil and rhodomontade in him; and Purdy had a twinkle in his eye which bespoke no little sly humour and love of fun. Their wives and children we may speak of more hereafter. The exploring party went on to the overseer's hut, which was much larger, and contained no less than four rooms; for there came numbers of people travelling to and fro, and freely took up their quarters for the night, or longer if it pleased them, for there were no inns, and everybody gave and took in this way on their journeys through the bush. Mr. David Rannock the overseer, a grave,

middle-aged Scotchman, unmarried, and devoted to business, was not there, for he was constantly riding to the different outlying huts of the shepherds and stockmen; but there was the cook, a queer sort of Irishman, Dennis O'Foggaty, and a great number of dogs, chiefly of the colly species, lying about. There were tribes of fowls of all kinds, and clouds of pigeons, all objects of plenty and agreeable cares that delighted Aunt Judith.

But what called forth more admiration almost than anything else was a pair of magnificent kangaroo dogs; that is, Highland staghounds naturalised in this country, and invaluable in the chase after the kangaroo. Mr. Fitzpatrick and Charles promised themselves many a gallop after these superb creatures, these gigantic greyhounds, through the woods; and horses, too, there were in the paddocks at hand to supply any number of equestrians. There were, indeed, hundreds running wild on the estate, as fine creatures as ever carried tails.

From the huts they took their way to the oat and barley paddocks, where fine green crops were growing, strolled under the trees of the immense grass paddock, where fed the milch cows and horses, and then directed their course to the margin of the lake. From the smooth, down-like swells on the banks of

this fine sheet of water they could clearly see on the short turf of the plains at a considerable distance numbers of the wild turkeys or rather bustards of the country, which, however, are difficult to approach. Large flocks of wild ducks of different kinds rose up and removed far away on the waters; and here and there, but at a safe distance, the native black swans seemed to drift carelessly before the breeze, while the large snowy pelican flew along the reedy shores with strange clanging sounds, with a lustrous whiteness in the bright sunshine.

A boat lay moored to a post; Barks said there were three on the lake, and he asked whether he should give them a pull out, but they deferred that pleasure to another day, and they now took their way homewards, highly satisfied with what they had seen; the kangaroo hounds showing a desire to follow them, but Barks called them back, saying they were yet new to the place, and therefore not safe company for the emus. A light wooden foot-bridge led them across the creek where it issued from the lake; all carriages and cattle passing through the creek itself by a shallow ford.

Such was the first survey of our settlers of the portion of their new domain immediately under their eye, and from day to day they extended their re-

searches with augmenting avidity. At one time they took a leisurely stroll up the hill; saw with increased amazement the still vaster views thence of woods and distant mountains. On the open slopes they lingered with pleasure, examining the various flowers, or listening to the wind singing wildly in the long, wiry tresses of the shiacks. On the hills themselves they found one unbroken forest running in varied swells and valleys, but all solitary and woodland, where prostrate trees lay in various stages of decay, where the kangaroo rat and the bandicoot rushed away from beneath some fallen log or protecting thicket, and parrots and paroquets glanced and twittered on the tree-tops, or the noisy wattle-bird cried, "Karaka-rock!"

At other times Charles and Georgina, often accompanied by their father and the kangaroo hounds, and the indefatigable Club, who would not be left behind, finding continual objects of chase in the woods, made long rides, exploring the bearings of the neighbourhood, sometimes starting a grand boomah, or great red kangaroo, and dashing after the dogs till they would have been inevitably lost in the trackless waste but for the sure instinct of their horses and hounds.

The whole family soon found that there was no lack

of pleasant employment in this, as they had feared, solitary place. They were yet utter strangers; they knew not a soul of their neighbours; there was no daily paper arriving by railroad mail, bringing every morning from London all the doings of the world. There were no neighbouring towns or villages; the very hills and valleys, for the most part, had no names yet; but the ladies had their books, their music, their needlework, and their garden. There was always something for them to attend to within or without. Barks and Purdy brought in two broods of young paroquets, the green leeks, and the lovely speckled budgregores, which afforded Aunt Judith and Georgina especial pleasure to feed and watch in their large cages under the verandah. Seeing that this gave great pleasure, they soon also brought in two or three of the strange animals, half pig, half bear in appearance, which live in huge burrows in the woods, the wombats. These they placed within an enclosure in the orchard, where they soon made burrows to their hearts' content, and grew very tame; and not long after they added to this native menagerie a couple of uncouth animals called sun-bears, which they placed in wooden cages or kennels on the branch of a great tree, and fed upon the leaves of the peppermint gum. All these things, with visits down to

the huts, the women and children there, and the fowls and garden, filled up wonderfully their time, and which, indeed, was not long left so free from human visits as they expected.

As for Charles and his father, they were enthusiastic sportsmen, and they found Barks and Purdy as eager as themselves in this chase whenever they were at liberty to accompany them. The lake and creek gave them the most exciting exercise in pursuit of the wild-fowl, for, from the scarcity of cover, they were not approachable except by the nicest stratagem and caution. Sometimes they might be seen creeping on all fours, or progressing like serpents at their full length on the ground, by means of their hands, behind some swell or bank, so as to get a fair shot at their game, or they were cautiously drifting with the wind over Purrumbang, the lake, with a thicket of boughs concealing them in the boat till they were fairly in the midst of the flocks of geese, ducks, or black swans; at others they were stalking, under cover of their horses' shoulders, across the deep, grassy prairies, in order to come near the wild turkeys, which were often wild indeed, and wonderfully cautious of the approach of man. Charles delighted, too, in nothing more than in driving occasionally with the buoyant-hearted and talkative Barks, on his

weekly rounds to carry the rations to the different shepherds' huts. These lay some of them many miles distant in the unpeopled woods; and Barks had endless stories of bushrangers and blacks in past days, when they were hostile and made fierce attacks on the squatters and travellers. There were lovely creeks, and pools, and forest solitudes, where there were extraordinary game, or extraordinary fish, or stupendous trees, and other wonders which he had to show,—the fern-tree, the grass-tree, the fragrant myal wood, or the wild quondong fruit. Their guns were constantly in requisition to fetch down a bronze-wing, or secure a platypus; and as they lit their fire on some pleasant stream-bank and eat their dinner, or as they sate and chatted with the solitary shepherd in his hut, Charles felt a fast growing attachment to this species of free, fresh, and primitive existence. It is one which seizes forcibly on the imagination of youth, so forcibly that at no period and in no country have the hunting races been ever induced to abandon their limitless haunts for the more brilliant or more boasted attractions of towns. How much more fascinating must the free range of untrodden nature, the solemn wood, the airy mountain, the widely rolling lake, and the sounding shore, with all their living things, become to those who carry with them all the domestic and intellectual resources of civilised life!

CHAP. III.

NEIGHBOURS.

Notwithstanding the generally auspicious appearance of affairs on the station at Tallangetta, yet, as things are never wholly right anywhere in this world, so neither were they there. You cannot transplant full-grown people any more than full-grown trees, and make them take to the new ground at once. It happened, therefore, that both at the house and at the huts on the same evening conversations were going on that betrayed the fact that certain persons had not yet reached that *terra incognita*,—heaven upon earth.

Peggy Wilks and her husband had, indeed, discovered a great deal more than they had rational reason to expect in their new world; they had not only a comfortable hut, and plenty to do, and good pay, but they had immediate neighbours out of their own old neighbourhood in England. The Barkses and the Purdys knew all and every thing and person that they knew at home, and often they spent very

delightful hours in talking all those old familiar matters over. In an evening, when all work was done, and the cool night air made a little fire pleasant, they would assemble in each other's huts, and have a most refreshing gossip. Any one who has ever entered a country inn in England, when the villagers are congregated there at the regular levee of the host within the large settee before the winter fire, will have long ago discovered how all the affairs of the gentry in the neighbourhood are there canvassed and discussed most minutely. There is not a family, however high or great, whose most intimate concerns are not as thoroughly known to the smith, and wheelwright, and gamekeeper, and mine host himself, as they are to the families and persons treated of. There you hear who and what they are in all their family branches and ancestry; how this great man made his fortune, and how that great man lost it; how this estate came to be bought and sold; what it is worth to a farthing; what mortgages are upon it; what flaws there are in the title; and what flaws in the pedigree and parentage of the possessors. Many a nod and wink, and most grave and knowing look, reveal mysteries of mishaps in people who lift their heads very high, and ill-founded claims to legitimacy if the truth was known to the world as it is to these

village magi. Every run to Gretna Green is again galloped over, with all its particulars;—how Sir Thomas overtook his daughter, and she was smuggled again out of a chamber window while the old gentleman was overtaken himself by his after dinner nap, as he sat with the key of her chamber door in his pocket. How Squire Grub had grown out of a dishonest steward into a right honourable gentleman; how Squire Canter had turned himself out of a land surveyor into a land proprietor, by running off with old Slowman's only daughter; how this lord's grandfather was a grocer, and that lord's father was a clever mixer of physic, if the "parson as is gone" was to be believed about a certain death-bed. There you could learn why such a fair estate was forsaken; why that fine old hall was falling to ruin; who it was that walked in the great picture-gallery at Lonesome Lodge, and that rung the only bell at midnight in Drearywood Chapel. All this you could learn, with the exact dates, names, places, and causes, and receive totally new ideas on such fractions of aristocratic society as you happened to know. Little do the great families in the country think how they and their totality are dissected, seen through, and weighed out in parcels, and labelled with very different names and characters to those which they

felicitate themselves on possessing; and little are the reverential bows and touching of hats as they pass likely to let them know anything of this; or how John the groom, or Prim the valet, or Bombazina the lady's maid, carry out and carefully sow in the very thirsty and absorbent minds of the villagers all the mixed seed of this knowledge, this grotesque medley of truth and romance.

Well, a world of such talk enlivened the evenings of the huts at Tallangetta, where it could do little harm to the unconscious subjects of it at the other end of this or other worlds. There was nothing that could be started that Purdy, in particular, did not know everything and more than that about it. Mention a man, no matter who,—"Oh, yes! he knew him,—who his father was, his mother, his grandmother; how he came to be lame, how he jumped into his present birth." Name a place, at once he knew all about the squire and the rector, and how he came to get the living by taking the fancy of a certain lady at Bath, and all about the duel in which there was trickery in the weapons, and of course murder, nothing else. He knew where that child was born that certain people declared never was born; where it was carried to in a butter maund, and who it was now, though that child that ought to

have been a duke knew nothing of this, and was only a coal merchant. Peggy Wilks and Hannah Barks had no lack of such histories by the end, and no sooner was this end out than Purdy would seize it, and pull it out like a man at a fair pulling out whole yards of ribbons from his throat, and illustrate and verify every point of it.

Could there be any more charming luck than to have dropped into such a congenial society, and to enjoy such precious evenings at home? Yet Peggy Wilks was not contented. She was an odd woman was Peggy. She liked to grumble; she could not live without it, and yet she hated to hear anybody else grumble. "What are the thankless folks wer-ritting about?" she was sure to say, if they were re-pining at anything. "Have n't they enough to be thankful for? Is n't it shameful, now, to hear them going on so, and so much as they 've had done for them? But there 's no thanks nor gratitude in this world: the more a body does, the more they 're pecked at. I hate your black-hearted, double-faced, un-contented gentry, I do!"

Yet Peggy was not altogether contented herself. She had plenty, "thank the Lord for it." She had health, "thank Goodness for that too." Abner had lost his rheumatiz, "saints be praised!"—and had

an uncommon fine garden to rule in. And as for the family, Peggy would really have gone through fire and water for them all and sundry; but yet she liked to grumble now and then at them herself, mind; nobody else was to do it, at the peril of her fiercest anger. But the things which chafed Peggy here were the heat and the "varmint."

"Drat these flies!" she would say, as Abner came in at noon to his dinner. "I think I'll e'en gie up cooking, and you may bring us raw lettices and ingins to our bread. What with the heat, — we might just as well live in an oven, — and what with these lingons of outrageousest flies, I tell thee what, Abner, my life's a plague to me. There's the mutton that was killed just an hour sin, it's full of maggots half an inch long, it swarms wi 'em."

"No matter for that," said Abner, "the meat is sweet enough."

"Sweet enough, is it? And creeping with maggots? Sweet enough for them as cares nothing for what they swallow. Sweet enough for you, perhaps."

"For anybody," says Abner; "just scrape them off, and pop the steaks into the frying-pan."

"Ay, just and just, man; that is soon said; but just you now try it yourself, and see how you'll hold the pan and fry with twenty thousand flies darting

at your eyes, nose, and mouth at once, and never a hand at liberty to fight with 'em."

"But I never do fight 'em," said Abner.

"Oh lors, no! that's true," retorted Peggy; "you let them crawl all over your face, and fill your very eye-holes, till they are black as my shoe, with the creeping, crawling varmint — ugh! it makes my flesh creep to see it."

"But my flesh does n't creep," said Abner.

"No, it only should," exclaimed Peggy, indignantly; "but you 've no more feeling in your skin than a rhinoceros. Your skin is just leather. Stringy bark is more of a skin by half. I would n't own such a skin, I would n't. And to-day I 've done nothing but get tanged (stung) with those nasty prismires as is crawling over every mander of thing. Sets my clothes-basket on the grass, jump! comes something, and tang! goes something into my hand, just like a needle. Leans my hand in my fright against a tree, tang! goes another villain in my neck. Shakes my neckhandkerchief, and, Lord above us! jumps half a score of the nasty stinging wretches down my back. Runs in to pull off my clothes, the little devils tanging and tormenting all the way, and just as I sits down on the bed there I sees a hugous ugly sentrypid curled up with all its legs in my best

cap. Out I throws him into the garden, and runs out to stamp on him, and there he isn't to be found, the filthy reptile; but I potters amongst the wood heap, and stead of him nearly sets my thumb on a horrid scorpion! Sky above us! who's safe here a blessed minute?"

"Why, you, Peggy," said Abner, smiling; "you're safe enough yet."

"Safe enough, am I? And that's all you care for a good wife like me, is it? But you mayn't just have me, one of these days. Safe, am I? That's because you don't know nothing about it. Safe, am I? And you'd ha' said so if you had been down at the creek when I went for a bucket o' water to-day. Sets down my bucket, and is just going to swing it into the water by the rope, and flop! goes something into the water; and what was it? Just a great, ugly, deadly, omfabulous, venomous snake, as black as black can be, and above a yard long. My heart jumped into my mouth, and I should have given such a screech, but I lost my voice, and I was just tumbling into the water in my start, only my fright made me turn and run. Let the monster have just bitten me, as was a narrow miss, and then I should have been safe enough, you may take my word for it."

This was at noon. At evening, when Abner came in, he found Peggy cleaned up, with her bettermost gownd on, as she called it, and sitting at the tea-table waiting for him. "All safe yet, Peggy?" said Abner, rather daringly. "No more flies, ants, snakes, or triantelopes?"

"Get your tea, man," said Peggy, "and be thankful that nothing hurts you; only that you do n't know summer from winter, nor spring from autumn. It is a pretty country where they call December June, and June December."

"But they do n't," said Abner.

"Do n't they?" said Peggy. "Then why do you set your potatoes in September, and gather your gooseberries in January? I thought you were cracking your poor skull to know one time from another, and thought that the months had all run backwards, and that your north aspect for sun, and south aspect for shade, rather bothered you."

"Well, they did," said Abner, "but I 've found a remedy for that. I 've just altered all the names in my 'Gardener's Calendar' with a pen, and written June for December, and April for October, and so on; and all comes as clever as a pod after a pea-blossom. I never stop to think about it now; autumn's autumn, and spring's spring again, as I 've written it."

"Well, then, as you're so sharp," said Peggy, "I wish you'd just turn the world round as you've turned the seasons, and set us down at Thrumpton again, out of reach of these flies and sentrypids. I wonder what we must be doing to come to such a country as this, just to please a parcel of broken-down gentry."

"Broken-down gentry!" said Abner; "pray who may they be? I've followed none, though I would have done it, had it been so. But you do n't call Sir Thomas a broken-down gentleman, I hope? You do n't call an estate like this a broken-down man's estate, I hope?"

"Who are you setting up, you simpleton?" said Peggy. "Who are you Sir Thomasing? I do n't know any such man; and if these here ar n't broken-down gentry, who is? If they ar n't, man, where's Thrumpton Hall and Heathercote Hall? And what's that Sir Patrick doing there, as grand as my lord? More fools we for coming all this way after nothing but flies and water-snakes!"

Abner sat down to his tea, stirred his cup with a very upright spoon, which seemed to grind surlily against the bottom, and was silent, as if in anger. But he knew his cue; and all at once taking a large slice of brown bread and butter, and doubling it up,

he said, "Well, Peggy, it is a pitty we've come, just as you say, to please a parcel of broken-down gentry; but I thought nothing would stop you, or I could have staid well enough. Sir Patrick offered me high wages."

Peggy looked fire and daggers.

"And you'd have been mean enough to have taken the dirty money of that dirty, designing, thieving body, that has dropped himself like a cuckoo into another's nest? Well, that becomes you now, it does; but," added Peggy, growing very red, "I'd ha' cut off my hand first before I'd ha' moved a knuckle-bone for such a wretch! An upstart, a base impostor, a ——!"

"Gentlemen of property, however," said Abner, taking another slice of bread and butter, "and not a broken-down gentry."

"Who are you calling broken-down gentry?" said Peggy, firing up.

"Who?" said Abner; "why, the same that you called so."

"Well, and if I called them so, have not I a right to call them so? I who saw them married, and nursed the children, and the blessed boy that died, and helped to cheer them up when they were in trouble. I've a right, if anybody has; I should

think so! And when I say it, I do n't mean it; its only because I feel savage innerly, and must say something; and when I know that I mean no harm, why there 's no harm in it; but as to you, Abner, oh, fie! fie on you, to foul your lips with such words! I 'd rather sew them up, I would!"

Abner very gravely said he gave in, as he had done scores of times before, and said Peggy was quite right. He admired her spirit, and all the time he laughed in his sleeve and enjoyed the fun.

Up at the house, just as this dialogue was taking place, and they knowing nothing of it of course, Mr. Fitzpatrick, after a long, solitary ride over the plains, threw himself on the sofa after dinner, and said, "After all, this is rather a slow affair, this bush life. If one had but a pleasant neighbour or two to exchange a word with now and then, we might do."

"Neighbours!" said Aunt Judith. "But where are we to look for them?"

"Well, there are such people; but they do n't seem very neighbourly," said Mr. Fitzpatrick. "There is Captain Ponceford down the valley on the Monalka, over our creek, not more than five miles off; but you see nothing of him."

"Do n't you know why, Nim?" said Charles.

"No, Demby," replied his father.

"It is because he has been in Melbourne till yesterday; and now they are beginning sheep-washing and shearing, and I guess you won't see many squatters till that is over."

"Well, no," added his father; "and as we are going to begin too, we shall not have much visiting time, I expect."

"But," said Charles, "I have made out that we have no less than four families of neighbours within a circle of fifteen or twenty miles. There are the Metcalfes on the Campaspe, and the Quarriers on the Goulburn; Captain Ponceford just below here."

"Just below!" said Georgina, laughing. "Five miles off!"

"Yes, just below, Gremby," continued Charles; "and there is Dr. Woolstan's at Mount Corballa, over the hills there."

"What! is he a medical man?" asked Aunt Judith. "That is good hearing, if he be a clever man."

"A very clever man, they tell me," said Charles, "and only seventeen miles off!"

"For our comfort," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, laughing, "we need not be dead above once or twice over before we could have him, if he did not happen to be making a medical visit away on the Billebong, or the

Yanko over the Murray, some hundred or two of miles in the other direction."

All laughed, and yet said it was no laughing matter; and from that day for a month the whole place was astir with sheep-washing, shearing, and packing of wool. The gentlemen were as busy and as interested in it as if it was the most delightful occupation in the world, and no more was thought of want of company. Then, one day, as they were just sitting at their noon dinner, they saw a stoutish man, with a full, ruddy face, ride up at a brisk rate into the court, and presently he was announced as Mr. Quarrier. Without waiting to be invited in, the squatter walked in with as brisk a pace as he had ridden up, and with a face full of smiles he passed from one person to another in a quick, familiar style, shook both ladies and gentlemen heartily by the hand, bade them welcome to the bush, apologised for not being able to call before, but pleaded business, and said he supposed they had found there was no great ceremony used in the bush, but he hoped they would not be long before they discovered much warm-heartedness.

Scarcely waiting for invitation, he seated himself at table and fell into the use of his knife and fork as naturally as possible; congratulated the ladies on

their fine situation, only feared they found it a bore to get water up from the lake so far; congratulated Mr. Fitzpatrick on the good clip and good price of wool; hoped they had not much grass seed in their fleeces.

"Grass seeds in wool!" said Aunt Judith.

Mr. Quarrier laughed loud and heartily. "Ah! I am glad, ma'am, to hear you ask that, for it shows you have not got them. Depend upon it, you would have heard of them if they had been on the run. Your washers and shearers would have cursed them cordially as they ran into their fingers. Why, ma'am, they are sharp as needles, and run through the sheep-skins as they would through a pat of butter."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed the ladies. But Mr. Quarrier went on to ask Mr. Fitzpatrick how they were for scab and foot-rot; said he heard there was catarrh in the Upper Goulburn, and then turning suddenly to Mrs. Fitzpatrick, said Mrs. Quarrier and her mother and the girls meant to drive over and see them soon; pulled out his watch just as the cloth was drawn; said he would just take a cigar and a glass of toddy while his horse ate a little corn, and would be off, for he must be at home by daylight.

With that he jumped up and went out to see his

horse, came in, and sate with Mr. Fitzpatrick and Charles as he smoked his cigar; talked at a wonderful rate of the colony, the squatting interests, the abominable attempts of the radicals in Melbourne to invade their rights; drew out a long printed memorial that he had sent to the home government on the subject; hoped Mr. Fitzpatrick would stand up for the poor squatters and the great wool trade; and then, hurrying to say good bye to the ladies, was seen cantering off down the very steepest of the hills, splashing through the water of the creek, stopping a moment to shake hands with Mr. Rannock the overseer at the door of his hut, and then off again at full speed into the woods.

"Do you call that a squatter?" said Aunt Judith, with a droll expression of countenance, as they saw Mr. Quarrier vanish into the bush. "I should call him a rusher, a careerer; I feel exactly as if a whirlwind or a torrent had gone through the house, don't you? Are those your squatters, your quiet men of the woods, whose name gives one an idea of people sitting in profoundest composure like hares on their forms? Why, they are all mercury and locomotion! What in the world can have made them so rapid, fierce, fidgety, and full of bustle? Bless me! it upsets all my notions. I expected nothing in a hurry but a frightened kangaroo,

or a bush fire. Ah! that's it, Mr. Quarrier is a bush fire."

"But, Judy, you are judging a whole race by the very first specimen," said Mr. Fitzpatrick.

"So you are, Judy," said Charles. "Neither Weir nor Wallthorpe are at all like this Mr. Quarrier."

"Why, who are they? Who are Weir and Wallthorpe, Demby?" asked all the family at once.

"They are the overseers of Captain Ponceford," said Charles; "I met them down the creek the other day, and two very nice young fellows they seemed."

"There now," said Mr. Fitzpatrick; "how these young fellows do find one another out! But who comes here?"

A lady and gentleman rode at the same moment into the court. They were young, and in dress and bearing would not have been distinguished from any of the aristocratic class of England.

"Captain and Mrs. Ponceford," said the servant. The persons announced entered. The captain was a tall, thin, gentlemanly-looking man with a moustache, and wearing a riding suit of grey merino. There was a quiet seriousness in his manner, accompanied by an expression that evinced good sense and a kindly disposition. Mrs. Ponceford was also tall, and remarkably handsome both in figure and face.

All thought that in her riding dress they had never seen a more graceful woman; but it was the cordial, happy, frank expression of her face that drew and wholly engrossed the attention of the spectators. It was soon learnt that Captain Ponceford had served in India, but had determined to settle here on account of his health, which failed there. He had gone to England and married the object of a long attachment. They were neither of them yet more than thirty, and had only two children of about seven and eight years old. All quickly felt that they should greatly like them. Captain Ponceford, in the quietest contrast to their late visitor, showed so much knowledge of the colony and its statistics, placed the life of a squatter in so pleasant a point of view, and Mrs. Ponceford spoke with so much heart and feeling of the beauties of the country round, of the pleasures that were to be found even in the bush, which she preferred infinitely to town life, and evinced such a natural, warm, affectionate interest about all the productions of the neighbourhood, animate and inanimate, as charmed every one. They mutually congratulated each other on becoming neighbours, and the Ponce-fords said they were to use that freedom, and ride over at any time without ceremony. Aunt Judith declared that it would be quite a luxury to come

to them, if it were only to ride over those golden prairies.

"Are they not glorious?" exclaimed Mrs. Ponceford. "But do you know what our vivacious neighbour Quarrier said when I first saw and expressed my admiration of them?—'Yes, madam, and the beauty of it is that the sheep are very fond of them, and will eat them all down when the grass gets scarce!'"

"A strange man, that, I should think," said Mr. Fitzpatrick.

"A good fellow," replied Captain Ponceford, "but too much of a fire-eater; too much excited about what are called squatters' rights, which, after all, must, between us, be limited by the public rights; but a well-educated and really warm-hearted man."

"And you must wait and see his family," said Mrs. Ponceford. "You will love Mrs. Quarrier, a gentle, good creature as ever lived, and a very fine woman, too; a superb woman, and a most favourable specimen of the native-born white population. And the children, such a family! I think there are eight or nine, running up as they stand in a row as regular as a flight of stairs, head above head, or, as you may say, step above step. I think you will say you never saw anywhere a more beautiful set of children, and

the homes of England can show a finer race of them than any homes in the world. Then there is old Mrs. Quarrier; but I must not tell you all; she will soon speak for herself, and when you hear her free and independent notions—the energetic old lady—you will wonder where Mr. Quarrier got his exclusive ones."

The visitors took their leave, but with such a lively feeling in their favour, that though it was getting towards evening, Mr. Fitzpatrick, Charles, and Georgina could not resist the pleasure of riding some distance with them. The sun was sinking over the vast woods; and as they rode on Captain and Mrs. Ponceford pointed out the most striking ranges of mountains, and named them, including the Buffalo mountains, the Plenty Ranges, Mounts Alexander and Korong, afterwards so famous. The whole family of Tallangetta were delighted at the discovery of such neighbours, luckily, far their nearest ones, and all sense of solitude fled away.

In a few days a couple of rather tall but very shy youths made their appearance at David Rannock's, and said they wanted him to go with them up to the great house, as they called it, for their father and mother were coming to spend the night there, and had sent them on before to become acquainted with

the young people of the family. They were Bell and Brady Metcalfe. It was in vain that Mr. Rannock told them that they needed no introduction from him, they would be made heartily welcome; they only blushed, shrugged their shoulders, said they knew the new-comers were very fine folks, and showed no disposition to move; so David Rannock at length walked up with them. The two blushing youths, looking very big and very awkward in their bush costume of jack-boots and short, coarse coatees with metal buttons, bowed stiffly to all round, seated themselves on chairs near the door, and smiled and said "yes" and "no" in reply to the words addressed to them, but appeared very little at their ease, and did not get out of a very uncomfortable silence, only blushing and smiling whenever they were addressed afresh. Charles, who perceived their embarrassment, said he would like to show them about the garden, and once out of the room they regained their nerves and faculties, and said their father and mother were coming, and asked Charles how he liked the bush, and very soon were in full and eloquent talk of great cod-fish in the Campaspe, and shooting of black swans and wild turkeys, and kangaroo hunting. They wonderfully admired the two kangaroo hounds at the

huts, and invited Charles to come and spend a fortnight with them.

Charles soon saw that they were two very good-natured fellows, and deep in all the mysteries of the bush, but totally unused to any society more distinguished than that of the squatters around them. They told him they were born in the bush, had had wonderful adventures in taking and fetching cattle from distant parts of the country; had only been to school a short time at Melbourne, for they hated the town, and soon came back; that they had had a tutor up there to read with them, but instead of teaching them anything they had taught him all sorts of things belonging to bush life, and that he had become desperately in love with it, and was now gone to the Edwards river as an overseer. "Ah! you'll like it, Mr. Fitzpatrick," they said. "You'll soon like it better than everything; you'll never want to go into those dry brick towns to be cooped up like rabbits in a hutch. Ah!" said Bell, "that's the life, to be up in the morning when the sun just reddens the tree tops, as if they were all roses and gold, get your breakfast, catch your horse, and away through the woods, the dews glittering, the peppermint-trees scenting all the air, the crows warbling, the jackasses laughing, the wattle-birds crying 'Tackamahac!' on

the honeysuckle-trees, and the kangaroo rats brushing off right and left as if their legs were of whalebone. Is n't that jolly? Away you go, through miles of woods, down deep valleys, up great hills, dashing through the deep rivers; my word, though, but I had a swim for it across the Goulburn the other day where it is twenty fathoms deep, and the stream was rushing round a bend like mad. But bonny Bess did it bravely. The blacks are coming here in a week or two from the Goulburn and the Campaspe, and all about. They'll play old Harry with the game, I can tell you; but it is best to be civil to them. You 've noticed their ovens all about here, have n't you?"

"No; what are they?" asked Charles.

"Why, great mounds of wood cinders; charcoal, in fact."

"Oh! yes, yes!" said Charles. "I have often wondered what they were. They look like Druidical barrows at home."

"They are where the tribes used to congregate, and make their common fire and cook all their victuals while they staid. They never stay long in one place, for they soon eat up all the fish and game. But here they used to be very numerous; and this part of the country is famous for game, and so you

find hundreds of these old charcoal mounds, or ovens. It's very odd you do n't find them anywhere else for hundreds of miles round, and the natives now all cook at separate fires for each family."

While talking thus, they saw two gigs come driving up the hill, and the speaker, pausing, said: "And there comes the governor."

"What governor?" asked Charles.

"Oh, our governor, our worthy daddy," said Bell, "and mother; and I declare there comes the Doctor and Mrs. Woolstan."

The youths all hurried to receive the approaching guests, and the station of Tallangetta bade fair to lack no company for the night. We must, however, introduce our new acquaintance in a new chapter.

CHAP. IV.

WONDERFUL TIDINGS.

When our new guests were duly introduced and had taken their places at the tea-table, which was just prepared for that agreeable *séance*, they presented as remarkable a variety as you could easily meet with in a far more populous region. Mr. Metcalfe was a quaint-looking, thin Scotchman, with sharp, well-defined features, and hair of grizzled black and grey. He was a man who had had great reverses and troubles in his time, which had given him a still and subdued manner, but had neither been able to acidify his temper, nor to prevent him recovering his social position and a good property. You were surprised, when you came to converse with him, to find what a much superior taste and amount of general information he possessed than you would expect in the bush, and in a man who had had to struggle his way up again out of deep and discouraging circumstances. But he had a great knowledge of books, and managed

to keep up an acquaintance with what was going on in Europe, and in literature in a remarkable degree.

Mrs. Metcalfe was a large woman, of a full and fresh-looking person, and with a countenance of much gravity and dignity, displaying unquestionable evidences of beauty not yet past, and of strong sense never more present. She was what is called a very commanding and imposing lady, and yet never was there a woman less disposed to impose in any sense, or to command. Nature did that for her, and for herself she was a truly kind-hearted woman, of the strongest sympathies, but having a high sense of the proprieties and moralities of life. The world gave her credit for having furnished the sagacity and spirit which reconstructed their fortunes, but she never on any occasion gave the least warrant to this opinion, but universally spoke of Mr. Metcalfe's plans and exertions, and self-merited success. On all occasions she sought her husband's views, and deferred to them before company in the most natural manner, which did not, however, convince very penetrating people, those who can see all the way through a millstone, and who let it be understood that it was all very well, but did not deceive them; it was quite right of Mrs. Metcalfe, and quite accordant with her depth of character, to maintain the honour of her

husband. One thing, however, was certain; there was no happier or more estimable couple in the colony. They were famed for their hospitality; Mr. Metcalfe being ready to aid the views of his neighbours in any possible way; and Mrs. Metcalfe for her tenderness in cases of illness or trouble, and for her intense love of her flower-garden.

Dr. and Mrs. Woolstan were a very different pair. The doctor was a leanish, tallish man, with an aquiline nose of considerable dimensions, a look of great simplicity and friendliness, and a voice at once homely and rather dialectic; but there was that about him which pronounced him very soon to be no ordinary character. The first thing which struck you in his conversation was a certain old-fashionedness. His words and tone carried you back to past days and country places, but this was very soon forgotten in the subjects which he was sure to bring into play. You were pleased with the pleasure which he discovered in the country; you were surprised at the feeling of poetry which flowed after his conversation; you were drawn by a primitiveness of faith and sentiment, mingled with a degree of real science which revealed themselves as he went on; and very soon you found him leading you forward to the discussion of social or intellectual questions which were bound up with

the progress of society and the profoundest interests of spiritual life. The doctor was a great mesmerist, and surprised the Tallangetta family by the most entire belief in it; for they had always entertained the settled idea that it was a piece of sheer humbug, and its advocates either dupes or charlatans. They were, therefore, astonished to see a medical man of mature years and great experience so coolly confessing to his faith in it. But he told them that he was open to conviction; it was only by such a disposition that science and philosophy had been enabled to triumph over ignorance and its shadow, prejudice, and to place us where we are.

But Mrs. Woolstan went further. Both she and the doctor were born and educated in the Society of Friends, and she was a mild, gentle-looking woman, very like a Friend still, of a placid and fair countenance, and very quiet in her manner, and she averred a belief in spiritual agencies and appearances with a calm frankness which amazed the Fitzpatricks.

"Why surely," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, "you don't believe in being able to communicate with spirits while we are in the body?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Woolstan, addressing her husband, "our friends here doubt of spiritual communications; would you object to endeavour to satisfy them?"

"By no means," replied the doctor, as speaking of a matter of course. "But all these things hang together by a natural series of affinities, and I had therefore better show you, first, a fact or two on the more physical and so more convincing side of this great question. They will demonstrate that there are powers lying on the very surface of nature too wonderful for belief if they were not actually seen. Come here Bell, my boy," he continued, addressing Bell Metcalfe; "let us see whether you or Mr. Fitzpatrick are the strongest."

Bell looked sheepish, and hung back. He was unwilling, from mere shyness, to exhibit himself before these superior strangers; but the doctor advanced to him, and seizing him by the arm, drew him into the middle of the room, the servant having just taken away the tea.

"Now," said the doctor, "you, Mr. Fitzpatrick, should be immensely stronger than this youth; you are twice his size; you are strongly knit, and your whole frame is solidified by mature years. Bell is slender, not yet fully grown, and therefore rather loosely hung; yet I will venture to say that he shall overcome all your strength in the trial which I shall institute."

"If he do," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, with an air

of self-confidence, "I will admit it to be most wonderful."

"Place your left hand, thus, behind his shoulder, and take his right hand in your right; hold his arm at full length, thus; and now see whether, you resisting his efforts, he can in this position bend his arm forward."

"That will very soon be settled, I think," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, holding Bell as desired, and the young man making the most determined efforts possible, but being totally unable to bend his arm in the least.

"As I said, doctor," observed Mr. Fitzpatrick, "that is very soon settled," smiling in triumph; "your stripling has not overcome me, as you promised."

"You are quite satisfied of that?" remarked the doctor.

"Why, every one must be satisfied of it," added Mr. Fitzpatrick.

"Now then," said the doctor, making some passes down the front of Bell's arm, which Mr. Fitzpatrick continued to hold out as in a vice, "try all your strength, sir, to keep his arm straight."

Mr. Fitzpatrick felt some new power now in Bell's arm which evidently astonished him. His face flushed, he put forth all his strength, but Bell bent forward

his arm with the utmost apparent ease till his fingers touched his breast. Mr. Fitzpatrick stood astonished; and the astonishment was universal in the members of his family.

"That is the most surprising thing," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, "that I ever saw in the whole course of my life. That is wonderful! How can it be done?"

"Simply by that power of which we only yet know a little," said the doctor; "but that one fact should prove to you that there is no deception in it."

"Deception!" cried Mr. Fitzpatrick. "How can there be deception? How can this boy overpower all my force under one circumstance, and not under another?"

"Under precisely the same circumstances," added the doctor, "except in the addition of the mesmeric force in the second experiment. But, indeed, you might try the experiment between any parties that you pleased; between a giant and a dwarf, a giant and this slender maiden, your daughter."

"That is marvellous," said the astonished spectators. "And yet," said Brady Metcalfe, laughing, "you never could mesmerise me, doctor."

"No, that is true," replied the doctor; "the power is not to be exerted on every subject by any one operator; but really, Brady, I think I can master

you now. Here, take hold of that bit of paper." The doctor took up an envelope of a letter from a side-table. Brady held it in his fingers; the doctor made a pass or two over his hand and then cried, "Throw it down!" The young man tried to drop it, but his fingers remained closed; a look of surprise and confusion passed over his features, while a flush of triumph lit up the doctor's cheek, and flashed in his eye.

"Ha! there you are at last, Brady, my man; throw it down. I will give you five pounds to throw it down!—five pounds!" Brady strained his hand, shook it, grew very red, made more violent efforts to get rid of the paper, but his fingers refused absolutely to unclose, and the doctor continued to exclaim, "Five pounds! Brady, ten pounds, twenty pounds to throw it down!" And Brady struggled, writhed, dashed his hand up and down, this way and that, grew redder and redder, burst into profuse perspiration, and then suddenly gave it up, saying he was beaten, it was all up with him.

"Not so," said the doctor. "Come, the paper may be set loose, there!" He made a reverse pass or two, and cried, "Now I give you five pounds to retain possession of that paper!—five pounds!"—as he saw Brady make a desperate effort to keep his finger and

thumb compressed—"ten pounds! I will give you twenty pounds to hold it." In vain! Brady strove, struggled, stamped, ground his teeth, doubled up his body, and sent all the blood into his face in desperate efforts to keep the paper; but his quivering fingers relaxed, opened, and the paper dropped in spite of him.

The whole of the party, not excepting the parents of the youth, were lost in astonishment, for they had never seen that experiment before; it was a sudden fancy of the doctor, and all efforts before to produce any effect on Brady had been ineffectual, and Brady's triumph and pretended scepticism had been not small.

"But what of clairvoyance, doctor?" asked Mrs. Fitzpatrick. "Do you go all the lengths with that? Do you believe the Poughkeepsie seer in America can see what is doing in Saturn and Jupiter?"

Dr. Woolstan laughed. "He is quite safe there, madam. He may say what he pleases; we can none of us contradict him. But after what we have just experienced, we may as well suspend our opinions on clairvoyance till we have seen more. These few examples of what lies concealed, even in our physical nature, may prevent us dogmatising too confidently on the spiritual phenomena which also exist in and around us. Much of what is called clairvoyance

is clearly a mere reflex of what is passing in the mind of the person with whom the mesmeric subject is in rapport. What goes further, demands capability of proof. Without such proof we are certainly at liberty to suspend our belief; but as it regards actual science, we are, in my opinion, just now on the verge of great discoveries, both physical and psychological; on the frontiers of a wonderful region of life which the Almighty in the grand progress of his plans has prepared us to enter upon. What it is, we yet know not; we are only thus far admitted to catch the first gleams of splendour which burst through the slowly expanding gates of reality upon us. Even by these gleams we are dazzled, and stumble about in the 'darkness of excessive light.' We are near some great truth, some mighty and substantial revelation, as the alchemists formerly were almost within touch of the great world of chemistry, and all its revolutions of our mechanic and social life; and as the astrologers were conscious of powers and prizes, which eluded them, but which have made the triumph of astronomy under the guidance of advancing art."

"What I have shown you to-night," said the doctor, "are facts, regarded as perfectly threadbare in Europe and America; but the experiment of

strength is such as you may try between any parties that you please, if you have a mesmeric medium present; as I have said, between a giant and a dwarf; a giant and this slender maiden, your daughter."

The whole Tallangetta family were extremely excited by what they had for the first time seen. At supper the doctor sate by Aunt Judith, who said, from what she had witnessed, she felt greatly tempted to ask the doctor after supper to try whether he could communicate with the spirit of a deceased friend. The doctor promised, and, on the return to the drawing-room, a circle was formed at a round table, in which Aunt Judith, Charles, and Georgina took part. Very soon there was evidence of some spirit being present, and the doctor requested it to spell its name. All now seemed to wait with a breathless awe the result of the experiment. It stood thus — written on paper by Charles, at the request of the doctor, as the letters were indicated by raps upon the table — HORACE FITZPATRICK!

"Horace! my brother Horace!" exclaimed Mr. Fitzpatrick. "What do you know of him? Who told you of him?"

"I know nothing," replied the doctor, calmly. "I have never heard of him — I only know what he pleases to tell me. Shall I go on?"

The doctor went on; and soon there stood written out by Charles, at the dictation of the spirit, — "*The old enemy is still at work — his spies have followed you — be on your guard.*"

At this revelation Mr. Fitzpatrick seemed actually paralysed; his face exhibited intense wonder and feeling.

"Is this not going too far?" said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, very seriously. "Is it not meddling with things better let alone?"

"The moment you think so I will desist," said the doctor; but Mr. Fitzpatrick, gasping as it were for breath, signed to him to go on; in the next moment, with a strange, wild look, he staggered from the room, followed by his wife.

"More!—let us know more!" cried Aunt Judith, frantically, but keeping her hands firm in the circle on the table. "Is there no hope — no comfort?"

The doctor continued his inquiries; and Charles wrote on, — "*Yes; friends, true, staunch friends are on the watch — trust in God, and all will go well!*"

"All will go well!" exclaimed, impetuously, Aunt Judith; and, springing from the table, rushed after her brother and Mrs. Fitzpatrick. The rest of the company were left in a state of utmost wonder and confusion. Presently Aunt Judith returned, called

the doctor, and led him into the dining-room. There he found Mr. Fitzpatrick in the strangest excitement.

"What is all this, Dr. Woolstan? What do you know of my history — of my brother? What means all this?"

"It means nothing more," replied the doctor, "than that the spirit of your brother, of whose existence I did not even know till now, has warned you of some evil intended, and also that it will be surely defeated by God's providence."

"And you believe all this? There is no juggle, no trick? My brother Horace, my only brother, died as a mere youth; and yet you, here at the antipodes, know of him, and tell me from him what is more frightful to me than death. Will you swear that you knew nothing of my brother's existence before?"

"I never swear," replied the doctor; "but I will *tell* you, on the word of a Christian and in the presence of God, that I know nothing whatever of your family history, and that what thus surprises and agitates you is nothing whatever surprising to me. Depend upon it, it is God's truth revealed by his own permission for your good. Let it satisfy you that it

is declared that you have only to trust in God, and all will be well."

"Yes, yes! believe that; rest on that, dear brother," said Aunt Judith, taking his hand, and looking earnestly and affectionately in his pale, agitated face. "Oh, that is such a comfort!"

Mr. Fitzpatrick sate as if lost in thought. At length he said, "It is wonderful! most wonderful! I must believe it altogether, or disbelieve it altogether. To think that that villain, Patrick, has pursued me here — destroyed my quiet here. Oh, that is terrible!"

"But then," said the doctor, "if the message as to the evil be true, it is also equally true as to the good. But how natural it is," he continued, "to believe what we fear rather than what we hope! Yet the message says all shall be well; and that is good."

"Oh, very good!" said Aunt Judith. "Oh, excellent; if God be for us, who can be against us?"

"But who are those spies?" continued Mr. Fitzpatrick, still harping upon the dark side of the message. "And who are the friends? Have we any? Are there really such things as friends? Ah! that is the most difficult to believe after all."

"And yet believe it," said Dr. Woolstan, with an open, kindly face, which seemed to impart a wonderful

confidence. "Believe it as firmly as your own life. Friends and foes God will reveal in His own good time; and only one thing is it worth while to let your mind dwell upon: — He has promised, whose promises cannot fail, that if you trust in Him all shall be well."

"I will trust in Him," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, solemnly. "God, I believe; help thou my unbelief;" and, with a voice as solemn as in prayer, he grasped the hand of the doctor.

"Then all is right; all is safe," said the doctor; "and you are as free from real cause of anxiety or of danger as if you wore a mail of adamant."

"I believe it," said Mr. Fitzpatrick; "but the shock of surprise has been too much for immediate return to composure." He withdrew to his bed-room.

Aunt Judith continued to talk to the doctor on the subject. Her mind was wonderfully affected by this startling event; and the message and the circumstances attending it had so much of marvellous reality in them, that she knew not how to disbelieve them. The doctor related many singular facts in relation to spiritual life with a simplicity and distinctness which produced a singular sensation in Aunt Judith's mind. He said he was bred in the faith of George Fox, and, like him, he entirely believed that, if we did but live

near to the inner life, we should have free enjoyment and experience of it. He told her that she must prepare to hear him and his wife, called mystics and enthusiasts; but, if she would come to Mount Corballa, she would find them as matter-of-fact in all matters of fact and daily life as any people in the colony. They were not dreamers, but workers; and she would find his wife as clever a woman, as sound and shrewd a manager, as any she could meet with, and as cheerful as the light, because she felt that she was existing in the great spiritual life of all time and space, so that death and change were to her mind but the mere throwing off of worn-out garments.

The result of the evening had been far different to anything expected, especially as the visit was one of introduction to people yet strangers to each other. All more or less felt the startling effect of the disclosures, and retired their several ways for the night, deeply impressed by it. In the morning at breakfast nothing was said of the evening's occurrence, yet there was a solemn tone in the whole company. Mr. Fitzpatrick appeared as if endeavouring to be cheerful, but was constantly falling into thoughtful silence, and, when the guests departed, he mounted his horse and accompanied Dr. and Mrs. Woolstan some miles on their way through the woods. What

passed in the interview we know not; but he returned far more cheerful, and never reverted to the subject, though his family felt assured, from his manner, that the thought of it was, nevertheless, continually with him.

CHAP. V.

THE BAD YEAR.—BLACK THURSDAY.

After the remarkable evening narrated in the last chapter, there was a great exchange of visits between these few neighbours and the Ponceford; and fresh characters appeared upon the scene. There was Mrs. Quarrier, with her mother-in-law and three or four daughters. Mrs. Quarrier was a remarkably fine woman, who, though she was born in the colonies and had never quitted them, had all the quiet grace and tact of a lady accustomed to good society, and her kindliness of heart justified all that had been said of her. The girls were splendid specimens of Australian beauty; but *the* charade was Mrs. Quarrier, senior. The old lady was to the Fitzpatricks a curious study. She was not less than seventy, yet she seemed to possess energies for half a century to come. Captain Ponceford called her the galvanic battery. She was a most original and independent woman. All her ideas of all sorts of government were of the freest kind. She hated what she called domination and humbug.

She was for all the rights of the human race. Certainly the bush was the place for her; and she was so enthusiastic an admirer of nature, that she was ready any time still to climb a mountain with her long staff in her hand, or to wade a stream. "Give me," she often said, "a Bible and a Shakspeare, and I can live in a desert, and all the better, because I should not be bored with those good-natured people who are always wanting to put you into their own mould for your salvation."

And in truth Mrs. Quarrier, senior, had made good use of her energies; through them her daughters were married to the chief men in the colony, and her son was one of the most affluent of its squatter lords. The best of it was, that Mr. Quarrier was as enthusiastic in conferring kindnesses as she was in asserting her independence; and all the colony acknowledged her wonderful faculty of seeing things a long way off. "That is," she said, "because I look well at the things that are near;" and of this she gave a striking proof on the spot.

"You are new here," said the lively old Mrs. Quarrier, senior, as they were at breakfast the morning after her arrival at Tallangetta; "and you cannot, therefore, judge of what is coming by what is past. But let me tell you one thing: I believe we are going

to have one of the terrifically dry seasons which occur every now and then. There are crises in this country of drought and floods which can only be conceived by those who have witnessed them. Traces of the drought in such years vanish with the season, except in the evidence of the burnt trees; but those of the floods you must have already observed in the neighbourhood of the rivers and creeks. After the drought generally come the floods, and now for the drought. The season so far reminds me of those pre-eminently dry and consuming summers which are the direst calamities of this colony. It is now February, and the country is just one sheet of tinder. The rivers are low; the creeks are dry, or but a mere string of water-holes; and many a plentiful pool is now a basin baked as hard as a dish. The sound of the frog has given way to that of the grasshopper. The grass is drier than hay, the leaves on the trees you may crumble to powder between your fingers, and there lacks but a hot wind and the whole country may be in flames."

"Oh, Mrs. Quarrier," said the ladies, "you are joking now; you are amusing yourself with frightening us."

But the old lady said: "Nothing of the sort. I never was more serious; as I said, you are new to the

colony, and therefore do not comprehend the peril you and the whole country are in. Come, now, I will tell you what happened to us but last year; it is a thing never to be forgotten in Victoria, and as I don't wish to weary you with dry details, I will tell you what occurred to some families that I knew well in the country west of Melbourne; and I will give my narrative the title of BLACK THURSDAY, a name which will always remain an ominous word in this colony:—

"BLACK THURSDAY.

"As the voyager approaches the shores of Victoria, the first welcome land which greets him is the bold promontory of Cape Otway. If it be at night, the blaze from the lighthouse on its southern point sends him its cheering welcome for many a league across the ocean which he has so long traversed in expectation, and calls forth rapturous hurrahs from the throng of passengers who crowd to the forecastle. If it be day, the eye rests on its lofty forest hills with a quiet and singular delight. These heights fully respond to the ideal of a new land only recently peopled. Clothed with forests from the margin of the sea to their very summits, they realise vividly

the approach to a vast region of primæval nature. The tall white stems of the gum-trees stand thickly side by side like so many hoary columns; and here and there amongst them descend dark ravines; while piles of rocks on the heights, alternating with jagged chines and projecting spurs of the mountains, present their solitary masses to the breeze of ocean.

"Amongst the rocks of this wild shore there are sea-caves of vast extent and solemn aspect, which have never yet been thoroughly explored. The forest, extending fifty miles or more in all directions, is one of the most dense and savage in the whole colony. Until lately it was almost impassable from the density of the scrub, and from the thick masses of vines (that is, lianas, or climbing cord-like plants, chiefly parasitical), which, as in the forests of South America, climb from tree to tree, knitting the woods into an obscure and impenetrable shade. Excepting along the track from Mr. Roadknight's station, near the sources of the Barwon, through the heart of the forest to Apollo Bay, a distance of forty miles, you might cut your way with an axe; but would find it difficult to make progress otherwise. The greater part of the promontory—consisting of steep hills covered with gigantic trees intersected by shelving valleys, and dark with congregated fern-trees, beetling

precipices, and stony declivities—affords no food for cattle. In one day, however, known to the colonists as Black Thursday, a hurricane of flame opened its rude and impracticable wildernesses to the foot of man: but presented him, at the same time, with a black and blasted chaos of charred trees, and gigantic fallen trunks and branches.

"It was in this forest, in the early morning of this memorable day, the sixth of February, eighteen hundred and fifty-one, that a young man opened his eyes and sate up to look about him. He had, the day before, driven a herd of fifty bullocks from the station of Mr. Roadknight thus far on his way towards his own residence in the country between Lake Corangamite and Mount Gellibrand. He had reached at evening a small grassy valley in the outskirts of the forest watered by a creek falling into the western Barwon; and had there paused for the night. His mob of cattle, tired and hungry, were not inclined to stray from the rich pasturage before them; and, hobbling out his splendid black horse Sorcerer, he prepared to pass the night in the simple fashion of the settler on such journeys. A fallen log supplied him with a convenient seat, a fire was quickly lit from the dead boughs which lay plentifully around, and his quart-pot, replenished at

the creek, was soon hissing and bubbling with its side thrust into the glowing fire. He had a good store of kangaroo-sandwiches, and there he sate with his cup of strong bush-tea; looking alternately at the grazing cattle, and into the solemn, gloomy, and soundless woods, in which even the laughing-jackass failed to shout his clamorous adieu to the falling day. Only the distant monotone of the morepork — the nocturnal cuckoo of the Australian wilds — reached his ear; making the profound solitude still more solitary. He very soon rolled himself in his travelling-rug, and flung himself down before the fire — having previously piled a fresh supply of timber upon it — near which his trusty dogs lay, and where Sorcerer, in the favourite fashion of the bush-horse, slept as he stood.

"The morning was hushed and breathless. Instead of that bracing chill, with which the Australian lodger out of doors generally wakes up, Robert Patterson found the perspiration standing thick on his face, and he felt a strange longing for a deep breath of fresh air. But motion there was none, except in the little creek which trickled with a fresh and inviting aspect at a few yards from him. He arose, and stripping, plunged into the deepest spot of it that he could find; and thus refreshed, rekindled

his fire, and made his solitary breakfast. But all around him hung, as it were, a leaden and death-like heaviness. Not a bough nor a blade of grass was moved by the air. The trees stood inanimately moody and sullen. He cast his eyes through the gloomy shadow beneath them, and a sultry, suffocating density seemed to charge the atmosphere. The sky above him was dimmed by a grey haze.

"'There is something in the wind to-day, old fellow,' he said, addressing his horse in his usual way; for he had long looked on him as a companion, and firmly believed that he understood all that he said to him. 'There is something in the wind: yet, where is the wind?'

"The perspiration streamed from him with the mere exertion of saddling his horse, and with the act of mounting him to rouse up his cattle. Horse, dogs, and cattle, manifested a listlessness that only an extraordinary condition of the atmosphere could produce. If you had seen the tall, handsome young man seated on his tall and noble horse, you would have felt that they were together formed for any exploit of strength and speed. But the whole troop—cattle, man, and horse—went slowly and soberly along, as if they were oppressed by a great fatigue or the extreme exhaustion of famine.

"The forest closed in upon them again, and they proceeded along a narrow track, flanked on each side by tall and densely-growing trees; the creeping vines making of the whole forest one intricate, impenetrable scene. All was hushed as at midnight. No bird enlivened the solitude by its cries, and they had left the little stream. Suddenly there came a puff of air; but it was like the air from the jaws of a furnace, hot, dry, withering in its very touch. The young settler looked quickly in the direction from which it came, and instantly shouted to the cattle before him, in a wild, abrupt, startling shout; swung aloft the stock-whip which he held in his hand, and brought it down with the report of a pistol, and the sharp cut as with a knife, on the rear of a huge bullock just before him. The stock-whip, with a handle about half a yard long and a thong of three yards long, of plaited bullock-hide, is a terrible instrument in the hands of a practised stockman. Its sound is the note of terror to the cattle; it is like the report of a blunderbuss, and the stockman at full gallop will hit any given spot on the beast that he is within reach of, and cut the piece clean away through the thickest hide that bull or bison ever wore. He will strike a fly or a spot of mud on a hillock at full speed, and take away the skin with it, making the

rosy blood spring into the wound, and the astonished animal dart forward as if mad.

"Louder and louder, wilder and more fiercely shouted the squatter, and dashed his horse forward over fallen trees; through crashing thickets, first on one side of the road, and then on the other. Crack, crack, went the stinging, slashing whip; loud was the bark of dogs; and the mob of cattle rushed forwards at headlong speed. The young man gazed upward; and, through the only narrow opening of the forest, saw strange volumes of smoke rolling southward. Hotter, hotter, stronger and more steadily came the wind. He suddenly checked his horse, and listening grew pale at the sound which reached him. It was a low deep roar, as of a wind in the tree-tops, or of a heavy water-fall, distant and smothered in some deep ravine.

"'God have mercy!' he exclaimed, 'a bush-fire! and in this thick forest!' Once more he sprang forward, shouting, thundering with his whip. He and the herd were galloping along the narrow wood-track. But, as he had turned westward in the direction of his home, the woods—of which he had before seen the boundary—now closed for some miles upon him; and, as he could not turn right or left for the chaos of vines and scrub that obstructed

the forest, the idea of being overtaken there by the bush-fire was horrible. Such an event would be death, and death only.

" Therefore, he urged on his flying herd with desperation. Crack upon crack from his long whip, resounded through the hollow wood. The cattle themselves seemed to hear the ominous sound, and sniff the now strongly perceptible smell of burning.

" The roar of the fire came louder, and ever and anon seemed to swell and surge, as if urged on by a rough rising blast. The heat was fierce and suffocating. The young squatter's clothes clung to him with streaming perspiration. The horse and cattle steamed and smoked with boiling heat. Yet onward, onward they dashed with lolling tongues. Sorcerer, specked with patches of foam on his dark shining body, seemed to grow furiously impatient of the obstruction offered by the bullocks in his path. As his master's whip exploded on their flanks, he laid back his ears; and, with flaming eyeballs and bared teeth, strove to tear them in his rage.

" Robert Patterson knew that the extraordinary heat and drought of the summer had scorched up the grass; the very ground; had licked up the water from crab-hole, pool, and many a creek; had withered the herbage into crisp hay, and so dried the foliage,

that you might crumble it between your fingers. The country seemed thoroughly prepared for a conflagration, and only required this fiery wind to send a blaze of extermination over the whole land. For weeks, nay months, the shepherds and sawyers had spoken of fires burning in the hills; and, in the fern-tree breaks of this very forest, he had been recently told that flames had been observed in various directions burning redly by night.

" If the fire reached him and his herd before they escaped into the open plains, they must be consumed like stubble. The cattle began to show signs of exhaustion, hanging out their parched tongues, and panting heavily; the perspiration on himself and horse was dried up by the awful heat, and the dogs ran silently, or only whining lowly to themselves, as they hunted every hollow on their way for water. Suddenly, they were out in an open plain, yet with the forest on either hand, but at a considerable distance.

" What a scene! The woods were flaming and crackling in one illimitable conflagration. The wind, dashing from the north in gusts of inconceivable heat, seemed to sear the very face and shrivel up the lungs. The fire leaped from tree to tree, flashing and roaring along, with the speed and the destructiveness

of lightning. The sere foliage seemed to snatch the fire, and to perish in it in a riot of demoniacal revelry. On it flew, fast as the fleetest horse could gallop; and consuming acres of leaves in a moment, still remained to rage and roar amongst the branches and in the hollow stems of ancient trees. The whole wood on the left was an enormous region of intensest flame; and that on the right, sent forth the sounds of the same ravaging fires; but being to windward, the flames could not be seen for the vast clouds of smoke, mingled with fiery sparks, which were rolled on the air. There was a sound as of thunder, mingled with the crash of falling trees, and the wild cries of legions of birds of all kinds; which fell scorched, and blackened, and dead to the ground.

"Once out on this open plain, the cattle were speedily lost in the blinding ocean of smoke, and the young settler, obliged to abandon them, made a dash onward for his life. Now the flames came racing along the grass with the speed of the wind, and mowing all smooth as a pavement; now they tore furiously through some near point in the forest, and flung burning ashes and tangles of blazing bark upon the galloping rider. But Sorcerer, with an instinct more infallible than human sagacity, sped on, over thicket, and stone. and fallen tree, snorting in

the thick masses of smoke, and stretching forward his gaping jaws to catch every breath of air to sustain impeded respiration.

"When the wind veered, the reek, driven backward, revealed a most amazing scene. The blazing skirts of the forests; huge isolated trees, glaring red —standing columns of fire; here a vast troop of wild horses with flying manes and tails, rushing with thundering hoofs over the plain; there herds of cattle running with bloodshot eyes and hanging tongues, they knew not whither, from the fire; troops of kangaroos leaping frantically across the rider's path, their hair singed and giving out strongly the stench of fire; birds of all kinds and colours shrieking piteously as they drove wildly by, and yet seeing no spot of safety; thousands of sheep standing huddled in terror on the scorched flats, with singed wool, deserted by their shepherds, who had fled for their lives.

"But onward flew the intrepid Sorcerer, onward stretched his rider, thinking lightning-winged thoughts of home, and of his helpless, paralysed mother there.

"With a caution inspired by former outbreaks of bush-fires, he had made at some distance round his homestead a bare circle. He had felled the forest

trees, leaving only one here and there, at such distances that there was little fear of ignition. As the summer dried the grass, he had set fire to it on days when the wind was gentle enough to leave the flame at command; watching, branch in hand, to beat out any blaze that might have travelled into the forest. By this means, he had hitherto prevented the fire from reaching his homestead ; and he had strongly recommended the same plan to his neighbours, though generally with little effect. Now, the fire was so terrible, and sparks flew so wide on the wind, that he feared they might kindle the grass round his homestead, and that he might find everything and every person there consumed.

"But, behold ! the gleaming, welcome waters of Lake Colac ! Sorcerer rushed headlong towards it ; and wading hastily up to his sides in its cooling flood, thrust his head to the eyes into it, and drank as if he could never be satisfied with less than the whole lake. Englishmen, new to the scene, would have trembled for the horse ; but the bush steed knows well what he needs, eats and drinks as likes him best, and flourishes on it. Smoking hot, the rider lets him drink his fill, and all goes well. The heat produces perspiration, and the evaporation cools and soothes him. Robert Patterson did not lose a moment in following

Sorcerer's example. He flung himself headlong from the saddle, dressed as he was, dived, and splashed, and drank exuberantly. He held again and again his smarting face and singed hands in the delicious water, then threw it over the steed that now, satiated, stood panting in the flood. He laved and rubbed down the grateful animal with wave after wave, cleaning the dried perspiration from every hair, giving him refreshment at every pore. Then up and away again.

"He had not ridden two hundred yards, before he saw, lying on the plain, a horse that had fallen in saddle and bridle, and lay with his legs under him, and head stretched stiffly forward, with glaring eyeballs; but dead. Near him was a man, alive, but sunk in exhaustion. His eyes turned wildly on the young squatter, and his parched lips moved, but without a sound. Robert Patterson comprehended his need; and, running to the lake, brought his pannikin full of water, and put it to his mouth. It was the water of life to him. His voice and some degree of strength came quickly back. He had come from the north, and had ridden a race with the fire, till horse and man had dropped here, the horse never to rise again. But Patterson's need was too urgent for delay. He found the man had no lack of provisions;

he carried him in his arms to the margin of the lake, mounted, and rode on.

"As he galloped forward, it was still fire — fire everywhere. He felt convinced that the conflagration — fanned by the strong wind, and acting upon fires in a hundred quarters — extended over the whole sun-dried colony.

"It was still early noon, when, with straining eyes, and a heart which seemed almost to stand still with a terrible anxiety, he came near his own home. He darted over the brow of a hill — there it lay safe! The circle within his cleared boundary was untouched by the fire. There were his paddocks, his cattle, his huts, and home. With a lightning thought his thanks flew up to heaven, and he was the next moment at his door, in his house, in his mother's arms.

"Robert's anxiety had been great for the safety of his mother, her anxiety was tripled for him. Terror occasioned by a former conflagration had paralysed her lower extremities; and now, the idea of her only son, her only remaining relative in the colony, being met by this unexampled fire in the dense defiles of the terrible Otway Forest, kept her in a state of the most fearful tension of mind. Mrs. Patterson, though confined to her wheeled chair, was a woman of pre-eminent energy and ability. Left with her boy a

mere infant, she had managed all her affairs with a skill and discretion that had produced great prosperity. Though her heart was kind, her word was law; and there was no man on her run who dared in the slightest to disobey her; nor one within the whole country round who did not respect and revere her. She had been a remarkably handsome woman. The whole of the floors of the station being built upon one level, in her wheeled chair she could be at any instant in any part of her house or premises.

"The moment the first joy of mother and son was over, what a scene presented itself! The station was like a fair. From the whole country round people had fled from the fire, and had instinctively fled thither. There was a feeling that the Patterson precautions, which they themselves had neglected, were the guarantees of safety. Thither shepherds had driven their flocks, stockmen their herds, and whole families, compelled to fly from their burning houses, had hurried thither with the few effects that they could snatch up, and bear with them. Patterson's paddocks were crowded with horses and cattle; the bush round his station was literally hidden beneath his own and his neighbour's flocks. Stockmen, shepherds, substantial squatters, now houseless men, were in throngs. Families, with troops of children, had

encamped on the open ground near his house, beneath temporary tents of sheets and blankets. His house was crammed with fugitives, and was one scene of crowding, confusion, and sorrow. Luckily the Patterson store-room was well stocked with flour, and there could be no want of meat with all those flocks and herds about them. But for the cattle themselves there must soon be a famine; and the moment that the fire abated, scouts must be sent off in all directions — but especially to the high plains around Lake Corangamite — in search of temporary pasture. Meantime fires were lighted in a dozen places; and frying-pans and kettles fully employed; for, spite of flight, and loss, and grief, hunger, as Homer thousands of years ago asserted, is impudent, and will be fed.

"The stories that the people had to tell were most melancholy. Houses burnt down, flocks destroyed, children suffocated in the smoke or lost in the rapid flight; shepherds and bullock-drivers consumed with their cattle. Numbers had fled to creeks and pools, and yet had been severely burnt; the flames driving over the surface of the water with devouring force. Some had lain in shallow brooks, turning over and over, till finally forced to get up and fly. Still, as the day went on, numbers came pouring in with fresh

tales of horror and devastation. The whole country appeared to be the prey of the flames; and men who were, a few hours before, out of the reach of poverty or calamity, were now homeless paupers.

"'The Maxwells, mother,' Patterson asked — 'is there any news of them?'

"'None, my dear Robert, none,' replied his mother. 'I hope and believe that they are quite safe. They have long ago adopted your own plan of a clearance ring, and I doubt not are just now as much a centre of refuge as we are.'

"'But I should like to be sure,' said Robert, seriously. 'I must ride over and see.'

"'Must you? I think you need not,' said Mrs. Patterson. 'But if you cannot be satisfied, let some one of the men go; there are plenty at hand, and you are already worn out with fatigue and excitement.'

"'No, I am quite well and fresh — I had rather go myself,' said Robert; 'it is not far.' And he strode out, his mother saying —

"'If you find all right, don't come back to-night.'

"Robert Patterson was soon mounted on a fresh and powerful horse, and cantered off towards Mount Hesse. It was only seven miles off. The hot north wind had ceased to blow; the air was cooler, and the

fires in the forest were burning more tamely. Yet he had to ride over a track which showed him the ravages which the flames had made in his pleasant woods. The whole of the grass was annihilated; the dead timber lying on the ground was still burning; and huge hollow trees stood like great chimneys, with flames issuing from their tops as from a furnace, and a red intense fire burning within their trunks below; and from them burning earthy matter came tumbling out smoking and rolling on the ground. He was about crossing a small creek, when he saw an Irishman — a shepherd of the Maxwells — sitting on its banks; his clothes were nearly all consumed from his back, his hat was the merest remaining fragment, scorched and shrivelled. The man was rocking himself to and fro and groaning.

"'Fehan!' exclaimed Patterson. 'What has happened to you?'

"The man turned upon him a visage that startled him with terror. It was, indeed, no longer a human visage; but a scorched and swollen mass of deformity. The beard and hair were burnt away. Eyes were not visible; the whole face being a confused heap of red flesh and hanging blisters. The poor fellow raised a pair of hands that displayed equally the dreadful work of the fire.

"The young squatter exclaimed, 'How dreadful! Let me help you, Fehan—let me take you home.'

"The man groaned again; and, opening his distorted mouth with difficulty and with agony, said,—

"'I have no home—it is burnt.'

"'And your family?'

"'Dead—all dead!'

"'But are you sure—are you quite sure?' said Robert, excitedly.

"'I saw one—my eldest boy: he was lying burnt near the house. I lifted him, to carry him away; but he said, "Lay me down, father—lay me down; I cannot bear it." I laid him down, and asked, Where are the rest? "All fled into the bush," he said; and then he died. They are all burnt.'

"Robert Patterson flung the wretched man a linen handkerchief, bidding him dip it in the creek and lay it on his face to keep the air from it, and turned his horse, saying he would look for the family. He soon found the place where the hut had stood. It was burnt to ashes. On the ground, not far from it, lay the body of the dead little boy. Patterson hastened along the track of the old road to the Maxwells' station, tracing it as well as he could in the fire and the fallen flaming branches. He felt sure the flying family would take that way. In a few

minutes it brought him again upon the creek by which the poor man sate, but lower down.

"There stood a hut in a damp swamp, which had been used years ago for the sheep washing, but had long been deserted. It was surrounded by thick wattles, still burning. The hut was on fire; but its rotten timbers sent out far more smoke than flame. As he approached, he heard low cries and lamentations. 'The family is fled thither,' he said to himself, 'and are perishing of suffocation.' He sprang to the ground, and dashed forward through columns of heavy smoke. It was hopeless to breathe in it, for its pungent and stinging strength seemed to close his lungs, and water rushed from his eyes in torrents.

"But, pushing in, he seized the first living thing that he laid his hands on, and bore it away. It was a child. Again and again he made the desperate essay, and succeeded in bringing out no less than four children and the mother, who was sunk on the floor as dead, but who soon gave signs of life as she came into the air.

"The young man was now in the utmost perplexity with his charge. It was a heart-rending sight. The whole group were more or less burnt; but, as it seemed to him, not so much burnt as to affect their

lives. Their station was three miles distant, and he had no alternative but to leave them here till he rode on and sent a cart for them. With much labour, carrying the children one after another in his arms, he conveyed the woful group to the father.

"As the young man stood bewildered by the cries and lamentations of the family on meeting the father, a horse ridden by a lady approached at a gallop. This apparition contrasted strangely with the lamentable group of sufferers. The young lady was tall, of a most beautiful figure, and was mounted on a fine bay horse. A light skirt and broad felt hat were all the deviations from her home costume that haste had led her to assume. Her face, fresh and roseate, full of youth, loveliness, and feeling, was at the same time grave and anxious, as she gazed in speechless wonder on the scene.

"'Miss Maxwell!' Patterson exclaimed, 'in the name of Heaven, what news? How is all at the Mount? Yet, on this dreadful day, what but ill can happen!'

"'Nothing is amiss, that I know of,' said the young lady. 'We are safe at home. The fire has not come near us.'

"'Thank God!' said Robert. 'I was going to

your house, when I fell in with this unfortunate family. Will you ride back and send us a cart?'

" 'But I beg you will come with me, for I, too, was going to you.'

" 'To me!' cried the young man, in the utmost astonishment. 'Then all is not right. Is George well?'

" 'I hope so,' replied Miss Maxwell; but the tears started into her eyes at the same moment, and Robert Patterson gave a groan of apprehension.

" 'I hope so,' added the young lady, recovering her self-possession; 'but that is the point I want to ascertain. Yesterday, he went with Tuncen into the hills to bring in cattle, and this morning the fire surprised them when they had taken two different sweeps along the side of a range. Tuncen could not find George again, but made his way home; hoping his master had done the same. George has not yet come, and the fire is raging so fiercely in the hills, that I could think of nothing but coming to you for your advice and assistance.'

" 'Thank you, Ellen!' said Robert, with a sad emotion. 'I will find him if he be alive.' He sprang upon his horse; and, telling the unhappy family that he would send them immediate assistance, both he and Miss Maxwell galloped away.

"I will not attempt to divulge their conversation on the way; but will let you a little into the mutual relations of these two families and these young people. Miss Ellen Maxwell and her brother George were the sole remaining members of their family. As the nearest neighbours of the Pattersons, they had grown into intimate friends. George and Robert had been play-fellows in Van Diemen's Land; and here, where they had come in their boyhood, they were school-fellows. Since then they had gradually grown, from a similarity of tastes and modes of life, the most intimate friends. It was not likely that Robert Patterson and Ellen Maxwell could avoid liking one another. They possessed everything in mind, person, and estate, which made such an attachment the most natural thing in the world. Ellen was extremely attached to Mrs. Patterson, for whom she had the highest veneration. Ellen had received an excellent education in Edinburgh, whither she had been sent to her friends. In her nature she was frank, joyous, and affectionate; but not without a keen sense of womanly pride, which gave a certain dignity to her manner, and a reputation for high spirit.

"All had gone well between herself and Robert till some six months ago. But, since then, there had sprung up a misunderstanding. Nobody could tell

how it had arisen; nobody except Ellen knew; and whatever was the secret cause, she locked it impenetrably within her own bosom. All at once she had assumed a distant and haughty manner towards Robert Patterson. From him she did not conceal that she felt she had cause for dissatisfaction, but she refused to explain. When, confounded at the circumstance, he sought for an explanation, she bade him search his own memory and his heart, and they would instruct him. She insisted that they should cease to regard themselves as affianced, and only consented that nothing as yet should be said on the subject to her brother or Mrs. Patterson, on the ground that it would most painfully afflict them.

"Ellen, who used to be continually riding over to see Mrs. Patterson with her brother, now rarely appeared, and proudly declined to give her reasons for the change; adding that she must absent herself altogether, if the subject were renewed. To her brother she was equally reserved; and he attributed her conduct to caprice, bidding Robert take no notice of it. Ellen was not without other admirers; but that was nothing new. One young man, who had lately come into the neighbourhood, paid her assiduous attention, and gossip did not fail to attribute the cause of Robert Patterson's decline of favour to

his influence. But Ellen gave no countenance to such a supposition. She was evidently under no desire to pique her old lover by any marked predilection for a new one. Her nature was too noble for the pettiness of coquetry, and any desire to add poignancy to coldness. On the other hand, it was clear to the quietly watchful eye of her brother, that she was herself even more unhappy than Robert. Her eyes often betrayed the effects of secret weeping, and the paleness of her cheek belied the assumed air of cheerfulness that she wore.

"Things were in this uncomfortable state at the outbreak of the fire. It was, therefore, a most cheering thought to Patterson that, in her distress, she had flown first, and at once, to him. This demonstrated confidence in his friendship. True, on all occasions, she had protested that her sense of his high moral character was not an iota abated; but, in this spontaneous act, Robert's heart persuaded himself that there lay something more.

"No sooner did he reach the Mount, than, leaving Ellen to send off assistance to the Fehans, he took Tuncen the stockman, and rode into the forest hills. It was soon dark, and they had to halt, but not far from the spot where Tuncen had lost sight of his

master. They tethered their horses in a space clear of trees and of fire, and gave them corn that they had brought with them. When the moon rose, they went on to some distance, uttering loud cooées to attract the ear of the lost man; but all in vain. The fire had left the ground hot and covered with ashes, and here and there huge trees burning like columns of red-hot iron.

"Finding all their efforts for the night fruitless, they flung themselves down beside their horses, and, with the earliest peep of dawn, were up and off higher into the hills. Their way presented at every step the most shocking effects of the fire. Ever and anon they came upon bullocks which had perished in it. Here and there, too, they descried the remains of kangaroos, opossums, and hundreds of birds, seared and shrivelled into sable masses of cinder.

"They came at length to the spot where Tuncen and George Maxwell had parted; and the experienced bushman carefully sought out the tracks of his horse's feet, and followed them. These were either obliterated by the fire, or failed from the rocky hardness of the ground; but, by indefatigable search, they regained them, and were led at length to the edge of a deep and precipitous ravine. In the ravine itself the trees and grass remained unscathed; the torrent of

fire had leapt over it, sweeping away, however, every shrub and blade of herb from the heights.

"'God defend us!' exclaimed Robert, 'the smoke must have blinded him, and concealed this frightful place. Man and horse are doubtless dashed to pieces.'

"He raised a loud and clear cooée; instantly answered by the wild and clamorous barking of a dog, which, in the next instant, was seen leaping and springing about in the bottom of the dell, as if frantic with delight.

"'That is Snirrup!' exclaimed Tuncen; and the two men began to descend the steep side of the ravine. Robert Patterson outstripped his older and heavier companion. He seemed to fly down the sheer and craggy descent. Here he seized a bough, there a point of the rock, and, in the next instant, was as rapidly traversing the bottom of the glen. Snirrup, the cattle-dog, rushed barking and whining upon him, as in a fit of ecstatic madness, and then bounded on before him. Robert followed in breathless anxiety, stopped in the next moment by the sight of George Maxwell's horse, lying crushed and dead. Robert cast a rapid glance around, expecting every moment to see his friend stretched equally lifeless. But presently he heard the faint sound of a human voice.

"There lay George stretched in the midst of a grassy thicket, with a face expressing agony and exhaustion. Robert seized his offered hand, and George called first for water. His friend started up and ran down the valley at full speed. He was soon back with a panikin of water, which the sufferer drank with avidity.

"He now learned that, as had been supposed, in the thick smoke, the horse had gone over the precipice, and was killed in an instant. George had escaped, his fall being broken by his steed; and he was flung into the thicket, which again softened the shock of his descent. But he had a broken leg, and was, besides, extremely bruised and torn. Life, however, was strong within him; and Tuncen and Robert lost no time in having a litter of poles bound together with stringy bark, made soft with grass and leaves laid in a sheet of the same bark. They had three miles to bear the shattered patient; to whom every motion produced excruciating agonies. It was not long before they heard people in different parts of the wood loudly cooéeing; and their answers soon brought not only a number of men, who had been sent out in quest of them, but also Miss Maxwell herself.

"We shall not attempt to describe the sad and yet rejoicing interview of the brother and sister, nor the

rapidity with which the different men were sent off upon the horses tied in the hills for the surgeon; who lived ten miles off.

"In a few days George Maxwell—his leg having been set and his wounds dressed—had become easy enough to relate all that had happened to him; the dreadful night which he had passed in extreme agony in the glen, and the excitement which the loud ringing cooées of Robert, which had reached him, but to which he was unable to reply, had occasioned both him and the faithful and sympathising dog, who barked vehemently, but, as it proved, in vain.

"From the moment of this tragic occurrence Robert Patterson was constantly in attendance at the Mount on his friend. He slept in the same room with him, and attended with Ellen as his nurse in the day-time. From this moment the cloud which so long hung over the spirit of Ellen Maxwell had vanished. She was herself again; always kind and open, yet with a mournful tone in her bearing towards Robert, which surprised and yet pleased him. It looked like regret for past unkindness. As they sate one evening over their tea, while George was in a profound sleep in the next room, Ellen, looking with emotion at him, said, in a low, tremulous voice, 'Robert, I owe much to you.'

" 'To me?' said Robert, hastily. 'Isn't George as much a brother to me as to you?'

" 'It is not that which I mean,' added Ellen, colouring deeply, yet speaking more firmly; 'it is that I have done you great wrong. I believed that you had said a most ungenerous thing, and I acted upon my belief with too much pride and resentment. I was told that you had jested at me as the daughter of a convict.'

" Robert sprang up. 'It is false! I never said it,' he exclaimed. 'Who could tell you such a malicious falsehood?'

" 'Calm yourself,' added Ellen, taking the young man's hand. 'I shall tell you all.'

" 'Hear me patiently; for I must impress first on you the strange likelihood of what was reported to me. You were driven to a stockman's hut, it was said, by a storm — you and a young friend. You were very merry, and this friend congratulated you in a sportive style on having won what he was pleased to call the richest young woman in the colony. And with a merry laugh you were made to add, 'and the daughter of the most illustrious of lags!'

" Robert Patterson, with a calmness of concentrated

wrath, asked, in a low measured tone: 'Who said that?'

"'The woman whom you lately saved with all her family. It was Nelly Fehan.'

"'Nelly Fehan!' said Robert, in amazement. 'What have I ever done to her that deserved such a stab?'

"'You threatened to send Fehan to prison for bush-ranging. You reminded him of his former life and unexpired sentence.'

"'That is true,' said Robert, after a pause of astonishment. 'And this was the deadly revenge — the serpents! But, O Ellen! why could you not speak? One word, and all would have been explained.'

"'I could not speak, Robert. Wounded pride silenced me. But I have suffered severely; have been fearfully punished. I can only say — forgive me!'

"One long embrace obliterated the past.

"The late Mr. Maxwell had been transported for the expression of his liberal political principles in hard and bigoted times. There was not a man in the penal settlement who did not honour his political integrity and foresight, and who did not reverence his character. But the convicts as a body were

proud to claim him as of their own class, though sent thither only for the crime of a Hampden or a Sidney. Whenever reproach was thrown on the convict section of society, the insulted party pointed to the venerable exile, and triumphantly hailed him as their chief. No endeavours, though they were many, and conducted by powerful hands, had ever been able to procure a reversal of his sentence. The injuries of a man of his high talents and noble nature might be comparatively buried at the antipodes; at home they would be a present, a perpetual, and a damaging reproach. He had lived and died a banished, but a highly-honoured man. Still, as he rose to a higher estimation and an unusual affluence, there were little minds who delighted occasionally to whisper — 'After all, he is but a lag.' And it was on this tender point that the minds of his children, whose ears such remarks had reached and wounded, had become morbidly sensitive.

"Amid the general calamity, this reconciliation was like a song of thanksgiving in the generous heart of Robert Patterson, and quickened it to tenfold exertions in alleviating the sufferings of his neighbours. His joy was made boundless and overflowing by a circumstance which appeared to be little short of a miracle. When Robert rode up to his own station,

he beheld his mother, — not seated in her wheeled chair, but on foot, — light, active, and alert, going to and fro amongst the people whose destitution still kept them near his house. The mass of misery that she saw around her and the exertion which it stimulated burst the paralytic bonds which had enchained her for years. The same cause which had disabled her limbs had restored them.

"The conflagration had extended over a space of three hundred miles by a hundred and fifty, and far away beyond the Goulburn, the Broken River, and the Ovens, may still be witnessed the remaining traces of its desolation. Over all this space, flocks and herds in thousands had perished. Houses, ricks, fences and bridges had been annihilated. Whole families had been destroyed. Solitary travellers, flying through the boundless woods before the surging flame, had fallen and perished. For weeks and months, till the kindly rains of autumn had renewed the grass, people journeying through the bush beheld lean and famishing cattle, unable to rise from the ground, and which by faint bellowings seemed to claim the pity and aid of man. Perhaps no such vast devastation ever fell on any nation; and the memory of Black Thursday is an indelible retrospect in Victoria."

CHAP. VI.

THE BUSH FIRE AT TALLANGETTA.—THE QUEST FOR BELL METCALFE.

Long before Mrs. Quarrier had concluded her terrible narrative, the whole Fitzpatrick family were filled with consternation as well as sympathy. They no longer wondered at the earnestness of the warning that she gave them, and eagerly demanded if there were no preventive means, if there was nothing that they could do to avoid the threatened dangers? "Yes," said the practical old lady; "first clear a space all round your huts by burning the grass, when the wind is still or so gentle that you can command the flame and beat it out at will with a few bushes. Then you have a place of retreat for yourselves and cattle. Then your buildings and ricks are safe. Do the same at all your out-stations, where your sheep camp at night, and let the camping places be quite away from trees. *You* are admirably off on this station; for you have low grounds, moiras, those lands on the level of the rivers which are overflowed

in flood-times. They are now grassy and green on your run by the Goulburn. Let your cattle be herded down near these, and your flocks too as much as possible, that, in case of fire, they may flee thither and find both safety and feed. In every quarter of your run keep these things in view, that your shepherds and stock may not be taken by surprise; for when the wind comes it comes in a moment, and the fire travels with it more fleetly than the fleetest race-horse."

Scarcely had the old lady left the place when all her words were verified. Mr. Fitzpatrick, as he bade the Quarriers good-bye, hastened down to the huts, and asked the overseer what he thought of Mrs. Quarrier's prediction. "If she has said it," replied David Rannock, in evident consternation, "it will be so. I would not lose a moment; in truth, the drought is ominous of the greatest peril."

"Then away!" exclaimed Mr. Fitzpatrick. The overseer mounted his horse, and galloped off. Barks, Purdy, the cook, were sent in like speed to different sheep-runs. Mr. Fitzpatrick and Charles galloped away in other directions; and the event showed that they had not a moment too much. Bush fires broke out in all directions. They saw from their own windows those glorious prairies swept by a flame

which went like intensest lightning across them, and changed their billowy gold into one black, smoking expanse. It was not without the most extraordinary exertions that their shepherds were able, from the more distant tracts of the run, to reach the spots of safety which Mrs. Quarrier had mentioned. The cattle on the hills, at sight of the flames below, appeared to take the way towards the Goulburn by instinct, and were, therefore, driven with the greater ease towards the swamps and moiras on its banks by the stockmen and David Rannock.

Soon there came the awful tidings of the devastations of the fires extending far and wide over the neighbouring districts; of grass, corn, cattle, and sheep destroyed. Black Thursday seemed come back again in all its horrors,—and they saw what Mrs. Quarrier had so vividly described still more vividly acting under their own eyes. Our friends at Tallangetta had been felicitating themselves on the abundance and the splendid appearance of the fruit fast ripening in vineyard and orchards. It was a scene of affluence and beauty in peaches, grapes, figs, melons, and the like, such as previously they had no conception of. In one day the greater portion of this glorious promise was destroyed. The wind came from the blazing forest like the breath of a furnace

seven times heated; and the leaves of the fruit trees shrivelled up as in actual contact with fire; and the fruit was withered, shrunk, parboiled as it were, on the trees, and vast quantities of it soon began to fall to the ground and perish.

It was a woful and melancholy spectacle; a heavy sense of calamity fell on the minds of every one. Peggy Wilks was particularly eloquent on the madness of coming to such a country as this. It would have saved them all the trouble, she said, if they had gone and jumped into the nearest red-hot lime-kiln at home, or into the furnace at Butterly Works. Every one went about silent, awe-struck, and dejected.

But our friends had escaped far better than many of their neighbours, thanks to the foresight of Mrs. Quarrier. The Poncefords had every quarter of their station, which lay altogether on the plains, ravaged by the fire, and were compelled to cut down the shiock and wattle trees wherever they could, to keep their flocks and cattle alive. It was beautiful to see how well they bore it. Captain Ponceford was out all day long, hunting out proper trees, and helping to cut them down. His hands were blistered by wielding the axe, and the heat was still intense; but he rode here and there, and continued to wield

the axe with all his vigour, to supply the necessary comfort for their stock. Mrs. Ponceford shed tears for the sufferings of the poor dumb creatures dependent upon them, and for those of their fellow-men which were continually coming to his ears, but she shed none for their own losses. She was on horseback many hours in each day, searching the woods for suitable trees to fell, and during the rest was as busy seeing that the shepherds were supplied with their necessary rations under the extraordinary circumstances. Mr. Fitzpatrick gave them leave to fell a vast number of shiocks on his station, especially on the hills above; and thousands of beautiful trees, with all their green flowing locks, like those fabled of the mermaid, were laid prostrate, which at any other time he would have witnessed with the profoundest regret.

The Woolstans at Corballa, though further from the rivers, had escaped wonderfully. They lay high, and though the wind had driven the flames up to the tops of the loftiest hills in many parts of the country, the fire had not been able to touch them. They declared that they had had a strong impression upon them that some great calamity was at hand. The drought suggested very naturally fire and dearth. They had, therefore, burnt the places at the feet of

the hills where the fire could find access to them, and had just completed their arrangements when the conflagration came. Their stock was somewhat pinched for pasture, but not in any alarming degree ; and they were able to think and act for their neighbours.

Dr. Woolstan rode over to Tallangetta ; and finding all safe there, returned and took the way to the Metcalfe's, at Moolap on the Campaspe. Nothing had been heard of them ; but, being on the banks of a never-failing stream, less anxiety was felt on their account. The worthy doctor rode along through parts that had been swept by the flames, and were black, desolate, and appalling. He rode on again over low grounds which had escaped, and through some pleasant ranges where, though the intense drought had scorched the grass into the crispest hay, the fires had not reached. His mind was greatly relieved, and he was even singing aloud a favourite thanksgiving hymn when, as he said, on passing over a certain ridge, a heavy cloud fell on his heart. A heavy black cloud settled also on his brain, and a confused sense of evil bewildered and confounded him. It was as if tons of distress, as he expressed it, had fallen on him. He sat like a stone on his horse, which, as if of its own will, stood still as a statue.

For a time all thought was annihilated in him; his soul was paralysed, yet there lay on it a deep, dead sense of a strange and immense woe. He felt as if he were really in the land of the shadow of death. When his mind began to recover from this vague sense of evil, this stupor of affliction, he felt himself relieved in some degree by a deep sigh; and he looked round for any object or image which might have thus affrighted his spirit. There was nothing of that kind. The afternoon sun lay with a beautiful golden calm on the slopes of the hills around him; the grass was sere, but bent in the light air with a soothing whisper. The very trees which time had prostrated around him lay in a certain beauty of their own, a picturesque and deep tranquillity. He saw a small herd of kangaroos on the slopes, which stood up and listened, but did not take to flight; and the blue mountain parrots in the tree-tops glanced their gorgeous plumage in the sun, and uttered their peculiarly soft and melodious notes. It was a picture of nature's sweetest repose and beauty.

He looked onward, and all wore the same tranquil smile. He could see the broad valley of the Campaspe unscathed by fire, and in the distance the rising smoke of the station of Moolap. But the cloud would not disperse within. There was a cry

in his brain of woe! woe! woe! He put on his horse, in a feeling of impatience to reach the station, and learn what could justify this rending, as he termed it, of his very vitals. The nearer he drew, a more terrible anxiety hung on his heart. When he was just upon the station, he cast a rapid glance over it: — all was profoundly calm; but ah! why only one smoke from all those chimneys? At this hour — when flocks return to the camping grounds, and the shepherds to their huts; when all is usually full of life; when the smoke streams up actively from the different huts; when the bleat of sheep and occasional low of cattle, the bark of dogs and the passing of people from one hut to another show that all are at home — why this stillness? why this solitary smoke?

The doctor rode up, full of wonder and surprise; no dog announced his approach, no single person peered from the door of a hut. The hoofs of his horse sounded hollow in the silence as he cantered up to the door of the chief hut. He cried, "Hillo!" and cracked his whip. In the next moment an old man, very old, and wrinkled, and grey, half bent double, appeared at the door; and at the sight of the doctor he turned round and retreated into the hut, as if he had seen something terrible. Again, in a moment, he reappeared, his head shaking as with

palsy, and every limb trembling violently. Large tears rolled down his withered face; and as the doctor demanded what was amiss, he again shook his head from side to side as in an agony, appeared struggling to speak, but in vain, and, dashing his sleeve across his eyes, he again suddenly retreated into the hut.

The doctor dismounted, and found the old man, a faithful servant of many, many years, weeping violently in a chair into which he had sunk. The doctor placed his hand kindly on the old man's shoulder, and said a few kind words to console him; but it was some time before he could find composure enough to tell his story. He was the only person at the station. Every one besides, including Mrs. Metcalfe, were gone off in search of Bell, who had been tending a flock on the banks of the river a long way off. Three days had now elapsed since the flock had been found wandering without him.

"Where was that? Where was the flock found, Barzillai?" asked the doctor.

"Near the Wild-dog hollow on the Yan-Yan creek, doctor."

"It is well," said the doctor; "let me have some tea, and give my horse a good feed of corn. I must go there to-night."

"The Lord bless you for it, doctor," said the old man, tears again streaming down his withered face. "If God wills that he shall be found, there is no man that is so likely as you, doctor, and you love poor Bell, I know, almost as much as foolish old Barzillai. Oh Lord! Oh Lord! that I should live to see this! Me, such an old, tottering, useless thing, and poor Bell such a fine strong young fellow, who can leap like a kangaroo! Could, I mean,—could,—could,—pray the Lord he may now!" and the old man bustled off to get tea ready.

Dr. Woolstan sate sunk in deep thought while tea was preparing; once or twice he rose and strode across the hut, and then sate down again. Old Barzillai brought in tea, and a smoking chop. The doctor ate and drank, without uttering a word. "My horse," he said at length, rising and going to the door.

"It is there," said Barzillai; and as the doctor mounted, he drew close to him, and said, "Do you *think* you shall find him, doctor? If you could just say so, I know it would prove true."

He squeezed the old man's hand, as he put his horse in motion, and said, "That is as it may please God, but, my good old friend, I feel a hope."

"God bless you for that," said the old man, gazing

after the doctor, who disappeared at a rapid canter into the dusky forest. On he went, over hill and down dale, through the depth of most solitary forests, leaping fallen trees, pushing on through scrub and jungle, as if the way were tracked, and the light were on the earth. About midnight he saw a fire blazing before him in the valley, and on reaching it saw a party seated partly on the trunk of a fallen tree, and partly lying on the ground round it. The dogs barked at his approach, and the silent people looking up showed him Mr. and Mrs. Metcalfe, Brady, and a couple of shepherds.

There was no need to ask if they had been successful; their wearied and dejected looks showed plainly that they were in the depth of trouble. They arose as the doctor alighted, and grasped his hand one after another without uttering a word. The doctor sate down, and all resumed their seats in silence. Thus they sate for at least a quarter of an hour, when the doctor said, "My dear friends, we must not despair. The moon will rise in two hours: I will then set out." The father and mother shook their heads, as if in despair. "I shall set out then," repeated the doctor; "and till then let me lie down, and let no one come near or speak to me." He wrapped himself in a rug which lay at hand, with-

drew to a tree near, and flung himself down on his face.

Still and motionless he lay through those two long hours. The fire flared and snapped; the tuons or flying opossums came forth and shrieked in the tall blue gums over head; the flying squirrel made its chattering cry; the opossum uttered its snoring sound, and gambolled like a kitten over the long dependent boughs of great red gum-trees; and through all, the woful parents sate and gazed into the fire. They refused to lie down, though worn out with fatigue and trouble; they still were heavily drowsy, and frequently nodded, started, looked round, and said, "Is it morning yet?"

At the end of the two hours the moon was seen above the horizon, and the doctor was observed to be on foot; and fetching up his horse he came leading it towards the fire, where Brady was busy putting on the kettle, and getting out some breakfast.

"I hope you have slept, doctor," said Mrs. Metcalfe, her noble countenance exhibiting the stony expression of her natural fortitude struggling with deep affliction.

"No," said the doctor, "I have not slept. I have striven to get above all the distracting agitations of the natural mind, into that region of pure freedom

where the spirit communes with its maker, and is still. It is hard wrestling with one's own flesh and blood, but I have found peace in it. My way lies over yon hill," pointing eastward. Mrs. Metcalfe solemnly shook her head, saying,—

"Alas! we have sought all over that quarter for these two days. I fear me it is useless. The whole of those hills and valleys have rung with the loud cooées of our men."

"Nevertheless, that is my way, and I believe I have no time to lose," replied the simple-hearted man. He took some of the damper from the log on which it was laid, and put it in his pocket, drank off a panikin of tea, took the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Metcalfe affectionately, saying, "Do n't be cast down; I have faith that all will yet be well." Tears gushed into the eyes of his sorrowing friends, as he said this; and, turning, he mounted his horse. At the same moment, he saw Brady also mounted, and ready to accompany him. "That is kind, my dear Brady," said the doctor; "you can greatly comfort and assist me."

"Keep my dog secure in his chain," said Brady, turning to his father, "and should you wish to follow, he will bring you direct to me."

The two friends rode away. The doctor rode on

without speaking. The moon was bright, and almost perpendicular over head. The forest was nearly as light as day, and the stems of the trees, white as marble in their new bark, had a ghostly radiance in its beams. The doctor rode on; — he asked no questions of Brady as to where they had already searched, but followed solely the promptings of his own mind. Morning broke, day grew, and the sun began to pour down upon them his burning rays. Still the doctor rode on, and looked neither to right nor left. Brady occasionally made a divergence, cantering off to explore some thicket, or take a survey from the brow of a hill; but the doctor, without seeking to check or encourage these little detours, still went on his way.

It was near noon that, as they were traversing the side of a considerable hill, Brady observed a sort of still but excited attention in the doctor's face. It was set with a direct onward look. His eyes seemed fixed on some particular spot, and the expression of his countenance was singularly solemn and expressive. Brady thought that the old prophets must have worn such a sacred and ennobled look. He felt a strange reverence for the man with whom he had so often joked and played in the most boyish freedom. Anon, they beheld a hollow in the hill side, filled with

dense masses of bushes and dark wattles. On some tall trees above this jungle sate a number of the Australian carrion crows, and raised loudly their strange, bleating, and piteous cries.

"That means something, Brady." They were the first words the doctor had spoken since they set out.

"Then I fear it means no good," said Brady; "for where they haunt there is generally death."

"Let us see," said the doctor. They were on the edge of the jungle, the hollow in which it grew being evidently the consequence of a landslip at some former period. The doctor dismounted, and tied his horse. Brady still kept his saddle, and said, "This is a whip-stick scrub, doctor; you cannot penetrate it without the axe, and besides, we have searched it all round."

"We must search it again, Brady; give me the axe," said the doctor. But Brady sprang at once from his horse, drew his small axe from his belt, and said, "Where shall I hew a way, doctor?" The doctor pointed out the direction, and Brady went vigorously to work. The scrub consisted of dwarf gum-trees, of about fifteen feet high, growing up closely, side by side, like so many wands of sufficient size to make the long handles of bullock-whips; hence the name. These rods were woven

together with lianas, or vines, as they are called, — long, tough, rope-like plants, — till the whole was an impenetrable mass, except to fire and the axe. Brady's steel soon cleared a way into the centre of the jungle, throwing down the rods, and treading over them as he went on. At once he came to a little stream trickling down from the hill side. "Follow me," said the doctor, taking his way up the stream, stooping under the boughs of the jungle.

"Beware, doctor!" said Brady, as he saw themselves coming into an open place wildly grown with tall clumps of sedge, wild grass, and watery shrubs. "This is the very place for the black snake." The doctor went on, rising as he got out of the dense mass of the whip-stick gums, and directing his way through the boggy soil still up the stream. At once Brady, uttering a wild cry, dashed past him, and the next moment was seen on his knees beside what appeared to be a corpse. He was wringing his hands in distress, and convulsed with a violent passion of tears, when the doctor's calm face was bent down to the body — clearly that of poor Bell.

"He is dead, doctor! he is dead!" said Brady, dropping showers of tears, and frantically driving away the flies with his handkerchief. Poor Bell lay on his back close to the spring which gushed out of

the hill side. His eyes were closed, his face pale as marble, his hat rolled into the water, and his black hair wildly strewn about his thin and ashen features.

The doctor stooped, put his hand upon his mouth, and then laid it for a considerable space on the region of the heart.

"He is *not* dead!" said the doctor. "There has been fever and probably delirium here, but these are over; the ebbing force of life needs rallying." He took his panikin from his belt, dipped it in the spring, and then showed that he had come prepared by drawing a small wicker-guarded flask of brandy from his pocket. He poured some into the water, and applied some of it to the parched lips of poor Bell. After one or two repetitions of the restorative the poor lad moved his lips, and sought to reach the fluid with his tongue.

"He lives! he lives!" exclaimed Brady, starting up, and as suddenly flinging himself down again by his brother, crying, "Bell! Bell! my dear Bell!"

"Gently, Brady; command yourself," said the doctor. "We must be very cautious;" and he gently poured a little of the liquid into the sufferer's mouth. He leaned anxiously over his face; watched the effect of the stimulant with a fixed intensity. Then

he gave him a little more, and, when Brady attempted to speak, putting out his hand towards him warningly. In a little time Bell gave an audible sigh, a slight tinge of colour came into his cheek, and there was a motion in his fingers. The doctor saw all this with the liveliest attention, and continued to repeat the stimulant at intervals. At length Bell raised his right hand and laid it on his own breast. There was a trembling in the eyelids, and the eyes for a moment opened, and closed again.

"He is going!" exclaimed Brady. "We are too late — too late!"

"Be patient, my dear Brady," said the doctor. "Give us time. And now go out of the jungle, make a fire, and get some tea." "Will he live, though?" said Brady, as he started up to go. "We will hope it," said the doctor; "for what else were we sent?" And Brady dashed away. He had scarcely scrambled together some dry leaves and branches and set fire to them, and was running for water, when he saw the doctor coming, carrying Bell in his arms. He laid him down on his rug near the fire, and bade Brady make all haste with the tea. Brady pushed the quart pot into the fire, opened his little bags of sugar and tea, but with trembling hands; and at every moment casting a glance from these to Bell, who lay with his

eyes now open, but dreaming, and as directed to no particular object. The doctor seized the tea and sugar and threw them into the boiling water. Very soon the panikin of tea was ready; and the doctor, cooling it by pouring it repeatedly from the quart to the panikin and back, knelt down to give some of it to the half-conscious patient. But Bell now received the nourishment almost greedily; and presently he attempted to speak, and they thought he said, but so faintly as to be almost inaudible, "Where am I?"

"Hush! hush! my dear Bell," said the doctor, "don't be anxious, you are amongst your friends; all is right." And they saw with wonder and delight that he became every minute more conscious, and strong. In a few hours he was so well as to be able to say that he had been very ill, and had lost all sense of life. The doctor nursed him, gave him from time to time yet a little nourishment, and he at length fell asleep. During this time Brady's dog came rushing up to them, and would have barked for joy, but Brady seized him by the muzzle, and carried him to a distance, where he made him, in obedience to his perfect discipline, lie down, and remain by his saddle. The dog was the herald of the approach of the party, and Dr. Woolstan hastened to meet them, and to

give them the joyful intelligence of the life of their son, and to enjoin the utmost caution upon them.

But no power could restrain them from hurrying forward to where the young man lay. There the rejoiced and yet trembling parents fell on their knees by the side of their recovered son, and with silent tears poured out their prayerful thanks to God.

Towards evening Bell was sufficiently restored by the judicious nursing of the doctor and his mother, to tell them that he had been seized by a strange dizziness and fever after several days' hard watching and toiling after the flock in the intense heat; that he had got down to this spring, telling his dog to mind the flock, and this command the poor dog had so faithfully obeyed that he was found almost dead with hunger, yet still crawling after his charge. By this, however, he lost all trace of his master, and had proved of no use in attempting to find him. Bell said, that reaching the water he had drunk copiously, and immediately afterwards the world seemed to go round with him, the earth seemed to heave and sink under him, and soon he lost all sense but that of a strange, urging, inextricable confusion in his brain. When this left him he had found himself too feeble to raise even his hand, and he saw several huge black snakes come and play and splash

in the water near him. When they glid rapidly away it was only at the approach of several wild dogs, which snuffed, started, and ran back at sight of him, and at their retreat the snakes returned again and resumed their gambols, while the crows over head looked down with their black, glistening, fiend-like eyes, and uttered their lamentable, but, to him, horrible notes. He had lain in the terrible conviction that he should soon perish of exhaustion, till happily at length sense and feeling passed away.

We could not express, if we would attempt it, the rejoicings over the son who had been lost and was found. Brady galloped off to the station for a light spring cart with a bed in it, and one of the men mounted the doctor's horse to convey the happy intelligence to Mount Corballa. It was two days before the party could reach their station with their patient. Frequently they had to take him from the cart, and carry him on a litter constructed of branches, over stony ranges, and abrupt gullies. At length, however, they reached home: at length poor old Barzillai had the delight, a weeping and trembling one, of seeing his dear lad, as he called him, safe and wholly convalescent. The doctor took his leave amid the blessings of the grateful and once more happy family, and with a wonderfully augmented sense of veneration for his

deep but unaffected piety, and the almost prophetic character of his mind.

The bad year rolled on its way; from all quarters came melancholy details of dearth, loss of cattle, and suffering of families; but amongst these tidings were mingled strange reports of the discoveries of gold; of people running, as if struck with insanity, up the country; of deserted towns, highways crowded with wildly hastening throngs, drays, stores, tents, and tools; and of marvellous riches snatched up from the scarcely covering soil. On the heels of a terrible crisis came thus one more wondrous than any fable, and the whole colony was in a chaos of excitement, joy, fear, doubt, and extravagant rumour, before which all description is annihilated.

CHAP. VII.

AN UNEXPECTED NEIGHBOUR.

"This is heart-breaking work," said Abner Wilks one evening, as he came in to tea, with a number of nectarines in his hand, shrivelled up into little lumps, resembling leather more than anything else; "cruel, woful work it is, to see such fine fruit ruinated a thissens. It makes me quite malancholy to go about the garden, and see nothing but scorched leaves, all curled up into cockle-shells, and grapes, and melons, and apples, and plums, and all sorts of fruit, coddled on th' trees. The 'taters are all dried in th' tops to nothing, and they tell me they will grow no more till rain comes, and then they 'll put out new tops and new 'taters, so we must get them before they dun that, half grown as they are."

Abner looked quite cast down and out of heart, for he loved his garden as every good gardener does, and had walked about with extraordinary pride amid such a show of fruit as he had never before seen growing in the open air.

"Ay, a nice country, is n't it?" said Peggy, "a very nice country. Do n't you think it would have been fine gardening in old Sprittlecake's oven? The old baker could have sown your seed for you as soon as his faggots had burnt down to hot ashes, and that 's the sort of stuff you 've been trying to grow your ingins and your reddiges in. And so you thought, did you, that you were going to grow peaches, and apricocks, and melons, and all such grand things out of doors, eh? Without walls, or glass, or green-houses, or any mander of thing, eh? And wuff! comes the fire out of old Sprittlecake's oven, and just settles them! A nice country indeed! A very nice country! I hope you enjoy it, Abner."

"Well," said Abner, "if I do, it 's more nor you seemen' to do, Peggy. You seemen' to tak a delight in making bad worse, and if you can find a raw, in hitting your hardest on it. Now is n't it enough to drive any man out of his senses to see such a world of beautiful fruits cut off in their prime, as one may say, and all the beans, peas, and the very parsley, shrivelled up into curl-papers? And yet you can jibe one about it. Prithee, hold thy tongue, wench."

"But I thought," said Peggy, pouring out the tea, "that you had hit on such a famous scheme for making all the months come right. Did you put

down any note about sowing parsnips and growing grapes in old Sprittlecake's oven? But I think that 's a touch above you, Abner."

"But," said Abner, "such a hot wind and such a conflagoration, they tell'n me, do n't mayhap come more than once in a man's life."

"Nay, they had n't need," said Peggy; "once is enough for me; but Milly Barks says these hot winds blow every few days in summer."

"But not such a wind as this," replied Abner; "and such a bush fire was never known."

"I reckon it waited of us," said Peggy; "it was very good of it; we generally come in for a boon if there be one. Fah! I just went out at the door, and slash comes the heat like a blast-furnace into my face. I thought I was killed outright. My breath was gone, my throat was burnt, the water gushed out of my eyes, and my face acchully seemed skinned. And this is a Christian country, is it? I wish I had 'em as first came and found it out; a nuisance it! And but for these wandering, helliraky vagabonds as can 't be quiet at home, nobody need ha' come here to be grilled alive, a plague on them!"

"But what are our troubles, Peggy, to those of thousands? They have lost all they have, and some on 'em their lives. It is enough to melt the heart of

a stone to hear of all the suffering there is. See what a state our neebor Captain Ponceford's run is in. All burnt out, and their cattle perishing, and the Captain and the Missis running about in the woods, and working like slaves to keep the poor creturs alive."

"Well, and they should e'en have had more sense than ha' come to such a country," said Peggy. "If people will run into the fire with their eyes open, who 's to hinder 'em? Not me, I 'm sure."

"And there 's poor Bell Metcalfe has nearly lost his life," said Abner; "it was a narrow miss, and would have been but for Dr. Woolstan, who traced him fifty miles through the bush by negromancy, they say, and recovered him at the last gasp."

"Ay, that's somethin' of a man now," said Peggy; "he's up like a gentleman and 's off, and saves his feller-creturs, and you sitten here, whimpering and simpering over a lot o' coddled apples, as if that would do you or anybody any good. What art good to, Abner, I should like to know; what art good to, I wonder?"

"Bravo, Peggy!" cried Abner, clapping his hands, jumping up, and tossing off the last of his third cup of tea. "Those are the sensiblest words you 've said these three months. That 's the truth, Peggy mine;

and so just hear, master has told me to go and help the Poncefords all I can; the garden can't be no worser, and wo n't be no better till rain comes, and I 'm off."

He took down his capital American axe, ran up stairs for a night-cap, and came down again with a face radiant with pleasure. His warm heart bounded with joy at the thought of lending a helping hand to neighbours in distress.

"Are you really going, Abner?" asked Peggy Wilks, as she stood with tears in her eyes, and the corner of her apron in her hand. "Now, directly? and how long for?"

"Oh! for a week or so, just as they may want me," said Abner, shouldering his axe.

"Well, God bless thee, my lad," said Peggy, coming up and kissing him; "and think no more of my nonsense; thou knows I mean no harm, but I can't help raffling a bit, now and then. My mother was so before me, and yet the old man and her lived to be ninety. Her raffling broke no bones, thou sees."

"Not it," said Abner, giving her a good smack, and striding out of the hut; "only mustard to the old man's beef." And with a hand laid on it, he leaped lightly over the post-and-rail fence, and strode swiftly down the valley.

Peggy stood watching him till he waved his hand in

passing behind a tall thicket, and said: "Um! if I'd knowed that he was going off at once, I'd a' kept my tongue within my teeth. And it took me at such a nonplush, that I never thought to tell him to take care the burnt trees do n't tumble upon him." She turned, and went in.

Summer passed on with all its drought, dearth, and suffering. Autumn came, with rushing winds and driving rains. The refreshed ground very soon gave evidence of new life, and the kangaroo-grass in the woods began to make them verdant with its tufts of delicate green, and the cattle and sheep to devour it eagerly. Soon there was grass short but delicious to the cropping flocks on the plains, and water running in a thousand channels, and pools and rivers once more swelling with their welcome supplies. Once more the countless swarms of frogs, which had saved themselves in the earth, made the air resound with their many strange notes. The flocks and herds ranged once more in leisurely plenty; the forest, and all nature, seemed relieved and restored.

But the floods as well as the drought, which Mrs. Quarrier had predicted, came. The rains, so long delayed, once let loose, appeared as if they would never cease. For a whole fortnight they continued to pour down, day and night. Occasionally fierce

winds raged through the woods, and it was hoped that they would carry away the rain; but soon the clouds reassembled, and the still, steady, soaking rain continued to fall. Soon the brooks and rivers began to shine out above their banks, and on low grounds spread wide sheets of water like lakes.

Amid all this the most wonderful rumours flew to and fro of the discovery and the gathering of gold. All Melbourne and Geelong were said to have deserted their homes, and to have crowded up to Ballarat and Mount Alexander. If you had believed everything that was said, that mount must be a mount of solid gold. People were shovelling gold into sacks like potatoes, and huge nuggets lay about like boulder-stones. Of all the marvels the most marvellous was that neither natives, nor squatters, nor shepherds, had seen these glittering treasures; had never run their toes against them; had never picked them up to pelt restive sheep or ox. Young men had come out of England, and gathered such sacks of gold that they had returned millionaires in the very same ship that brought them out. The lawyer, the merchant, the clergyman, all were armed with spade and pick, and were making far prettier pickings on the gold-fields than they had ever done before. Officials of all ranks threw up their posts,

and posted away to these wonderful regions. Sydney was rushing overland and by steamer with all its scamps. Not a lag would lag behind either there or in Van Diemen's Land. It came with all its demons. Not a creek but ran with gold, not a sod but covered it, not a tent there but had a lad in, to whom the Aladdin of Arabia was a mere goose. The governor rode up and poked away the moss from the roots of trees, and picked up nuggets. He sate on his horse, and saw rude fellows shovelling up gold like sand.

At such news the very earth under people's feet seemed to creep and tremble. Shepherds, stockmen, hut-keepers, all ran helter-skelter away; every man afraid of being too late in the scramble. Flocks, herds, horses, everything alive or dead, were left to take care of themselves. Who would stay in the woods amongst the shadows when he might in a few days be a man of untold substance? It was every one for himself, and the devil take the hindermost. The squatters rode about in consternation; the flocks were all astray in the bush, with only the wild dogs watching them. Not a man was to be had for love or money. Love! What love ever withstood gold? Money! What of that when here was the stuff it is made of, to be had in any quantity for the stooping?

Women and little children, and a few old super-

annuated fellows who had been set in the corner as only fit to keep the fire in and the dogs out, were called hastily into the bush and set a shepherding. The squatter often looked after one of his own flocks, and his wife and daughters brought round the rations. Young ladies mounted and scoured the forest hills and glens reconnoitring bullocks. There went a wild cry through the whole land that the end of the squatter world was come, and that wool should be no more! How could such a thing as squatting exist, when all the world was running at full speed? Where could the wool soon be but hanging on the thorns, and the mutton but in the stomachs of the dingoes? The prospect was, in truth, frightful, and never were men fuller of fright than the squatters. Oh! out of what a blessed and bountiful rest they were at once thrown by the stupendous occurrence! And they stood fixed in despair. Ruin, ruin, inevitable ruin, seemed their portion; and yet why not run too to the diggings, where, if half were true, they could secure instant recompense?

But the poor squatters clung with a convulsive love to their pleasant wilds, their flocks and herds. Some strained every nerve, and put every woman and child on the stretch to keep their stock safe; others in their panic sold or offered to sell their runs

for an old song. Mr. Quarrier rode over to Tallangetta, like a man frantic. Every shepherd, every man of every kind had run off. His wife was cooking; the girls running for water, peeling potatoes, and making the beds. His mother was on horseback hunting up the cattle; and as for himself, he appeared to be galloping from station to station like the man in the siege of Jerusalem, crying woe! woe! woe! to himself and the whole colony.

At Tallangetta things were far better. Though the shepherds and stockmen had run off, yet Barks, Purdy, Abner, and David Rannock stood true. They declared, one and all, that they longed to have a race for the diggings too, but they would wait awhile and see how the stock was to be cared for. Mr. Fitzpatrick thanked them heartily, tripled their wages, and declared at the very first opportunity they should have their adventure. The women at the huts cooked, and Charles drove round with rations; so all was wonderfully well under the circumstances.

But still a heavy load lay on the minds of the Tallangetta family. They could not see how this state of things could be maintained. If there were no men to be had, the squatting interest must go down, and all the stock must perish. It was a

melancholy prospect. If they attempted to sell, who would buy? what could they get for their property? And to return to England poorer than they came out was not to be thought of. Tallangetta in all its beauty, with that glorious view of woods, and waters, and mountains, was a house of woe.

The Poncefords, the Woolstans, the Metcalfes, were all in the like condition; they were all strenuously employed in preserving their property, and could not, therefore, make visits to sympathise or counsel with one another; but they showed, when Charles or his father rode over to them, wonderful patience, and the doctor, whom they found baking a damper while his flock rested at noon, away in the bush quite cheerful, and the first man to pronounce all this a fleeting state of things. "An earthquake," he said, "does not last very long. Nothing very violent is lasting, and nothing ever was so violent as this crisis, and therefore it *must* be proportionately short. I bide my time," said he, taking up his damper, now baked, and bidding his visitor smell how delicious it was.

But Mr. Quarrier kept galloping about, offering his run at any price, saying the colony was ruined; it might be a place for navvies, but was so no longer for gentlemen. One day, in the midst of a violent

tirade on the subject, he pulled out a letter from his mother and threw it on the table. The next moment he was gone, and Mrs. Fitzpatrick, taking up the letter, read, to the whole family's astonishment, as follows: —

"My dear Mrs. Fitzpatrick, — Do n't let my son persuade Mr. Fitzpatrick to sell his station. The colony ruined by the gold! It will be made by it. Wait a few weeks, and you shall have shepherds at pleasure. All is not gold that glitters at the diggings, any more than anywhere else. Thousands, I hear, are already disappointed or disgusted. Those are your men. They will be shepherds and stockmen for good wages. And then, only think what a price meat will be! What a price everything will be; hundreds of thousands pouring in to get the gold, and, thanks to good old mother Nature and her laws, as surely to eat and drink. Hurrah for the gold fields! Hurrah for the squatters! Theirs will be the chief digging. The Golden Age is at last come to the bush! Yours affectionately,

"ANN QUARRIER.

"Gurragong, April, 1853."

"And she is right again!" said Mr. Fitzpatrick, starting up. "How is it that this old lady can always

see, and all of us beside are blind? I will pledge my existence that she is right, and yet her own son has been riding about like a maniac, and might have ruined us all. Hurrah for the gold-fields! Hurrah for the squatters! Hurrah, three times three, and nine times nine, for Mrs. Quarrier the wise!"

Charles flung up his cap, and the ladies all joined in the hurrah, clapping their hands in delight.

"But there is one thing," said Mr. Fitzpatrick, "that should not be neglected," as if struck with a sudden idea. "That stretch of land on the Goulbourn, so indispensable for our sheep-washing and summer pasturage, which was made over to us by Mr. Farbrother, is only transferred verbally. If the value of stations rises greatly, as it will, he may be disposed to draw back. We must have this looked to before the panic is over. What is to be done?"

"I will ride off at once to him," said Charles, "and take the agreement to sign."

"But he lives now beyond the Campaspe, and I fear the waters are out, in which case it will be impossible to reach him."

The ladies were all terrified at the danger, and begged that Charles might not go; they were all too well acquainted with his ardent, daring temperament.

"No, no!" said Charles. "I will run into no danger. I will ride to the Metcalfes'. They have a boat,

and live on high ground above the river. I have no doubt they can put me across. Trust to me," said Charles, "I'll take good care of my precious self."

Early in the morning he mounted a splendid brown mare, with the buoyant and delightful feeling of youth backing a noble steed, and bound for new views, and perhaps adventures. He rolled up behind him his oil-skin overalls and coat, with a hood, so that in case of rain he could defy it all, and with the necessary supply of matches, a rug, and some provision in case of being obliged to lie out in the woods by any accident, he dashed away with his favourite tawny bull-terrier, Club, rushing on before him, barking in obstreperous delight at the prospect of a run into the bush.

Charles had to pass over the hill above the house, and then he plunged into the boundless forests. For an hour or two he cantered along, occasionally called out of his way by the barking of Club, who had a wild cat, or an opossum, or a bandicoot, or something of the sort in a hollow tree, or under the fallen logs; and Charles stayed to assist the dog by a few strokes of his small axe at his girdle. But soon he began to think he was wasting time, and calling Club to keep with him, rode on briskly through the forest. Towards noon the wind rose, and masses of

thick, dark clouds were poured over the woods. He perceived a storm coming, and prepared for it by dismounting and putting on his oil-skin suit. It was not too soon; the squally rain came down in torrents, and though it could touch no other part of him it drove directly into his face and prevented his seeing the way before him. What was worse, it also baffled his horse and impeded his speed. Charles, therefore, drew up under the side of a light-wood tree, whose olive-like foliage presented the only shelter amongst the trees of the forest. Long and furiously beat down the dashing, splashing rain, and mingled with it came several cracks of intense thunder, late as it was in the season. Charles looked round from time to time to see if any break in the clouds promised a discontinuance of the tempest, but all was one thick misty obscurity in the atmosphere. Club sate, and whined at the foot of the tree; the horse pawed the ground impatiently, its shoulders and flanks smoking from the evaporating rain, and he now inwardly regretted the delay occasioned by Club's hunting propensities. But he could not, he thought, be far from Moolap, and he resolved to go on. His mare was glad to proceed, and spite of the tempest still driving right into her eyes, she trotted on. But presently Charles saw with astonishment that the track had disappeared.

How was that? Had he left the true one? He became alarmed, and took out his compass. North was his true direction, and he now saw that for some time he must have been riding precisely north-east.

What was to be done? He must cut across westward to regain the true path to Moolap; but confounded by the driving, obscuring tempest, it would be difficult, perhaps, to strike the path again. He might come upon it where it was too faint to perceive it. He might even now be so far that by taking that course he should strike the river lower down. There was nothing else, however, for it, except going back, which his pride forbade. He would not willingly confess, at home, that he was "bushed," as the term is, between Tallangetta and Moolap. He rode on eagerly, anxiously, looking right and left for some object of recognition. Now he was involved amongst a chaos of fallen trees; anon his horse was wading to the sides through deep scrub, dripping with the wet. Now he came out into a wide, flat solitude, where beneath the shadow of the trees grew nothing but dense clumps of the thorny acacia, resembling masses of our black-thorn. Now, again, he passed over miles of forest, beneath the trees of which grew myrtle-like shrubs as high as his horse, making all look monotonously green.

All was new to him. Finally, he found himself down in a low situation on the banks of a stream, whence extended great swamps, and where a thick growth of the black acacia gave to the place a most gloomy and lonely aspect.

"How is this? Where in the world can I be? This cannot be the Campaspe, and yet what other stream can there be? I am fairly bushed, and no mistake." Such were the thoughts of Charles as he stopped and looked round him on that desolate, disheartening scene. To cross the stream he found impossible, from the extensive marshes; and, though reluctantly, he turned his horse once more somewhat to the right, to gain higher ground.

Here arrived, and the rain clearing off, he dismounted, and determined to let his horse rest and feed, and to get some tea himself, for he was cold. But any one who has attempted to make a fire in the bush, when everything is soaked with rain, may understand that he had no easy task before him. He made many attempts to kindle the driest leaves he could find. It was useless; they only gave out volumes of smoke, and expired. He therefore sought the boles of the trees, to discover some loose-hanging bark on the lee side of the trunk which might have escaped the rain, and in this he at length succeeded, and raised a fire. Over this, as he sate warming

his chilled fingers, he pondered on the probability of his situation,—how he had got wrong,—on which side Moolap really could lie. But the more he thought, the more he was confused. Not a yard that he had passed ever since the rain commenced did he recognise. The whole country looked to him perfectly strange. What could be this stream? He was bewildered beyond extrication; and once flurried, all is over in such cases. North, south, east, and west, are all one. Still, come the worst; his horse and dog would carry him home again; but no! not so while a chance was left. He sprang up in desperation, and ran to the neighbouring slope of the hill, hoping that he might thence gain a view of the Campaspe valley. Not a glimpse of it; but only one wild forest without particular feature, one solitary, savage scene. He listened for a cock-crowing, an axe, the shout of bullock-driver to his team, or of dog barking at a flock. Not a sound, except of a tree-creeper near, ascending the bole of the tree with its unceasing note of "pee-pee-pee-pee."

Dispirited immensely by this view, he sighed deeply, and gave himself up for a night in the wet forest. The day was now fast declining, and which way he should turn he could not decide. At length he determined to remount, and cross this hill again

to the right hand, for he could not cross the stream on his left, and take the first track he found. He did so, but for a long time in vain. His horse continually turned southward, in which direction Charles believed lay his home; and on all such occasions Club grew sprightly, and with a toss of head began to run before. But Charles still resolutely turned his steed the other way, and at length he struck a track going off to the north. He looked; he thought he recognised the trees by the way-side; this must be the track, after all; and away he cantered once more. But it went on, and on, and on. He must have ridden five miles, and no house, no Moolap! Night was setting in, and once more the tempest came growling and roaring up. Presently it was pitch dark around him, not from absolute night, but from the black enveloping clouds of the rain storm. It was impossible to see his way; he left it to his horse, and his horse reluctantly went forward. All at once the forest was lit up by a tremendous blaze; there was a crash as if the welkin above his head was rent in sunder, a thundering, stunning explosion, and a large tree in an open space before him was at once dashed into a thousand pieces by a vivid blue shaft of lightning. The next moment, all was still and dark as a tomb. His horse had wheeled round at

the flash and terrible concussion, and dashed away hap-hazard through the woods. Probably it was a happy circumstance for him, for the splinters of the shivered tree flew on all sides with the fury of an exploded shell. He was nearly swept from the saddle by a depending branch, before he could stop the frightened mare; when he once more stood still, and gave himself up for the night. But what a night! The rain, after the discharge of the electric fluid, came drenching down in torrents. It was not rain, it was a deluge; one heavy, solid, drowning descent of water. Shelter from the thinly-foliaged gum-trees there was none; way there was none, for all was Egyptian darkness, and roaring, dashing, inundating water. The horse drooped its head to its knees, and seemed to give itself up to its miserable lot. The dog cowed under its stomach, and whined pitifully. Never was there a more wretched situation. "What would they think if they could know," thought Charles to himself, "at home? But they think me snug at Moolap. Heigho! I wish I were."

But at once the clouds broke, the wind swelled again, but blew more temperately. And what is that? A light! Yes; he caught the steady gleam of a light, be it what it might, a station, or a mere night camp in the forest; there were human beings there, and the

means of learning where he was; he rode on towards it. His horse evidently saw it too, and increased its speed. As he drew nearer he saw that it was no open fire, but the light from a window, steady and unmoved by the wind. "Hurrah!" thought he. "Moolap after all! I thought I could not be so far off."

He cantered joyfully onwards. Yes; the same old slab huts. He gave a loud cooée, and a crack of his whip, and at the same instant was at the door of the hut whence the light came, and a man stepped out of it. "Take my horse, mate," said Charles, "for I am nearly perished;" and leaping down, he was entering the hut. "The other way, master," said the man, "round the corner." Charles thought he was still bewildered. He neither recognised the man's voice nor the place, but he went round the corner, saw the chief building, also of wood, and the light streaming from its two windows.

"How is this?" he said. "It is odd, I do 'nt seem to know the place; my head must be turned." He entered, and stood amazed. Round a noble blazing fire of logs sate a gentleman, two ladies, and two boys; but they were not the Metcalfes. They were utter strangers. At the sight of him, they all rose to receive him. The gentleman was a stoutish man, of apparently fifty. He was dressed in a drab coat and

trousers, and a figured silk waistcoat, with turquoise buttons. His hair was still quite dark, no tinge of grey; his face marked by strong features, and a look of cleverness and decision.

"Come in, sir, come in; what a night for you! Why, you must be literally drowned. Let me pull away your outer garments."

"But first," said Charles, in some confusion; "pray tell me where I am; I thought I was at Moolap."

"At Moolap! That's a dozen miles up the river! But no wonder you missed your way in such a storm. Give me hold of your waterproof."

Charles stripped off his oil-skin and his dripping hat, and stood there a handsome and gentlemanly youth, but still with a puzzled look. Freed from his outer garments, and a seat placed for him by the fire, he saw that the ladies were mother and daughter, the mother a very kind-looking woman, and the daughter a very fine, handsome girl. The two boys, of apparently twelve and fourteen, stood and looked at their guest in silence.

"But where, then, am I," asked Charles, "if I may ask?"

"Why," said the gentleman, "you are at Bongubine, at Peter Martin's, and [illegible]y welcome there,

too. Sara, my dear, get tea, and let us have some good steaks; I have no doubt this gentleman will be ready for them after his ride."

But as he spoke Charles started up. The strangest astonishment was in his face. He coloured scarlet, looked at one, and then at the other. Mr. Peter Martin! Mr. Peter Martin in this country! Mr. Peter Martin!—the man of all others that his father detested; the man whom Charles from his birth had been brought up to regard as the greatest and most persevering enemy of his family; the man whom to leave behind was the one reconciling idea of his father in quitting England for this far-off country! And he here! Come like a ghost to haunt their steps, to trouble their repose, to destroy the whole charm of this southland life!

"Excuse me," said Charles, stammering, and hardly knowing what he did. "Excuse me, I cannot stay. I beg pardon, I could not have imagined it possible." He turned to seize his wet waterproof clothes; they were gone out.

"What's amiss?" said Mr. Peter Martin. "What ails you, young man? You cannot go out; there is no need, indeed, you are perfectly welcome."

"No, no," said Charles. "Good God! How unfortunate! I must go. At once! at once!"

"Good gracious!" said the gentleman. "Why, you have lost your wits in the storm. Go out to-night! Not for worlds. It is madness!"

"No matter; Oh! Heaven above us! Give me my coat; I *must* go."

"But why, man? But why?" exclaimed the squatter vehemently, and as if at once astonished and insulted.

"Why?" said Charles. "O Lord! Why? Because you are Mr. Peter Martin, and I am Charles Fitz-patrick!"

"So—o!" said the squatter, stepping back in astonishment, and gazing fixedly at Charles. "So—o, that is it?"

Charles saw the ladies at once rise, colour excessively, and tremble with agitation as they gazed at him. They looked confounded with surprise.

"Charles Fitzpatrick!" again exclaimed Mr. Martin. "That is extraordinary. I can understand your feelings; but, a word! You look on me as the enemy of your house. I am its firmest friend; I always have been; I always will be, and that one day, and not a distant day now, both you and your father will acknowledge. And now, mark! I am a positive man; your father knows that, and you must now know it. You will sit down quietly

to-night. If you were my enemy, or I yours, I would set open the door and say, 'Go, and perish!' But, as your friend, I say you shall stay here till morning; I admit of no contradiction. Charles Fitzpatrick! Look on those two ladies; do they look like enemies, like bad people? They are your truest, kindest friends; and, whatever I look like, I am the same. You stay."

Charles looked at the ladies. They were both greatly agitated, but two more amiable-looking women no eye could fall upon. "God forbid!" said Charles, "that I should think so."

"Then shake hands, like a sensible lad." Charles took the proffered hands, and shook them cordially.

"There, there," said Mr. Peter Martin. "Now for tea, Sara. We shall know one another by morning."

Charles sate down, but silent, agitated by the strongest feelings. To have thus stumbled into the dwelling of a man that he had always heard named as the steady enemy of his father. To find him here, when he believed him in England. Not a word of his arrival in the colony to have reached them. And why here? For what object thus planted down near them?

The most painful feelings filled his whole mind;

and yet, when he looked about him, what more open and kindly aspects could he behold? There appeared nothing sinister, nothing to create a suspicious or a distrustful feeling. Could these be wicked or hostile people? Never did he see persons who had a more attractive, trustworthy appearance. The very place seemed to have a kindly, genuine, domestic spirit about it. True, Mr. Peter Martin had a short, quick, confident manner; a prompt, decided sort of speech; but could he be a bad man? He did not look it. How could it be?

Whilst Charles was running over these thoughts in his mind, the squatter had gone out, and the daughter returned, followed by a servant with the tea-tray. Mrs. Martin asked Charles if he had been intending to reach Moolap; and, on his replying in the affirmative, he was astonished to perceive that she was perfectly acquainted with the Metcalfes, and the Woolstans too. Here was fresh cause for wonder: why had they never mentioned the Martins?

During tea, Mr. Martin, in the most friendly manner, asked Charles the particulars of his ride through the bush. He quickly cleared up the mystery of his deviation from the proper track; told him he had had a lucky escape; that he had been going off gradually north-eastward, and would

have come down into the immense plains leading to the Murray, and might have ridden for days without seeing a soul. He appeared to take such an honest, undisguised pleasure in Charles's escape, yet without any fussiness or overdone *empressement*, that Charles was still more amazed. He cleared up the mystery of the creek to the left, which, he said, was a sluggish, boggy stream that fell into the river. He offered, in the morning, to put him into the way to Moolap; but Charles said "he was bound for Mr. Farbrother's, beyond the Campaspe in reality, and perhaps might," he added, "be able to proceed thither from this place."

"Oh, my dear fellow!" said Mr. Peter Martin. "Why, you are all right. You are in the very way here. I will see you over the river to-morrow, if it can be crossed, which is doubtful, however, after these heavy rains."

Charles was still more in wonder at the ready, friendly spirit of the man, at this prompt offer of assistance; he could not reconcile it with all he had heard of the man's enmity; and yet his father, he recollected, had always angrily denounced his busy offers of advice, his poking his nose, as he called it, into other people's affairs. Again Charles looked at him and at the ladies; he was more mystified

than ever. All was so kind, so open, and affectionate amongst themselves. Could wickedness and malice put on such a truthful, home-like, beautiful aspect? It was totally beyond his comprehension.

CHAP. VIII.

THE RIDE ACROSS THE RIVER.

DURING the evening Charles Fitzpatrick had leisure, notwithstanding the excited state of his mind, to notice some of the circumstances about him. He perceived that the room in which they were was as humbly furnished as it was built. The bare slabs, indeed, which in such stations are most commonly bare, and presenting ample interstices, were here clothed with a remarkable paper, consisting of nothing less than a collection of the *Illustrated London News*, varied by a considerable sprinkling of *Punch*. These had been disposed so as to display to the eye the largest possible amount of pictures; so that the squatter's sitting-room was at once a library and a picture-gallery. There was a most amusing assemblage of scenes, some serious, some comic, always before the eye of the spectator, and no one need suffer *ennui* there; for, even if left alone, he had only to approach the walls, and look into almost every country of the known world, as well

as into the interior of the society of the most celebrated cities. There, at the antipodes, he could travel his own country, and laugh with his countrymen at public and private follies; having all the time innumerable columns of letterpress at his command to enlighten and amuse his mind.

Had he turned his attention to the floor, he would have seen its stout planks covered with a mat composed of sugar-bags which had been slit open and well scoured in the river. The fire-place — as universal in the bush, being constructed for the burning of wood and for not being burnt itself, for it was of wood too, like all the rest of the house — was at least four feet square, and lined for the same height with slabs of granite. On the hearth, instead of a dog for the burning logs to rest on, lay the great bush or box of a dray-wheel, and opposite to it a considerable oblong stone, and across these supports lay the fire.

There was a plain table, a wooden couch with a mattress upon it, by way of sofa, and a few very rude chairs. That was the furniture of the room, very much on a par with the state of other wealthy squatters, and quite magnificent compared with the abodes of many.

Mr. Peter Martin and his family, accustomed in

England to the comforts and elegancies of a great estate, yet appeared to have settled down here with all the composure of the most regular squatters in the rude simplicity of this bush-life. What could it mean? How had it come to pass?

When Charles was shown to his bed-room he was irresistibly impelled to renew his studies and observations there. This room opened by a very rude door from the sitting-room. It was small, and was papered in a much soberer style; that is to say, with *Chambers' Edinburgh Journals,* and these having fallen short, the deficiency was supplied by the leaves of copy-books, where pot-hooks and fish-hooks were leaning in all their school-boy degrees of obliquity, and were identified by the subscription of "Thomas Martin is my name, England is my nation," and by a grand display of pugnacious genius on the part of the other brother:—

> "This is Peter Martin's; let no one steal it,
> Or he will get a blow, and no doctor to heal it."

"Pretty well, that," said Charles, as he read it. "Chip of the old block, I reckon." There was a small bed at the end of the room, covered with a handsome, dark opossum rug; the bedside carpet was composed of about four yellow wild dog skins; the

dressing-table was an article in two parts, that is, it consisted of two large boxes set one on the other. The only seat was a kind of ottoman, which, on examination, proved to be a tea-chest, but softened by a cushion, and disguised by a valence. On the dressing-table, or dressing-boxes, stood a small looking-glass and two or three books, a small bible, a prayer-book, and a selection of poetry. But what revealed to Charles that he had been installed in Miss Martin's own quarters were a handsome new lady's sadle and bridle and riding-whip, which hung on the wall, presenting an odd mixture of bed-room and harness-room, but quite in keeping with bush-life. Where Miss Martin had bestowed herself remains unknown; but Charles felt that his sudden appearance had in some degree disturbed the domestic arrangements of the Bongubine station.

Charles turned into bed, but lay tossing for a long time from one side to another, still disturbed by the strange discovery he had so strangely made, and considering how he was to break the matter to his father. He pictured to himself his father's rage at learning that his most antagonistic aversion was here coolly and completely residing in his neighbourhood, and he hardly dared ask himself how he would accost him for staying all night with this detested family. At

length he dropped asleep, and was only awoke when it was broad daylight by a sound of laughter and struggling and romping, so close to him that the riot appeared to be in the very room. It was, however, behind a slender partition wall of wood, with the usual airy interstices, and the *dramatis personæ* consisted of the identical Peter and Thomas whom he had seen overnight, and whose pot-hooks helped to paper his own chamber.

The sounds that did not *catch* his ear, but which came plunging and rushing and gushing upon it were these :—" Yoé, hoé, hoé, ho ! I say Peet ! Peet ! oh ! dash your wig, Peet ! Peet, I say ! oh ! oh ! You are squeezing all the breath out of me !" Slap ! bang ! a tremendous cuffing and dusting of each other with pillars and bolsters. " Oh ! oh ! ha ! ha ! ha ! bravo Tom ! bravo ! yo hoé, hoé, yo hoé, he ! he ! he !"—a regular, continuous, half-suffocated giggle, ending in a downright screech. Then slap, bang, cuff, dust, dash, tuzzle. " Aha ! oho ! there ! there ! Tom ! Tom, I say, ha ! ha ! oho ! oho ! ho-o-o-o, ee-e-e ! hoe,"—ending in another regular screech.

Then " Peet ! Peet ! I say, hush ! hush ! don't you remember that young Fitzpatrick 's sleeping in Sara's room ? We shall wake him, if we don 't mind."

" Whew," a long significant whistle from Peet. " By jingo, Tom ! I never thought of that ; whist, we

did 'nt make much noise, did we? But I say, what an odd thing that he should stumble in here, eh? How deuced queer! And was 'nt he in a pretty taking; my eye, he was in a fluster! And did'nt the governor stare a bit when he said who he was! Bravo! it 's regular fun. I 'd give a farthing to see old Fitzpatrick when he tells him where he 's been."

"Ay, indeed, there 'll be the dibble — dibble, as the black fellows say, to pay. I would n't be in his shoes for a trifle."

"But, I say, Tom, the young fellow 's not bad-looking."

"Bad-looking, Peet! No; why should he? They 're a very handsome family, the Fitzpatricks, as you may judge from their cousins, that is, us, Peety, my boy."

"Oh nonsense! I don 't mean bad that way, but wild and wicked. You know very well what I mean."

"Oh yes! It is a pity old Fitzpatrick should have always been so wild, and so spent all his property. But that 's what the governor here always told him would come of it; and that 's why he hates father so."

"The more fool he. Well, he 's suffered for it; so don 't let us blame him; the governor does n't; he only says he 's very sorry, but that it will all come

right yet, and the old baronet will get all his property back; and that rascally Sir Peter may go to ——. I can 't say where, though the governor slaps it out so flatly."

"Well, I 'm glad all will come right, Peet; and father knows, so it 's sure; he says, as sure as he lives, as sure as we 're in Australia, and that he 's here to bring it about. My word! I wish we were old enough to be let into the secret. Why the governor should take all this trouble, and why old Fitzpatrick should still go on hating him as he does, is a rum go, that 's all I can say."

A sudden rap at an opposite side of the boys' room, and the sharp, quick voice of Mr. Peter Martin, calling out to them—"What are you monkeys gabbling at there? Dress, and come away!"—broke off this interesting conversation. There was a sudden silence, a quick drawing on of clothes, and the interlocutors were gone.

But what a world of strange sensations rushed over the mind of the listener. So! This was the view here taken of the family hostility. This was a very different version and view of the affair. Mr. Peter Martin, not the enemy, but the fast friend of the Fitzpatricks. Not disliked by his father for any impertinences or unkind actions, but for a faithful and

wise counselling. His father ruined by a constant opposition to the advice of Mr. Peter Martin; and, more wonderful still, all the losses of his property were yet to be done away with. His restoration to title and estate were certain. And Mr. Peter Martin was not only the confident prophet, but the agent, the active, friendly agent in it. This was marvellous! — how all his father's property could have been wrested from him by Sir Peter, and why no evidence could be procured from any quarter to stem the ruinous course of trial after trial; and yet Mr. Peter Martin, who then lay still as a mouse, should now be here and acting for a certain restoration of everything. These were problems upon problems which, so far from Charles's brain being able to solve them, only threw it into a greater whirl. He sate down on the bed, and sunk into a series of thoughts so deep that they deprived his body of all motion — almost of breath. Thus sate he long, and at length started up, and said to himself, "It must be true! There must be something in it! But what? My father shall have his own again! What can this man know? But he knows something; and it is good. He says he is our fast friend, and we shall know it too ere long. His boys say it! Ay! That is confirmation tenfold strong. That is plainly the daily established familiar

talk of the house. That was not meant for me. That was the spontaneous language of children, who listen and hoard up the household topics of their parents. God be praised! I have not come here for nothing. I believe it all. I feel that it is true. I thought I could not be mistaken in my impressions of these people. I shall give them my confidence. True, my father has been expensive, and fond of that fatal turf. He is strong-willed, and bears strong resentment. A fair, plain-spoken opposition on the part of this his relative, who appears a frank, shrewd sort of man, would very likely excite a vehement dislike to him in my father. Yes; it must be so. I feel it."

"Breakfast, my young friend, if you are ready for it," said the quick voice of Mr. Peter Martin, with an accompanying rap on the door.

"Thank you! quite ready," replied Charles. And pausing a moment to compose himself, he opened the door, and stepped out. There stood the breakfast table, near the front window, spread plentifully, and Mr. Martin and the two ladies advanced to bid him good morning. Charles took their offered hands with a cordiality which evidently highly gratified them. An expression of great pleasure appeared on their countenances. The cheeks of the ladies flushed with

a warm bloom, their eyes brightened, and they said they trusted he had slept well, and was no worse for his exposure to the rain.

Mr. Peter Martin rubbed his hands, seated himself at table, and began to deal about the steaks and cutlets, accompanied by a variety of chatty talk. Club came bounding into the room with the two boys, who declared that he was a most wonderful dog; that he had run ever so high up a slanting tree, and dragged a wild cat out, and had been down at the bottom of the river, and fetched up a particular stone they had thrown in. Mr. Peter Martin told Charles that his mare seemed all right, and had been well fed, and asked if he was still bent on his attempt to cross the river. "Certainly," said Charles, "if possible." "Then," said the squatter, "Tom, tell Jerridot to saddle me Blue-Beard; we will lose not an hour."

Charles begged that Mr. Martin would not think of incommoding himself by accompanying him. If he would send a man or one of his boys to show him the ford, that was all he desired. He entreated that he would do no more.

"Now, cousin Charles," said Mr. Martin, "if I may call you so, just say no more. You know I have the repute in your family of being a very pig-headed

man. You 'll find me so. Words are all lost upon me. I am going." This Mr. Martin accompanied by laying his hand on Charles's wrist firmly. Breakfast was soon over, amongst very kind and agreeable talk. Charles felt every moment more and more the wonder that his family and this should ever have been enemies. He looked at Mrs. Martin,—never did he see a matronly lady so motherly and agreeable; at Miss Martin,—never did he see a young lady at once so handsome, so sensible-looking, and so agreeable as she took part in the conversation, and joked with her brothers. She had a fine figure, vigorously yet not heavily built, above the middle height, a face in which a very beautiful and high-toned likeness to her father was visible. Charles felt as though he had been at home amongst these relatives for years, and thought how proud he should be to see the division of the families swept away, and Georgina and Sara love each other as sisters.

The horses were at the door. They mounted, and, amid cordial adieus, rode off. Mr. Martin was mounted on a powerful bay horse, and the two boys, on active ponies, accompanied them for some miles down the valley. On their return, Charles and Mr. Martin put their horses to their speed, and soon came down into the valley of the Campaspe. It

was amongst bold, steep slopes, covered with growth of large, old trees. Craggy precipices overhung the river, crowned also with noble trees, and the river itself wound along in a very circuitous course; here sweeping round a green forest promontory or bluff, and here encircled by high, hollow, solitary coombs. It was a region of much majesty and silence. All at once came the roar of water, and the turn of a hill showed them the river dashing over a natural weir, and enclosed by high cliffs, looking above the weir like a long, narrow lake, in which hundreds of water-fowl were swimming and sporting. Charles was transported at the scene; but Mr. Martin rode briskly on, and very soon the scene was totally changed. They came to where a water-mill stood by the river-side, with fowls and vehicles about it, and on a mound containing several acres stood a good brick house, in the midst of gardens and vineyards. Mr. Martin rode a little past this, and then paused on a rising ground to observe Charles's impression of the place. That was one of wonder and delight. All below this beautiful mound on which the house stood so deliciously, with the lofty wooded slopes, presenting around it a variety of changing aspects, opened a valley of the most soft and Elysian beauty. The hills on either hand, and others which rose up from

the bottom of the vale, were of the softest and most fairy-land forms. They were green as the emerald, and soft as velvet. A double row of bold red-gum-trees marked the tortuous course of the river along the vale, and the autumnal sun shone with an imparadising lustre over the whole, as if emulous to present this Eden of the wilderness in its most attractive loveliness.

"Why, this is a heavenly spot," said Charles. "Whose station is this?"

"It belongs to mine," replied Mr. Martin. "This is called Lahni Mill; but more of that anon. At present we must push forward." They rode still for some miles, when, turning towards the river, they found themselves in a forest track which appeared to lead direct to it.

In a gloomy and rough scene, in strange contrast to the gentle beauty above, where rude mounds of earth overgrown with long grass and jungle were again overshadowed with large trees, they at once caught sight of the river, and a solitary tent stuck down amongst the bushes close to its approach. Mr. Martin appeared greatly surprised at the sight of this tent; checked his horse for a moment, and surveyed it in silence. Charles also looked closely at it, induced by the manner of his companion, but could perceive

nothing but a scarlet jacket with gilt basket buttons, hanging under a sort of canopy in front of the tent as if it had been wet through by the rains of the preceding evening, and a white horse singularly spotted with red grazing near. He could see or hear no person whatever. But Mr. Martin now rode quickly but carefully, keeping his horse cautiously on the grass, and the moment they were passed turning with a very meaning look, putting his fingers to his lips, as enjoining silence, and then riding rapidly forward. Charles, as he followed, could not help casting another backward glance, and was startled to perceive a huge figure and very hairy face protruded between the trees in front of the tent, and eagerly gazing after them. But he was obliged to bestow his immediate attention on his horse, as they were already riding in the water; yet he looked round once more,—there was nothing to see but a huge mass of bushes. Mr. Martin let him come alongside of him, and said, "That tent and dress and horse belong to a man that I would not for the world see us riding together. I'll tell you why some time; now let us get off as fast as we can." The river, however, now brought them to a stand; and what a scene!

It here spread itself over the wide flat of the val-

ley to the breadth of two hundred yards. All around was bushy, and shagged, and wild. The wintry torrents had brought down hither whole mountains of gravel and great stones mingled with the trunks of trees, and trees with enormous heads. These had intercepted fresh accessions of gravel, huge stones, beams, and carcasses of cattle. All amongst this chaos of debris rushed the headlong torrent, turbid and foaming, and roaring as it tore through these heaps of rugged obstructions. It was a wild and awe-inspiring scene. About three parts across it showed a clearer channel, where the current was swift as an arrow, and covered with foam.

Mr. Peter Martin stood with his horse nearly up to his shoulders in the flood, and said to Charles, "This is our crossing-place. What do you think of it?"

"This!" said Charles. "Is it possible that we can do it? Yon current looks as though it could sweep everything away."

"Of that I think least of all," replied his companion; "but in the flood amongst the gravel-heaps I dread the sunken logs and pieces of rock, which may throw down our horses where they may get so entangled in boughs as never to be able to rise again, or only to be washed away with us altogether.

But say the word! If your business is urgent we will try it."

"It is urgent," said Charles; "but I will not risk your safety."

"If that be all," said Mr. Peter Martin, "here goes." And he rode on boldly into the stream. Here he carefully held up his horse, encouraging him. Soon the stout horse lost footing, and swam vigorously; then again he caught ground, and struggled and floundered forward over roughest bottom. They were soon far in, Charles following carefully in his leader's track. As they approached the main current, Mr. Martin reined in his horse on a shoal, and stood a moment to survey the scene. It was enough to appal the stoutest heart. Nothing could be more wild, nothing more formidable in appearance. All round them stretched one great wide deluge, looking gigantic and merciless in its might. The muddy headlong waters rushed and roared along, working themselves against the huge heads of prostrate trees, which appeared partially above the flood with masses of yellow and dingy foam of a foot high. The waters of the main channel swept past in a heavy, careering torrent, which appeared capable of bearing anything to destruction.

"It won't do to look long on this," said Mr.

Martin; "we shall grow dizzy." He put on his horse, crying in the same instant, "Take heed!" And at once his horse stumbled over some trunk or rock beneath the water, and plunged headlong into the flood. Man and horse totally disappeared; and Charles's mare, startled at the sight, wheeled round and became restive. Horrified at what he had seen, Charles pulled round her head fiercely, and dug the spurs into her sides. With a furious bound she sprung forward, dashing the waters like a fountain high up all around him, and the next moment was also in the roaring, boiling gulph, battling with the waters with all her force. But her force! Against the immense weight of the furious stream it was as the force of a midge on the forehead of a tornado! Charles found himself swept down the raving torrent with the wild velocity of a frightful dream, the water washing over his very arms, while he strained his eyes in horror to discover his compa-ion. He saw only the raging flood whirling and tearing onward through the half-submerged trees. It was an age of strange agony to his feelings; though but an instant of time, when lo! the head of his companion's steed emerged, snorting powerfully, and driving the spray like steam from his nostrils. The next instant the stooping but still resolutely seated form of the

rider rose also from the flood, dripping with the deluge, and man and horse swept onward. The firm-hearted man had let go neither bridle-rein nor whip. Giving himself a vigorous shake, and blowing the water from his mouth and nose, he looked round, and perceiving Charles labouring to direct his horse athwart the current, he cried out clear and strong: "Heigh! let her go!" Charles dropped the rein on the mare's neck, and both the horses and the riders swept along with the mighty mass of waters.

Anon, Mr. Martin turned again, and pointing to a high shoal of gravel backed by a gigantic tree, he directed his horse thitherward in an oblique course. Bravo! They approach it easily. The first horse strikes the bottom. Another step, and he stands firm, but with distended nostrils and labouring flank, demonstrating that a little more and his immense strength would have been exhausted, and then adieu to both horse and rider. Charles felt his mare touch the shoal with a thrill of inexpressible joy, and the next moment the two travellers sate side by side, their hands grasped almost convulsively, and gazing on each other in speechless eloquence.

At length Mr. Peter Martin with a strong effort said: "Thank God for this. It is worse than I imagined: a narrow escape, indeed!"

"And that you should have risked your life for me!" said Charles.

"Pooh! No matter; I did n't mean to risk it, of course. It is an accident, or I should not have risked yours. My God! if you had been drowned, what would your father have said then? That I had drowned you on purpose! Oh Lord above! but never mind, all is right!" And with that he led the way over the gravel heaps, and through a few pools of shallow water to dry land.

"But now you will take your death in your wet clothes," said Charles.

"No; away with us now. Farbrother's station is only some quarter of a mile off." And he dashed forward at full gallop. Charles followed as fast, and in a very little time they were at the station, supplied with dry garments, and relating over a good dinner and a blazing fire the adventure of their passage of the river.

The travellers passed a pleasant evening at the station. The business which had brought them there was done at once. The document was signed and witnessed by Mr. Peter Martin; a fact the effect of which on his father, on first seeing it, Charles rather startled at on reflection, but which, after his experience

of this gentleman's devoted daring at the river, he resolved to justify and defend, if necessary.

But his thoughts were prevented from dwelling long on his own reflections; for Mr. Martin and Mr. Farbrother were soon afloat in a world of talk which immediately seized on the whole sympathy and imagination of Charles. Mr. Farbrother was, it soon appeared, a great traveller and an enthusiastic naturalist. He had his hut covered with cases of birds, beasts, and insects, all preserved and prepared by himself; and no sooner had Mr. Farbrother given them an excellent supper, and sent off three or four rosy children to bed, than he showed them splendid specimens of birds and beasts, and winged and creeping things which he had collected in every known part of Australia and Tasmania. Plants and stones in crowded cabinets and piled-up portfolios there were enough to detain them there for a month. In that wild corner of the bush he drew out Gould's magnificent work on the "Birds of Australia," and the parts, as far as they had reached the colony, of his equally fine engravings of the animals, and gave them such a succession of stories, the adventures in which he had been engaged in pursuit of his own treasures of natural history, as made Charles long to set out with him, and amid the trackless woods and mountains yet unnamed

hail all new additions to that family of extraordinary creatures. But time flew, the hour of midnight had arrived ; and as the three friends, for friends they were grown in this brief space by the discussion of objects which deeply interested them all, sate enjoying a final pipe, Mr. Farbrother, who was just returned from an expedition in Tasmania, gave them a few reminiscences of some naturalist friends whom he had met there. To Dr. Müller, the accomplished botanist, he said he was indebted for the following account of the

"LAND-SHARK.

"In that wild region of mountains in Van Diemen's Land, called the Western Tier, which stretches north and south, over a large portion of that side of the island, and terminates only on the western coast, in high black precipices lashed by the booming billows of the ocean, two young men were travelling in the month of May, and lamenting that the fall of the year was about to put an end to their delightful wanderings. Through the long, light summer they had lived the life of nature and of freedom, which is the heaven of the hunter; and hunters they were, being naturalists—hunters of plants and of animals,

not for the mere pleasure of destroying or devouring them, but to widen the realm, and enrich the life, of science. The spirit of the chase was their soul and their life's blood. To pursue their object over sea, and moor, and mountain; to seek out, discover, and make prize of something new and curious, was the dream of their existence. To rush impetuously upon some unknown thing, as the hunter rushes upon his noblest game, and to stand on mountain peak or in forest glen with waving caps, and exulting 'juchhe!' as they stood before some beautiful object that never before gladdened the eye of naturalist, which yet had never found its name or its place in the books of the learned,—that was their glory and their reward. Young as they were, they had traversed many lands, in the frozen North, in the flowery South, in the vast and wonder-fraught realms of America; they had sailed on the Mississippi, the Amazon, and the Plate, and revelled in the exhaustless forests of Brazil. But here, at the antipodes, a Flora and a Fauna existed, exhibiting singular laws and modes of being, hitherto unknown to them. They had visited every quarter of the island, climbed the mountains, traced its shores, dived into the densest obscurity of its forests, and stretched themselves, when wearied, on the green

banks of its streams, counting up and putting in order their acquisitions.

"From day to day they drove their faithful pack-horse before them, burdened with bundles of their gatherings and their supplies, or left him in some luxurious nook, while they ascended hills, or explored woods. With the lowering sun they lit their fire at the foot of some tree or crag, raised a screen of boughs from the night-dew and the wind, and over their homely supper sung the songs of the Fatherland — for they were Teutons — and slept. From time to time, they found warmest welcome in country-homes, where manly men and fair women had brought the refined tastes and intelligence of European life, to blend them with the peace and freshness of a gracious southland nature. These happy and hospitable people almost invariably became their guides to new discoveries. With eagerest enthusiasm, men and women mounted their horses, and led the way to distant rock, river, mountain, or morass, where were to be found the peculiar productions of the district. And, for many a long year yet, will come back on their memories, snatches of romantic country, bits of solitary forest, the sounding shores of the ocean, the scalp of the naked hill overlooking worlds of woods, and illimitable sea, where the feathered hat and flying

veil led the way, — or some bewitching face flushed like a rose at the representation of some glorious new thing; or the manly form of the Tasmanian gentleman on his sure-footed steed, pioneered the track down the shelving declivity or across the rushing stream.

" But now their travel drew to a close, for the year drew to a close. The myriad flowers had disappeared, except the crimson epacris, and a few other natives of sheltered glades; and they were on their way homewards, warned by rains, and winds, and sharp nights.

"The scene in which they found themselves was wild and remote from life. They had made their way up profoundly silent and spectral forests, along the banks of the Mersey, rank with most luxuriant vegetation, over steepest rocks, and through the grimmest outlets of precipitous ravines, and to the lofty table-lands of the Tier.

" Their way was still through dreary forests, in the glades of which already lay patches of snow, where stringy bark-trees of such bulk and altitude still met their view as even, after all they had seen, awoke fresh astonishment. They were in search, as the evening came on wild and stormy, of a resting-place which they had occupied on a former occasion.

It was a rude hut erected of boughs and bark, probably by bushrangers or convicts who had fled hither at some time when government was keen in its pursuit of them. It was raised against the face of a rock in a little green glen which bordered a mountain lake, whose dark deep waters increased the awe-inspiring gloom of the scene. Having reached it, they turned out their tired horse, and proceeded to kindle a fire in their hut. Fritz, the younger, obtained a bright blaze of dead leaves and twigs in the chimney, which dazzled their eyes by its sudden lustre, and then fetched the tears into them by filling the place with smoke. But presently the flame bore the damp air upwards in the chimney, and all became clear; and the active Fritz was not long in cultivating the fire into a generous glow. Around the wretched tenement were seats formed of posts driven into the ground, supporting a rude framework of branches. These, covered with a mass of boughs and leaves of the gum-tree, were to constitute the beds of the travellers, as they had done those of their unknown predecessors.

"While Fritz was collecting this luxury, the professor, his companion, forgetting his learning and his early-won fame in the scientific world, drew from their baggage a small frying-pan, and a tin pan bear-

ing the familiar name of a billy, and proceeded to slice a solid piece of ham into the frying-pan. Anon, there commenced a lusty frying and crackling over the fire. Fritz brought in the billy full of water, and set it to boil; and the place with its two cheerful faces, and a very savoury smell floating through it, assumed a wondrously home-like aspect. Fritz, humming some favourite Studenten Lied, threw a handful of tea into the billy as it began to boil, set, on the nearest bed, tin pannikins and sugar, and the two comrades sate down to tea.

"The wind roared, as if it would carry the struggling trees all away together. Fritz declared it was dark even now, and they mutually congratulated themselves on having reached this shelter while it could be seen. But hark! at the moment that they were setting about to enjoy themselves, the sound of a horse's hoofs on the rocky ground caught their ear. At the same instant came the thump of a heavy whip or stick on the rude door, and a loud 'Hillo! there, within!' Fritz started up, and as he plucked open the hurdle, in stepped a tall man, stooping, as was needful, from the humility of the portal.

"'What! Fritz? what, mein lieber Herr Professor?' exclaimed a tall gentlemanly man, in dark green riding-coat and handsome jack-boots, vehe-

mently, shaking the hands of the strangers. 'Well, this is a surprise; though one ought not to be surprised to meet you in any savage spot. I saw a light here, to my great wonder, and determined to take refuge from the storm, though it were with bush-ranger or devil. Oh! what a night — dark as the lowest pit of Erebus, and with a suffocating wind, that sends the dead branches down about your ears in most perilous style. Had it not been for my faithful Jack, I must have given it up; but he tumbled along, courageously, over stock and stone.'

"'But what in the world,' said the two naturalists, 'leads you here, Doctor, in such a night? Sit down and tell us all about it, over a pannikin of tea.'

"'But, first, my horse! my poor Jack!' exclaimed the doctor, who was the medical man from a township, some twenty miles distant; and, stepping out, he brought up his horse to the light of the door, took off his saddle, girthed his own rug round his smoking body, and hung to his nose a little bag of oats that he had carried with him. This done, the three friends sat down, and commenced an animated conversation which ran through the recent adventures of the two friends and the doctor's too; who, it turned out, had been over the mountains to a new settlement, at a

most urgent call to a sick man, and a proportionate fee.

"'A case of life and death,' said he, 'and really almost of the same to the doctor. May the settlement flourish and set up its own surgeon; for I never wish to go there again. Fifty miles through these terrible ranges, on the edge of winter, is no trifle; one ought to make one's will before attempting it.'

"Here the doctor, seeing his horse had finished his oats, jumped up, and little Fritz, with a flaming brand, took the animal to be company for the naturalist's horse, in the little sheltered glen just by. Returned to the blazing fire, they once more blessed their stars for so opportune a shelter, drank pannikin after pannikin of tea, digested many a good slice of ham, and basked in luxuriant content in the glow of the ample fire.

"'This has been some robber's den, take my word for it,' said the doctor. 'Some desperate convict skulked here till he found means to get over to the other side, and the gold-fields. But what times these are to those of our fathers in the island! Then Musquito came down upon them with the enraged natives, and Michael Howe and his gang spread terror from the Tamar to the Derwent. There is a story—a wonderful one—told of those times, which few who

hear it will believe; yet, it is quite true, and has been mentioned by West in his history of the colony.

"'At the time when a heavy sum was offered for the capture of Howe, alive or dead, and when the desperate fellow was so hunted and laid wait for, that he was irritated to a state of deadly ferocity,—a convict happened to make his escape. He bolted to the woods in nothing but the bright yellow suit which the so-called canary-birds, the convicts, wear. He had made his way up the country, by venturing to approach shepherds and solitary stockmen, who were often of the class, and actuated by the fellow-feeling which makes "wondrous kind." From them he had procured damper enough to carry him on, and at length, arriving in the mountains, he encountered the celebrated bandit, at the head of a gang of his desperate followers.

"'"Eh, mate!" said Howe, "whither away?"

"'"To join the bushrangers," said the man; "I have made my escape."

"'"That won't pass, my friend," said Howe, pouncing savagely on the man. "This is a stale dodge;—won't do here; it has been tried too often. Rather tempting, eh?—that price on my head? But we've settled all that. The man that comes

here, dies; and so all's safe. Mate, here's a choice for you;—we don't wish to be too arbitrary. The cutlass, the pistol, or the contents of this little vial;" producing one from his waistcoat-pocket.

"'The poor fellow, thunderstruck with astonishment and terror, begged piteously for his life, protested over and over his innocence of any treason, and his desire to join them. In vain. The savage outlaw bade him cease his whining, and make his choice, or they would at once choose for him. The poor wretch selected the poison as the least appalling. They saw him swallow it off, wished him a comfortable doze, and disappeared in the wood. The potion began to take instantaneous effect. The man sank down, overcome with drowsiness, on a stump, and felt himself falling into an overpowering stupor. But the dose was too strong; it produced violent sickness, and the man, relieved, arose in a while, and marched on.

"'After travelling some hours, taking, as well as he knew, a direction widely different from that of the bushrangers, to his own and their astonishment, he found himself once more crossing their path.

"'"What!" exclaimed they, "are you not dead?"

"'The man fell on his knees, and prayed vehe-

mently for his life. It was useless. The choice of sword or pistol was again offered him, and as he continued to implore for mercy, crack went Howe's pistol, and the victim fell motionless on the ground.

"'But he was not yet killed. After a time he recovered consciousness, felt the top of his head smarting and burning terrifically, and his eyes blinded by blood. But his bodily strength and feeling of soundness were wholly undiminished. He rose, wiped the blood from his eyes, washed his head at a pool, and found that the ball had merely grazed his skull. Binding up his head with his handkerchief, he once more set forward, trusting this this time to steer clear of the merciless crew of bush-rangers. But no such good fortune attended him. After marching some miles through a most laborious mountain-track in a deep inland valley, he again saw, to his horror, the robber troop approaching. It was too late to conceal himself; they already saw him; and he heard distinctly the shout of wonder that they raised on perceiving him.

"'"What!" exclaimed the terrible Howe, "still alive? Will neither poison nor bullet destroy thee? Why, thou art a cat-o'-mountain, with not nine, but any number of lives at the devil's need. Art thou man, or ghost, or fiend?"

"'The poor wretch once more, and still more movingly, pleaded for his life.

"'"What had he done?" he asked. "He wanted only to join them, and he would be their slave, their fag, their pack-horse, their forlorn hope in any desperate cases—anything, so that they only let him live."

"'"Live!" exclaimed the barbarous leader; "live! Why, thou livest in spite of me! Neither fire nor physic harm thee! Nay, I would kill thee, if it were only to see what it takes to do it. I have a curiosity to know whether thou canst be killed, or whether thou art not the Wandering Jew, or Old Nick himself." With these words, listening no more to the tears and entreaties of the man than if he had been a hyena, he devoted him to the infernal powers in familiar language, and, stabbing him with his cutlass, said, "Take that!"

"'The man struggled violently on the ground for a few seconds, and then lay still on the sand.

"'"That's a settler, I think," said the outlaw, whose hand had executed worse horrors than even that, since he had been hunted and bidden for by government; burning secluded families in their own huts at midnight, and making solitary travellers run a race for their lives as a mark for the rifles of his

men. "If the fellow comes to life again," he said, coolly, "I must get his secret, for it is very likely to be useful to me." Wiping his cutlass, first on some long grass that he pulled up, and then on his coat-sleeve, he coolly marched away with his crew.'

"'And that certainly must have been a settler,' said the professor.

"'By no means,' added the doctor. 'After a time the convict returned to consciousness. Fearfully weak, he was tormented with a burning thirst; but was still alive. With much effort, and various faintings, he managed to crawl in the direction of a stream that ran riotously and sonorously down the rocky valley, and there quenched his burning thirst in the deliciously cold water. Again exhausted, he sank back on the bank; and would no doubt have perished, had not a stockman come in quest of stray cattle. He removed him to his hut, having first bound up the wound in his chest; and, after a long period of illness and debility, the man was once more well, and determined to return, and deliver himself up to the authorities at Hobart Town, where, you may be sure, his story, and the confirmatory scars upon him, excited an immense sensation.'

"'But how could the man survive a thrust through the body?' said the professor in amazement.

"'It was a mere case of loss of blood,' replied the doctor; 'the weapon had luckily passed between the ribs without touching any vital part, and the man had swooned from agony and hæmorrhage.'

"'Horrid times!' ejaculated Fritz. 'In those days of unnatural history, natural history, of course, was not. Only think of stumbling on Musquito or Howe, who may be called the Tasmanian Alexander the Great; for, literally—

> "'"Thrice he fought his battles o'er,
> And thrice he slew the slain."'

"'Fie, Fritz!' said the doctor, laughing. 'Yet, even in my early days, here I botanised and entomologised. And that was the sole cause of my encountering any danger, or being compelled to shed blood.'

"'To shed blood!' simultaneously exclaimed his hearers.

"A serious cloud passed over the worthy doctor's features, and in a different tone he added: 'Yes! In all my rough and solitary rides in this insular depôt of excited ruffians; in all my night wanderings, when called, as must be the case, to often distant abodes, in the very worst parts of the island; I have always found my profession and my errand an infallible safeguard. Whenever I have been stopped by

outlawed fellows, whose very name and fame all over the island were a horror, to their demand of "Who goes there?" my reply, "The Doctor," brought the instant rejoinder—"All right! Go, in God's name, doctor!" Nay, these very fellows have, on many an occasion, been my guides, conducting me by ways known only to themselves, confident that I would never betray them. To them I owe a knowledge of passes and short cuts through these hills that no man besides is acquainted with. I have often received refreshments from these fierce outcasts of humanity, when I was ready to faint with exhaustion; more than once I have even slept all night in their rude huts in the mountains, feeling the profoundest security in guards who had the repute of being destitute of all feelings but the most diabolical. I have attended them in their sickness or their wounds, and I have seen and heard revelations by the death-beds of robbers and murderers that would draw tears from a stone. Oh! if the world did but know what glorious faculties and feelings might be cultivated in youth, in the poorest and most abject of our population—toads and deformed reptiles as they afterwards appear to us, yet in whose heads and hearts God has originally deposited the precious jewel of a great and capable nature—many a man who has

come hither leprous with crime, and venomous as a trodden serpent, would have remained at home to adorn society, and to accelerate its progress towards higher knowledge and a nobler standard of opinion.'

"'But what was the exception?'

"'This: I had but little to do, and I made long rambles, devoting those attentions to insects which were not required by patients. In one of these, I entered a new township in a remote situation, and stopped for the night at an inn still but partly furnished. I observed that my bedroom had no lock, but that was too common to give me any concern. But, having deposited in this room when I had gone up, on entering, to wash my hands, a brace of pistols, and a small morocco case in which I carried my insects, I observed that these articles had been removed and replaced in a very different manner. I examined the pistols, and found, to my surprise, that they had been both unloaded, and that water had been poured into them. This gave me a strange sensation, and it occurred to me that my insect case had been supposed to contain money, and that there was a design to rob me. It was too late to quit the house without notice, and without running greater risk outside than in the room itself. I carefully wiped dry and reloaded the pistols, drew with as

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little noise as possible a heavy chest of drawers against the door, and threw myself down in my clothes, anxiously waiting for the anticipated attack. It came. About midnight, I heard something at the door—force applied to push back the obstruction. My candle had burnt out; but I exclaimed, "Who's there?"

"'"Oh! are you awake?" said a man's voice, which I supposed that of the landlord; "I want to come in for some bed linen in the drawers—a guest has just arrived, and we can 't do without it."

"'I told him nobody should come in on any account till morning. The man swore that he must and would, and proceeded to push violently at the door. On this I started up and cried, "Desist! or take the consequences; whoever comes in here is a dead man!" But the man—and he was a huge, brawny fellow—swore dreadful oaths that he would come in; and, as he furiously thrust open the door, I fired.'

"'Mein Gott!' exclaimed the two German gentlemen, recurring in their excitement to their native tongue, though they usually spoke English like Englishmen.

"'Yes,' continued the doctor; 'he fell, I heard a groan. I could see nothing, but I heard a great running on the stairs, and low, suppressed exclama-

tions of horror, and whisperings. Then all was still, and I remained in a condition which you may imagine till morning. No one came near the chamber. At daybreak I pushed away the drawers, looked out, expecting to see a frightful stain of blood, but all was clean — the floor had been carefully scoured.

" 'I descended. There was no one to be seen but a girl, who looked at me with a sort of stupid wonder. I asked what I owed, paid it to her, and walked away. No one appeared to oppose or to question me. It seemed all like a horrible dream. As I ascended the village, a man began tolling a bell which hung in a tree by a new wooden chapel. I asked what that meant.'

" ' "It is the passing-bell," said the man, "for the landlord down yonder, who died suddenly in the night."

" 'The words struck me like an actual blow; I went on — no one pursued me — no one ever afterwards spoke or seemed to know of the affair. A short time ago I was in that neighbourhood. The place is become a great town; a new family is in the inn, which is one of extensive business. I ventured to ask if such a tradition did not exist? No one had heard a syllable about it.'

" 'You had a narrow escape, doctor,' said his wondering friends.

" 'Ay; and what would I now give if I had but told that dishonest landlord that I had discovered his trick, and that my pistols were once more loaded? It was his conviction that they were empty which made him secure.'

" 'No doubt of it,' replied the professor, 'and enabled you to rid the country of a monster who would have victimised others if he even failed with you.'

" 'That is my only comfort,' said the doctor, musingly; 'but we must soon to bed, and before I can do that, I must relieve my mind of another scene, which I can only effect by giving it words, and thus insure my sleep. I have just witnessed the end of one of those extraordinary animals which it requires the air of Europe, and that of new colonies combined, to produce.'

" 'What animal can that be?' asked the naturalists, their attention excited by the expectation of some novelty in their own region of inquiry.

" 'It is the land-shark,' said the doctor.

" 'The land-shark!' said the eager expectants, laughing; 'that must be a *lusus naturæ,* a nondescript, indeed.'

" 'No,' replied the doctor; 'it is a creature well

known, accurately described and classified; no sport of nature, but the offspring of colonial life and of the spirit of modern Europe. You have seen the Tasmanian devil—a furious beast that will devour its own species when wounded. The land-shark is even a worse devourer of his kind. You have seen how horses here will paw up and devour earth on which salt has been spilled?'

"'Yes,' said Fritz, merrily; 'I know that to my cost; for many a time have I had to rise and rush forth in the night, and, undressed, chase away into the bush wretched horses who were champing, and pawing, and snorting close to our tent, where we had poured out the salt water from pickled beef.'

"'Well,' continued the doctor, 'the land-shark swallows up earth by acres and leagues; the wehr-wolf of Scandinavian legends never had such a capacity for the marvellous in deglutition. Australia has produced no lion, tiger, grizzly bear, or such ferocious monsters, but it has produced the land-shark, and that is a *monstrum horrendum* worse than all of them put together. It is worse, because it wears the shape of a man; and, with a face as innocent, as meek, and placid as a manticora or a syren, takes shelter under human laws. In a word, a land-shark is a thing which combines all the attributes of the incubus,

the cannibal, the vampire, and the choke-damp. Where it lives nobody else can live. It is the upas-tree become animated, and, walking over the southern world like a new Frankenstein, producing stagnation, distortion, death-in-life, and desolation wherever it arrives. It is the regrater and forestaller of the old world, against whose inhuman practice so many statutes have been enacted, thus turned up as the opponent of Providence in a new sphere. It is the meal-worm of the shop converted by what it feeds on into the hungry caterpillar of these lands.

" 'I have to-day stood by the death-bed of a primate of this class. Peter Stonecrop was one of the earliest inhabitants of this colony, and his death will make a sensation. Of his beginning, which must have been tolerably obscure, I know nothing; but he was an illiterate man, and sordid from the first known of him. He got a large grant of land here, when grants were going as freely as the winds or the clouds. He never cultivated it. He bought more land—cheap, dog cheap—but he never cultivated it. What he got he kept, for he spent nothing. A hut scarcely fit for a labourer was his sole abode. He never could afford to marry. He was in this respect more penurious than Long Clarke, a congener, and the prince of land-sharks.

" 'Peter Stonecrop is little behind his celebrated chief, I mean in accumulation of lands. Though to-day he possesses but some six feet of earth, yesterday he was lord of fifty thousand acres. In one respect his influence has been more mischievous than Clarke's; for he has contrived to pitch, with a singular foresight, on a whole host of places that must, in the nature of things, become populous and influential. Where a port was needed, they had to repurchase the site from Stonecrop, at cent. per cent. cost. Where a town should spring up, the purchases of Stonecrop stood in the way, and turned the tide of building into a far worse position. Where families longed to settle, and saw in imagination fertile farms, and happy homes, Stonecrop had put his hand on the waste, and a waste it remained. Thus have this man and his congeners gone on obstructing settlement, distorting progress, pushing back from the warm sunshine of existence thousands of human creatures, because there was no place for them in the new and beautiful lands which God has revealed to the destitute masses of crowded Europe. Imagine Battery Point, in Hobart Town, with its magnificent situation on the estuary, and in the very centre of the new metropolis, being bought by the father of the present excellent Kermode for eight hundred pounds. Imagine

what it is worth now, with its sites, its buildings, its capabilities, nay, its necessities — every foot of earth precious as so much gold-dust. It is such startling, prominent, exciting spectacles, that have created the tribe of voracious, yet indigesting land-sharks. But it is in Victoria that the race and the mischief have at length culminated. There the in-rushing torrents of gold-seekers have found the squatter and the land-shark in a coalition terrible as an antarctic frost. What the one was reluctantly compelled to let go, the other seized. The land-shark was before the population, but certain of its arrival, purchasing up large tracts when they were to be had. Wherever the government offered modicums of land to the clamorous public, the land-shark was there, and outbid them, because he could wait, and knew that the higher the pressure of population the higher the price. You are no strangers to the outcries on that side the Straits for land; the indignant remonstrance and the reflux of despairing emigrants from those fair and fertile shores, where the squatter and the land-shark reign — the lords of a monopoly that amazes all wise men, and fills the valleys and prairies of America with millions on millions of people meant by Providence for the planters and forefathers of a glorious England of the south. You will yet hear, if this un-

holy alliance be not speedily cancelled, of woful tempests of vainly-repressed passion, and melancholy chronicles of bloodshed.

" 'Adelaide is the only Australian colony which, warned by the vicinity of the prowling monster, has guarded against him, and has offered to the small capitalist the opportunity of securing small farms; and it has seen its reward in a numerous, increasing, thriving, and happy rural population, capable already of sending out surplus produce to the incubus-ridden Victoria. But to my man.

" 'Peter Stonecrop was one of my very first patients, and he taught me one of my earliest lessons of caution. He came to me with a violent inflammation of the pleura. He doubtless selected me, as a young, and, as he hoped, a cheap practitioner. He actually passed on his way a much nearer and very able medical man, and, in agonies which nothing but the intensest avarice could have enabled him to endure, arrived at my door. Any other individual would have sent for a medical man to come to him, but his penurious soul would not allow him such a luxury. I opened my door, and saw him seated on a white, bony steed. I involuntarily thought of Death upon the pale horse; such was his ghastly and tortured aspect.

" 'I took him in, doctored, nursed, and kept him for a month. As he grew nearly well, he began to talk to me of my practice and prospects; said he knew it was anxious and up-hill work for a young man in a new place. I candidly confessed it was, and he sympathised—as I thought, feelingly—with me. He frequently shook his head seriously, muttered, "Yes; hard work, very hard work: but we must help one another. My good doctor, let me know what I owe you. You've been very kind to me, and I hope I shall show myself sensible of it."

" 'My impression was that he meant to make me some handsome present—something correspondent to his ample fortune, and the services I had rendered him. I therefore was careful to charge him as moderately as possible. I felt bound to rely on his generosity. He took his bill, paid me exactly to the farthing, called for his horse, and rode off. The land-shark and the miser are one.

" 'Twenty years have flown since then. Old age has only bent his iron frame nearer to the earth which held his soul. If ever there was a thing of the earth, earthy, it was Stonecrop. Like Mammon,—

> " ' "The least erected spirit that fell,
> From Heaven, for even in Heaven his looks and thoughts
> Were always downward bent" —

Stonecrop seemed only to see the earth, and be conscious of its existence. Whether he ever saw the sky, with its translucent and inspiring universe of suns and worlds, is doubtful, but certainly it never suggested to him vast colonies of spiritual life, and all the sublime thoughts that claim for us kinship with the Infinite. From time to time sad stories of hard dealings and oppressive acts towards widows and orphans, over whose property he had extended his mortgage-net, reached the public, and of wondrous sums of money, of no more real use to him than so many oyster-shells. From the day that I restored him to a worthless life, he never came again under my hands, and never did me the slightest kindness.

"'Yet, the other day came a messenger with hot haste to call me to him. Stonecrop, he said, was dying, or feared so. A new settlement was laid out on the western coast, the vultures of speculation had already flocked there, and Stonecrop was first in the field. He had pounced on various lots just where an acute surveyor should have reserved them for the public. He had possessed himself of the only sites for quays and wharves, for the erection of a church, and for the supply of spring water. He had managed to monopolise woodlands, just where their magnifi-

cent timber was at hand for exportation. If they wanted a market they must re-buy it of him.

"'From what the man could tell me, I perceived that the very complaint of which I had formerly relieved him, had seized him once more in his old age. I believed his time was come, but I did not feel justified in refusing his call under such solemn circumstances, where no other aid was to be got; I resolved, however, to make a stand for some fair remuneration this time. When the messenger saw I hesitated to undertake the journey, he pulled from his pocket an open note. It was in Stonecrop's own scraggy, scrambling hand, now almost illegible from feebleness; but it offered large terms, which showed that he doubted of my coming. I wrote at the foot of the note that I accepted them, and made the messenger witness it. We went.

"'When we descended into this new township it was evening, almost dark, and there was a fog so thick that, as my guide said, "you might almost hang your hat up on it." We made our way through roods of mire a yard deep, ploughed up by bullock-teams; and piles of sawn timber, and trunks of felled trees, amongst blazing fires that blinded us, when near, and which gave us no help at a distance for the dense haze. In the midst of all the indescrib-

able confusion, discomfort, and ugliness of such a nascent settlement, we found our great man, domiciled in a mere shed, which had been erected by some sawyers. There he had cooked for himself; and, if one might jest on such a subject, had literally taken in and done for himself. The dampness of that low, hollow spot, and the incessant rains, had again produced a pleurisy.

" 'A kind-hearted woman, the wife of a drayman just by, had gone in at his cries, and nursed him to the best of her ability. She described his agonies and moans as having been terrible; and when I said, "but he is still now," she gave a look full of meaning, and said:

" ' " Yes, and to my thinking will soon be stiller."

" 'I went in. A candle burnt on a deal box, besides the bedstead, the only furniture of the hut. The wretched man lay wide awake, watching with a keen look the doorway, and as I advanced, he lifted up his right hand, and said:

" ' " That 's you, doctor; but I 'm better; we were in too great a hurry. You 'll consider that, eh?"

" ' " You are better, you think?"

" ' " O, much better! my pains are gone. They were shocking, shocking. If I could but move my legs—but they seem to be lead. Yet what can ail them? I am better, much better."

" ' During this time I was feeling his pulse. He watched me with a look which betrayed a far deeper anxiety than his words would indicate. I put down his arm quietly, and sate in solemn silence on a rude stool, which the woman brought me to his bedside.

" ' "You think me better, doctor, do n't you?" said the wasted old man, with a ghastly and eager look. "You must think so, I am so easy now."

" ' "Mr. Stonecrop," I said, in a tone to prepare him as well as I could for the truth, "you are now an old man, and no circumstance should take you by surprise, especially where it concerns your most important affairs. You are easy; thank God for it; but do n't calculate upon that as delaying the crisis at which we must all arrive. I cannot flatter you with hopes of recovery."

" ' The thin, prominent features of the dying man, which looked wan and bloodless before, at these words grew livid. His eyes glared on me with a fearful expression, their white gleaming with a strange largeness and glaziness. He clutched me by the sleeve with his big, bony hand, which yet seemed to retain an iron grasp.

" ' "But you do n't think I shall die soon? Not for some days, weeks, months? No, no, I cannot die, I have so much to do."

" ' " Let me speak plainly to you," I added. " If you have so much to do, you have little time to do it in. Your hours, nay, your minutes, are numbered."

" ' At these words, he lay for a few moments, as if stunned. Then, dragging hard at my sleeve, he exclaimed, in a fearful, gasping voice, between a screech and a whisper :

" ' " No, no, doctor, you must not say that ! You won't say that ! Save me ! Save me ! and take half my land."

" ' " Not all the land on earth," I said, " could save you for a second beyond the two short hours that the progress of your disease has marked out for you."

" ' " But you must save me, doctor. You can do it; you did it before. Think what I have to do; what affairs I have unsettled. And that Widow Tredgold, who prayed that I might never see her mortgaged fields again — what won't she say ? A judgment she 'll call it. No, no, doctor, save me ! Say but the word, and I 'll forgive the widow all. And those Hexham's children — them, too — them, too ! O Lord ! O Lord ! who would have to do with widows and orphans ? A man has no chance. There is no driving a bargain with them with any comfort — only trouble,—trouble,— trouble ! But let them do just as they like. Doctor, say the word, and I 'll build a

church here. They 'll want one. Say it at once, doctor. I can 't die, for I have so much—so very much to do!"

"'"Have you made your will?"

"'"No—yes, I once did. I left my nephew the land, and my two nieces the houses and the money. But it would not do. When I looked on my lands they seemed no longer mine. These, I said, are Tom's; and when I looked at the houses and securities, these, I said, are Mary's and Jane's. No, no; they were no longer mine. I could not feel them mine, and I tore up the will."

"'"You must make another."

"'"Yes, yes, doctor—you 'll give me time for that? Oh, I have much—so very much to do!"

"'I gave the woman instructions to fetch in pen and paper, quickly; but such things are not soon procured in such a spot. When she was gone, I added: "And your Maker, who has crowned you with so much of his wealth, how stand your preparations with him?"

"'"Time enough for that, doctor. Let us make the will first. That 's the first thing—that must be done first."

"'He endeavoured to turn himself, as if to be ready to dictate; but sudden spasms seized him; he

gasped for breath; clutched convulsively my sleeve; groaned, his head fell back, and with a deep sigh, saying half audibly, "I have so much to do!" the days of the great owner of many lands were over. The shrewd foreseer of events, the sagacious speculator, the keen safe bargainer, died, with his chief work unaccomplished—the grand bargain of existence unsecured!

"'It has required the sharp ride of to-day, over rock, and stone, and fallen trunk, up steep jagged acclivities, and over many a mile of dark mountain forest, amid the moaning winds and the snapping boughs, to dissipate the black impression of that death-bed. But now for a sleep!'

"The three friends threw themselves on their hard couches; and, at break of day, were travelling through a region of magnificent mountains, with a bright sun beaming above them amid flying clouds, towards the hospitable home of the accomplished and popular Æsculapius."

It was late when our travellers turned into bed, and Charles awoke in the morning with the strangest confusion of half-remembered dreams of more and odder creatures than ever took refuge in Noah's ark, mingled with ever-recurring bands of bush-rangers, and

doctors traversing the wildest mountains to carry aid, if possible, to moribund land-sharks.

Towards noon the river was considerably fallen, and the squatter conducted his guests to a ford higher up, which was much easier to those who knew it. In good time that afternoon they were once more safe at Bongubine. One more night Charles was compelled to pass there; and the following morning he left the house of Mr. Peter Martin, the reputed enemy of his family, with the warm and deeply-rooted conviction that he and his were amongst the most sterling and loveable people on the earth. But he was not suffered to proceed alone. Once more Mr. Martin mounted and set out with him. They rode on till they reached the height above Tallangetta, and the conversation had been such as had enchained the ear of the younger man to the voice of the elder one, as if there had been a more than human fascination in it. Mr. Martin went over the grounds of difference between himself and his father. He reminded Charles that he and Thomas Fitzpatrick his father were sisters' sons; that his own mother had died early, leaving him in charge of Lady Fitzpatrick; his father had been long deceased. The sisters had been bound to each other with a most tender and devoted attachment. Lady Fitzpatrick had regarded him with an affection

little short of that which she entertained for her own children. He and Thomas Fitzpatrick had been at school and college together; they had been the best of friends till near manhood, when Mr. Fitzpatrick's fatal passion for the turf had displayed itself, to the deep grief and alarm of his parents and relatives. Then they took diverse ways. For himself, he detested everything belonging to gambling, but the gambling of the course above all other. He recoiled in disgust from the society of that class. He took especial delight in the cultivation of his estate, and the enjoyment of his library. His Homer, his Xenophon, and his Cicero were his favourite companions. Mr. Fitzpatrick came very young into possession of his large property and title, and the result was too well known. His mother sought sympathy in his, Mr. Martin's, society, for he loved her as a mother. To him she confided her sorrows and fears, and to the day of her death she was firm and unshaken in her friendship for him. Meantime the most hostile feelings had grown up towards him in Sir Thomas. Perhaps he himself had not been destitute of blame in evincing too much anger and indignation in his warnings and entreaties to Sir Thomas, both as commissioned by his mother, or as proffered by himself. But before Lady Fitzpatrick

died, she foretold extraordinary ruin and misery to her son, and took a solemn pledge from him, her nephew, never to forsake him, and to spare no pains or sacrifices finally to save him.

"And yet," Charles ventured to say, "when my father was attacked and borne down by the pretender, Sir Patrick, you never came forward with any tender of evidence or funds. That is what embitters my father especially, and which none of us can understand."

"There," continued Mr. Peter Martin, "appearances are clearly against me. But evidence I had none, and funds your father would, under our then relations, have rejected with scorn. Besides, I was pledged by his own mother, who, with all her unquestionable affection, was one of the most firm and far-seeing women that ever lived, not to move in any way up to a certain crisis."

"And what crisis was that?" asked Charles.

"The crisis of utter loss of fortune, and the reaction of mind which should follow it. Your noble-hearted grandmother, while she mourned bitterly over her son, and went sorrowfully towards the grave on his account, believed that nothing short of such a crisis could effectually root the dominant, absorbing pas-

sion from his soul, and give free play to the exalted qualities which there withered in its shade."

"But the marriage certificate," said Charles, "can you say where that is? For without that I can see no ground for the hopes of my father's restoration to his rights, which I believe you entertain."

"No! God knows where that can be! Yet sometimes I have my thoughts about that; but you forget, there is yet a chance besides that — a chance of the discovery of the chaplain who celebrated the marriage."

Charles sighed. "A poor chance, indeed, I fear. Every effort to trace him has failed, and we are not very likely to discover him in these woods."

"I would not even say that," added Mr. Martin; "there is a strange gathering of all the ends of the earth here."

Charles shook his head; and after a considerable pause, he said: "And may I ask what induced you to come out here?"

"That is a point I wished to come to," added Mr. Peter Martin. "It was in obedience to the pledge which I gave to your grandmother. It was to secure your safety and return."

"Safety!" said Charles. "I imagine we are safe

enough here, at all events. Sir Patrick will not trouble himself to follow us hither."

"You are safe while I am here," said Mr. Martin, solemnly; "if I said you would not be so were I away, would you believe me?"

Charles paused a moment; the remembrance of this strange man putting his life in peril in the flood came over his mind, and he said, "Certainly; I would believe you as I would believe my own senses."

"Then believe that I watch over you, and that the time comes on amain which will show that, and will clear up everything."

He put out his hand, grasped the young man's vigorously, wheeled round his horse, and dashed away through the woods.

CHAP. IX.

THE STORM BREAKS.

Charles Fitzpatrick rode down the hill towards his gloriously-situated home, not as if he was returning joyfully from a successfully executed mission, but as if some heavy tidings retarded his reluctant course. The words of his extraordinary companion were still sounding in his ears. The strange past, the strangely-predicted and fast-approaching future, engrossed his whole mind. What a mystery there was about this man; and yet what a truth he felt was in him. How his very words — that he was watching over them — tallied with the words of the mysterious message. And what could be this danger which he intimated, and which he was here to control? It was all unreal as a dream, and yet to him more real than any other reality. So completely was he living in the heart of this mystery, that the beautiful lake, the wide woods and hazy peaks of mountains rising far distant out of them, the smoking huts below, and the white walls of his own home,

were unseen and unthought of by him; and it was only when coming near that the apprehension of his father's anger, on the discovery of the proximity of this his old antagonist, fell over him. He put his mare into a canter, and came up to the door with the liveliest air that he could assume.

At the sound of his horse's hoofs there were eager faces at the window; and in another moment his father, mother, and sister were all at the door with words of most affectionate welcome. "What luck?" exclaimed his father. "All right," Charles replied, dismounting, and flinging his bridle to the groom. Speedily he was seated in the midst of his family circle, who were full of inquiries regarding his journey; and, to put off the evil hour, Charles related the occurrence of the storm, and the difficulty of crossing the river. He added that Mr. Farbrother signed the agreement at once, and he then handed it in an off-hand way to his father. Mr. Fitzpatrick took it, just opened it, saw the signature of Mr. Farbrother, rose, put the document into his desk, and sate down again to listen to his son's story. Dinner came in, and they all sate down to it in great joy. There appeared every prospect of a delightful evening; all were so deeply interested in Charles's dangers in the woods and floods. But such prospect

was fallacious, it could not endure. They began to inquire after the Metcalfes, and how Bell was, and whether Brady had accompanied him across the Campaspe. Alas! at every fresh question Charles's countenance fell, cloud followed on cloud, and he was obliged to confess that he had not reached Moolap, but a strange station.

"A strange station! What could that be?"

"Oh, a station called Bongubine."

"Bongubine! A good name — native they supposed. And who lived there?"

"A family of the name of Martin — a very decent family."

"Martin! how odd! What sort of people were they? — cultivated people?"

Mr. Fitzpatrick started up, went to the desk, took out the agreement, unfolded it, and stood for some time as if he were in a dream.

Then, holding out the paper towards Charles, he said, in a stern sort of voice, "Who is the man who witnessed this? Was this the squatter of Bongubine?"

"The same," said Charles, unable to conceal a tremor which shook every limb.

"The same!" exclaimed his father. "What kind of man was he? Peter Martin! Who is he?

There was a sudden shock at the name which went through the ladies like that from a galvanic battery, and a short exclamation as of terror. All turned pale, while Mr. Fitzpatrick, on the contrary, grew scarlet, as with passion.

"Speak, Charles, at once. Who is this man who bears so devilish a name, and bears it so near us?"

Charles felt that he was on the edge of a crater; but there was no escaping. He manned himself for the explosion, and said, as deprecatingly as possible, "Dear father, I am sorry, for your sake, to say that it is the very man who has always borne that name."

There was a wild shriek now from the ladies, simultaneously. They all sprang up in horror, and Mr. Fitzpatrick stood convulsed with rage in a manner that was most frightful to witness. His hand clutched the paper in spasmodic fury. His face was swollen and distorted. His eyes rolled and blazed with frenzy; his mouth worked with the most hideous action; he ground his teeth, but uttered not a word.

His wife and sister rushed towards him in terror, every moment expecting that he would fall in a fit, crying, "Oh, Sir Thomas! Sir Thomas! speak, for God's sake, speak!" Charles stood pale as a ghost,

and trembling violently; and Georgina clung to her father, and burst into a passion of tears.

But at once the demoniac spasm of dumb rage gave way. Sir Thomas, as we may just now with his family call him, pushed back the ladies fiercely, and, addressing Charles in a terrible voice, exclaimed, "The devil here! the devil of devils! And you have been with him?—you, my son—you—have been with him? Been under his roof? eaten his bread? accepted his company? put yourself under obligations to him? Death and confusion! My own flesh and blood, my own son, thus to turn traitor to me! And, after this, can you thus show your face before me? Speak, villain, speak! how dare you? how——"

His voice failed him; his lips quivered; his whole frame trembled; his face was livid, and almost black with anger. At once he dashed down the paper which he held in his hand, stamped on it with his foot, and went like a tempest from the room.

Charles picked up the important though unlucky paper, and sate with a feeling of inexpressible horror upon him. His mother, aunt, sister, all were sunk down on their seats, weeping and sobbing violently. There was a long continuance of this miserable scene, when Charles ventured to say, "What have I done

to deserve all this? I was driven by a terrible storm and night to this man's house. He would not let me go; he insisted on accompanying me. He risked his life to effect my object. And I will say it, however you may think of it, that both he and his family have behaved throughout like anything but enemies to us."

"Oh, my dearest Charles!" said all the ladies at once, his sister rushing to him, and embracing him passionately. "What a misfortune! What is to become of us?" And again they gave way to excessive grief. Suddenly, Mrs. Fitzpatrick hastened from the room after her husband; Aunt Judith followed; and Georgina, coming and clasping Charles's arm, and weeping profusely, said, "Oh, dearest Charles, how unfortunate that you fell in with these people! How unfortunate that they have followed us! All is over now; all our quiet happiness here! How inveterate must this man's enmity be to induce him to pursue us across the globe."

"Geordy, I do n't believe it!" said Charles. "I do n't believe in his enmity. If you had seen what I have, you would not believe it. Do people risk their lives out of enmity?"

"But at all events, then," said Georgina, "what

a pity Papa should know; that this man should have signed that paper."

"But, Geordy, the man, as you call him, being here, Papa must soon know; and if he had not signed the agreement, and it came out, as it would, that I had been there, that would have looked like a concealment, which my father would have resented in me still more. No, no; Martin being here, my father must know: and, though I was startled when I saw he had signed the paper, I immediately felt it was all for the best; and, if Papa would only listen to reason, he would soon see that there is no danger, but good, awaiting us."

"Good!" exclaimed Georgina, "good! oh, Charles! never, never. All this sweet peace, this quiet life, it is all over; we shall have to leave."

"Do n't believe it, Geordy," said Charles, throwing his arm round her; "do n't believe it. I know my father; he will defy the devil, as he calls him, but he is too proud to budge a step."

"Then, what a miserable life for us here, Charley! What a miserable life! All that old misery; those terrible outbreaks of fury, that fear of apoplexy, of the rupture of some fatal vessel, that prostration in which poor dear father used to lie after those frightful paroxysms. Oh! sad, sad: what shall we do?"

"But listen, Geordy," said Charles, and he began to tell her all that had passed. How amiable the Martins appeared; what the boys had said; what Mr. Martin had said on the road of his endeavours for their good. Georgina for some time listened with incredulous ears, shook her head, and shed fresh tears. When, however, Charles had told her all, she said, "Well; at least, it is very strange, very unaccountable. I do n't know what to think: I wish I could believe it all true." The unhappy brother and sister sat, with their arms about each other, in the utmost sorrow. Meantime, in his own bedroom, Mr. Fitzpatrick had exhibited all that violence of rage which had made his family so miserable during the years that his trials with Sir Patrick were going on. Oh, those miserable times! how they came back like a black night over the house. It was like the crack of doom bursting again on this fated family which, after years of the most awful unhappiness, had seemed to have escaped far away from all the old wretchedness into a new life of peace, beauty, and hope.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick and Aunt Judith could only sit and listen to the outburst of the dreadful storm of passion; any attempts on their part to soothe Mr. Fitzpatrick only the more irritated him, and they sat

and trembled and wept, while he cursed his fate and denounced vengeance and death on the villain who dared thus to dog him to the world's end. For hours he marched to and fro across the room, sometimes wrapped in gloomy thought, sometimes striking his forehead and clenching his hands, and with fearful groans again bursting forth in imprecations on his own fortune and on the detested pursuer of his steps. Towards midnight he staggered in his walk, caught at the bed-post, sat down in a sullen lowering mood, and gradually fell into that state of prostration which always followed these paroxysms, and which, perhaps fortunately for him, would sometimes continue for days. His family had always expected that in some one of these outbreaks he would die by apoplexy or rupture of a vessel; and the two ladies saw with a certain degree of satisfaction his subsidence into this state of exhaustion. Aunt Judith then stole quietly out, and Mrs. Fitzpatrick sat down and watched by his side.

When Aunt Judith joined the two young people, she found them still sitting with their arms round each other, silent and miserable. They rose and asked her how their father was. "He is quiet now," said Aunt Judith; "but what an ending to our beautiful new life!"

Charles endeavoured to impress Aunt Judith with the ideas which he had been communicating to his sister, but to all that he urged she only replied by shaking her head, and saying: "It won't do! it won't do! the thing is bad, bad, bad, past redemption. We are now ruined for ever!" When Charles spoke of the amiable appearance of the Martin family, of the straightforward character of the man, Aunt Judith replied: "Yes! there is the mischief of it. If the family had the character of a bad family, if the man had bad habits, the world would see and understand it; but there is the mischief. The family conducts itself admirably, the man is in all but his inextinguishable enmity to my brother, a correct, an honourable, a domestic, and most respectable man. That is his art. That is his tower of strength. It is out of this tower that he can fling his poisoned darts with tenfold effect. If he were confessedly bad, he were at once powerless."

When Charles related what he had accidentally heard from the boys—"Ha! cunning!" said Aunt Judith; "that was meant for you!" When he reminded her of Peter Martin's bold fording of the river to serve him, and his risking his very life—"But," said Aunt Judith, "he told you it was an accident; he did not mean to risk anything! Oh!"

continued she, clasping her hands and looking upwards, "if he had but drowned himself, what a blessing!" Such was the feeling with which a most deplorable family feud could inspire the kind heart of even Aunt Judith. But when Charles told her that Mr. Martin had hinted at dangers that threatened them here, and that he was on the watch to defeat those dangers, Aunt Judith exclaimed: "Oh! the consummate hypocrite! He defend us from dangers! What dangers can there be here except from himself? Charles! Charles! are you so blind, so easily imposed on? Oh! you do not know the craft, the subtlety of this man! He threw out that hint to unsettle us. He had heard that we are happy here, and he has resolved to chase us away, or make us wretched on the spot. Oh, the Judas! Oh, the fiend!"

Charles reflected for a moment. Could these things be so? Were they a part of this man's art? But he speedily cast the suspicion from him. He *felt* that it was not so. He was as sure as of his life, that what he had seen and heard was genuine. "Dearest Aunt," he said, "if you and my father would listen to reason, I am sure you would soon think differently."

"Reason!" said Aunt Judith, vehemently; "reason! there is no reason about Mr. Peter Martin; there

cannot be. Never! never! will your father condescend to speak concerning him. Do n't attempt it, or you may cost him his life."

"Very well, dear Aunt, very well," said Charles; "be it so; we will leave it to time." They all withdrew to bed, miserable and silent.

When Charles entered the breakfast-room the next morning, he found Dr. Woolstan seated at table with Aunt Judith and Georgina. He had been sent for in the night. There was a gloomy expression on the faces of the ladies. They looked very pale and ill. The doctor rose kindly, pressed Charles's hand, and in reply to his inquiry, said his father was now quiet, and getting some good sleep. When, after breakfast, the doctor rose to depart, Charles accompanied him up the hill. He asked him what he knew and thought of the Martins. He replied, that he thought them very excellent people, and Mr. Martin as real and kind-hearted as he was certainly a profoundly informed and clever man.

Charles said he wished that he could make his family believe that. "Yes," said the doctor, "that were a work indeed! That were to remove mountains. I know all that has taken place; but time, my dear young friend, time, that will do it: keep quiet, let the storm blow over, things are working, and will work

without you. Be passive, and above all things do not contest these matters with your father, as you wish to keep him."

Charles saw that the doctor knew all; he felt the full wisdom of his words, he pressed his hand cordially, thanked him, and went home consoled. But not the more was that home restored to peace. Comfort, happiness, had fled. For a week the paroxysms of his father returned with returning strength. He was continually haunted with the idea of being pursued and beset by his unwearied, unappeasable foe. That his life was doomed to be embittered by him to its close, and that no spot of earth, however remote, was secure from his pursuit. Sometimes he worked himself up to a persuasion that it would be justifiable to rid himself of him as he would of a wolf or a serpent. At others he shuddered at the possibility of staining his hands with human and kindred blood. His mind turned and preyed upon itself for want of a proper outlet for its anguish. Now he would flee once more, now he would not move a step for the world; and when he looked out of his window and saw the magnificent scenes around, he groaned in bitter pain at the thought that all this was spoiled for ever, that Satan was in his paradise.

It was a full week before he sent for Charles into

his room. Charles was shocked to see how much he was changed. His face was sunken from its rosy plumpness to a withered yellow; his form was reduced in substance; his hair appeared gray, and hung wild and lank. There was the languor of sickness in his whole appearance; and his eyes, generally so clear and bright, were dull, and the once clear white, yellow and streaked with a fine network of sanguine veins.

As his son approached he clasped him in his arms, and sobbed heavily. He remembered the bitter words he had spoken in his anger, and especially the word "villain," and his noble heart was wrung with remorse. After a time, and still with his arm laid on Charles's neck, he said, "You meant no harm, Demby; but avoid that man — promise me. You don't know him, and I trust never will. Why should we let him break our domestic harmony? No; you will have nothing to do with him."

"I will do whatever you please, papa," said Charles, kissing his father's hand, and the tears starting to his eyes.

"That's right, my boy — I believe you — so no more about it." The father and son walked out together into the sitting-room.

But the brightness of that home could not come back thus. "The glory and the joy" were gone

from Tallangetta. The enemy was in the vicinity: the storm which had burst upon its roof had left deep and lasting traces. Deep were the traces in every heart and on every brow in that lately so happy family; but deepest far on those of its master. The terrible shock which had gone through his whole system left its wounds and its weakness in the entire frame. He still looked ill, and had lost his elasticity. His rides were never far from home, and always in the company of his son, and often of his daughter, or, in their absence, of David Rannock. Mirth and spirit were no longer found in the mood even of the young people. He himself rode sad and silent. Thus time went on: no event took place: the hated personage never appeared upon the scene. Nothing was heard of the Martins or of Bongubine more than if they had been altogether the creations of a dismal dream. The other neighbours came sociably and partook the hospitalities of Tallangetta, and shared in its sports. Captain and Mrs. Ponceford were, from their nearness, constantly riding up, and, from their pleasant and cheerful natures, became regarded with warm affection, and their presence brought certain cheerfulness. The Woolstans, the Metcalfes, the Quarriers, were all most friendly and welcome neighbours. Charles and Captain Ponceford found

abundance of sporting together. Sometimes stalking wild turkeys on the plains; sometimes hunting up the wild ducks and swans on the Monalka and the lake; and sometimes chasing the kangaroo in the hill forests with their noble brace of hounds. The natives came to fish and hunt there, and afforded the Fitzpatricks a new object of study. They watched their modes of securing their game, visited them at their camps, and saw with wonder their wretched mode of life, and received plenty of visits from them in return to beg tea, bread, mutton, and, above all, if they could get it, brandy. But this they steadily refused, giving them, instead of it, blankets for the winter, and now and then a sheep or a piece of beef in exchange for fish, which they caught plentifully.

Charles and Georgina paid a visit to the Quarriers at their station on the Goulburn, and greatly enjoyed the change of scenery. The Quarriers' station was situated on a swelling ground just above the river. On three sides rose the forest, dignified with noble trees so thinly disseminated as to allow of a rich turf beneath them, and giving a park-like appearance. On the other rolled the noble river, deep between its banks; and the opposite side also crowned with fine woods. When we say the river lay deep between its banks, we convey no just idea to an English

reader. The river might be sixty yards or more wide, and its waters looked very deep. The banks were almost perpendicular, cut through a sandstone stratum, and dark with the coating of moist mud from the wintry floods. Just below the Quarriers' house the river made a fine sweep, and then its deep abundant waters flowed on in stately grandeur, making a tempting surface for a boat. But no one could descend those steep slippery banks, of twenty or thirty feet descent, overhung with gigantic trees. It required the aid of art, which had been afforded; steps were cut down to the water's edge, and a boat was there always chained in readiness for crossing or fishing. The fishing here was a great delight to Charles, from the grandeur of the fish, — the cod of the river often running to sixty or seventy pounds weight. Sometimes they ascended the river amongst the most beautiful and solitary hills, and at others descended into the silence of the low lands, where on either hand extended immense swamps, dark with wattles or solemn with the endless, huge, bluish columns of the vast red gum-trees, growing in the lively green of nature's ever verdant water-meadows.

Time had thus passed till July, when Mr. Fitzpatrick, as if to recompense Charles for his momentary severity, told him that as they had now sufficient

shepherds and stockmen, and as there were said to be fresh discoveries at Bendigo, he would give him leave to take Barks and Purdy and make an expedition to the diggings.

This was joyful news for all parties. There was an immediate bustle to get ready. The tent which they brought up with them was hauled out; an awning fitted to a light cart; and new mattresses and blankets, an oilcloth to lay on the ground at night to receive their beds, and the necessary cooking-apparatus, and tea and hams and other provisions, were quickly stowed in. Club was selected to accompany them as companion, and a savage, brindled bulldog, called Fright, to chain under the cart as guard. Charles appeared in a pair of fustian trowsers, plunged into a pair of water-proof jack-boots, a stout cabbage-tree hat with light-blue veil, and a scarlet blouse bound by a belt in which appeared his revolver, and a large knife or dagger in a leathern case. Purdy and Barks bore at their belts each a panikin and a brace of pistols; and they had, moreover, a plentiful supply of rifle, gun, and ammunition. Tools they were to buy on the ground.

Never was there more delight and enthusiasm manifested in starting on any adventure. Charles was all life and activity. He was in a constant

worry lest he had left any of his many indispensable articles: his bullet-moulds; his instruments for cleaning his guns and clearing nipples; his caps and cases. Then Club's chain had nearly been left; and his own tobacco-case. At length all was ready, and the cart and brown cob were put into motion from the door, all the family being assembled, and all the families down at the huts being out watching, and ready to wave handkerchiefs and hats, and send up an hurrah. Never since the direful advent of Peter Martin had so many smiles and jokes appeared on the faces and in the mouths of the Tallangetta family; one prophesying heaps of nuggets and insisting on having the largest, and another auguring a speedy return and "glad to be back."

So away went the cart, and our embryo diggers, a dozen voices crying "good bye! good bye!" a loud hurrah mingled with the shrill voices of children coming up from the huts below, Club barking in delight, and Fright trudging on under the cart in sober wonder. In a very short time, the little party had ascended the hill, given a parting cheer before going over the ridge, which was returned vigorously from the huts, and they disappeared.

CHAP. X.

DIGGING ADVENTURES.

Our digging adventurers went on their way with all the jollity of schoolboys. They had but two easy day's journeys before them to Bendigo, and the feeling of free life in the woods has something in it which puts the most sluggish blood in motion, and awakes the imagination to exercise all its enchantments. Barks stalked along with great strides, his long brown hair playing freely on his shoulders, and the spirit of rhodomontade, so strong in him, inciting him to continual sallies of fun. He swung his axe in his hand, and inflicted sundry gashes on the boles of the trees which grew on the road-side, in mere wantonness of spirits, leading Club continually to expect that there was an opossum to be cut out. Purdy went along more quietly, but with many a quiet joke, and sly humour twinkling in his eyes.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, they encamped by the Campaspe. The evening was beautiful and

sunny, and Charles had been attracted to the river by the active movements of a number of platypuses. He had managed to shoot two with his pea-rifle, and Club to bring them out; and they were sitting at their tea, admiring the pleasant hollow in which their tent was pitched, near Robertson's station, with the green meadows and sloping woods on the other side of the stream, when a man appeared, approaching their tent. He was a little fellow, dressed in a coarse blue woollen shirt, stuffed into a pair of ribbed cotton velvet trowsers, which again were stuffed into a pair of dirty boots. This was the whole of his dress, except a very shabby straw hat. But the most remarkable feature of the fellow was a bushy, intense black beard, which seemed to usurp the whole of his face, and to leave only sufficient space for a pair of small, keen, black eyes to peer forth. Club snarled and growled outrageously at the man, and Fright grinned his sullen displeasure from beneath the cart.

"Good evening, mates!" said the man; and before the salutation was well returned, he coolly threw away a bucket of water, which Purdy had just fetched from the river for tea, turned the bucket bottom upwards, and seated himself upon it, in wonderfully close contact to the fire.

"Well, that's cool, mate, anyhow," said Purdy, who was lying on the ground near the fire.

"What! the water, do you mean?" said the man, proceeding, as he sat, to pick up and fling upon the flame sundry little bits of stick, which had been burnt off from the mass.

"The water!" said Purdy, eying the fellow curiously; "no, something cooler than it. Do you know, mate, I'd just had the trouble of fetching it from the river?"

"Trouble! do you call that trouble? You do n't know what trouble is, I see. A new life, this, for you, gents," looking at Charles and Barks.

"Not very new, after California," said Barks, in his strong, jolly sort of voice.

"Pshaw! California!" said the man, picking his teeth with a twig; "you never were there."

"How do you know?" asked Barks.

"By the cut of your jib," said the black-looking fellow dryly.

"Or the cut of our bibs," said Purdy. "You think we are new rigged, eh? Many an old vessel is that."

"Well, old man, you 're right enough there," continued the fellow; "and so you are for the new rush at the Back Creek, I reckon. A good tent," said

he, looking hard at it, "and a pretty sort of cob there," letting his eye ramble round till it fell on the horse grazing in hobbles near. "Take care of him at Bendigo; there are clever fellows in want of such there."

"Your sharp fellows will find sharp practice with us, if they attempt to make too free," said Purdy; "lead 's heavy, but flies fast out of a good minié."

"Um! well stocked with fire-arms, eh?" said the fellow, peering carelessly into the tent. "But the bird is often flown before the gunner is ready. You 've not done much, young master, in California," said he, pointing to Charles's hands. "Plenty of room for a good crop of blisters on that tender skin, before you get down to the gold."

"There are no thieves about here, are there, do you think?" said Purdy, rather jeeringly.

The fellow pointed to the station just below. "Too near that, mate; besides, the government strings the knights of the highway up too unceremoniously now-a-days."

"It 's no catch me, no have me, though," said Purdy; "there are a few of your honest thieves about yet, I fancy."

"Maybe," said the man, lighting his short pipe with an ember from the fire, rising, turning his back

on the blaze for a moment, and then saying, "Good night, men," walked off. As the eyes of the travellers followed him, they caught sight of a fire at a little distance up the valley, towards which the swarthy fellow directed his steps.

"By the mass! an arrant thief that!" said Purdy, jumping up. "I could swear it was the Black Douglas, by all I've heard of him; and little as he looks, he is the devil for cunning and daring. Neither lock nor wall can hold him. These half dozen times the government has had him in quod, and condemned him to the gallows, but he is always away when wanted, and does some fresh horror that makes the hair of the whole colony stand on end. By dogsmeat! we must keep a sharp look out to-night."

"What!" said Charles, "a mean-looking fellow like that, the notorious Black Douglas."

"Just so," said Purdy, "we'll have the horse tethered near the tent to-night, however, and then I think we may trust to Fright and Club for warning. Better still, let us keep watch by turns."

Purdy's advice was deemed good, and so soon as the black-bearded stranger had disappeared, he and Barks took a stroll through the bush to get a sight of the party camping so near them, while Charles stayed to skin his platypuses. When they returned,

they reported that there were half a dozen as sturdy, scoundrel-looking rogues, drinking brandy, round a great fire, as they ever set eyes on. They had no tent or cart, but every man a good horse, hobbled out near them. There could be no question what profession the fellows belonged to. Our party felt considerable anxiety. They resolved to sit up all together for the night; and made up such a blaze, as at once drove off the night cold, and enabled them to see their horse clearly. As the evening advanced, they caught sounds of riot, singing, and, as it seemed, quarrelling from their neighbours; but by midnight all was still, and Purdy, who stole round and took a survey of them as near as he dared go, for fear of alarming their dogs, reported that they were all sleeping round the fire. This quieted their apprehensions, and Charles and Barks flung themselves down in their blankets, to be called in their turns to watch. When Barks was called, he said, "Where is the horse?" "There, lying down," said Purdy, pointing. "All right," replied Barks; and wrapping himself in his blanket, seated himself on a log, and began to hum a tune. He called Purdy again, instead of Charles, wishing to spare him. At day-break, or near it, Charles woke up, and going out, said to Purdy on the watch, "All right?" "All

right," replied Purdy; "we have escaped the rogues for once." "Then I will give the cob some oats," said Charles. He took some in a tin dish, and went to the horse, but in a moment he shouted, "Purdy! Barks! here! here this instant!" The two men ran in alarm, and found Charles standing in astonishment, gazing, not at the cob, but a miserable creature of a horse, blind, lame, covered with sores, and in the last stage of its misery. The clever rogues had contrived, unheard, unseen, to substitute this ghost of a horse for their prime one.

The astonishment and consternation may be supposed. "What could we be about?" exclaimed Barks. "What could these scoundrel dogs be about?" "Nay," said Purdy, "do n't throw the blame on the dogs; the poor beasts trusted to us. If we had left the watching to them, they would have done it." And with that, followed by Charles and Barks, he ran off at full speed towards the camping place of the thieves. The fire was still burning—the fellows were gone.

The three adventurers were beside themselves with indignation. They returned, and traced the horse by its well-known shoe-marks to the high-road, and thence to the thieves' fire, where the cob had clearly gone off with the rest of the horses towards

Bendigo. What was to be done? "I know," said Charles; "I will ask Robertson to lend us a couple of horses to pursue them." Said and done. Robertson knew the name of Mr. Fitzpatrick. He had two horses caught at once. They mounted, and away. Still along the road they could follow the troop of horsemen by the traces of their steeds. They seemed to make no attempt at concealment. Soon our pursuers overtook some drays loaded with hay. They inquired of the drivers if they had seen the thieves.

"To be sure, mates," said they, "large as life; and a regular rakehelly set they are; gallows-birds all. You may soon catch them; they are in no hurry; but take care, or they may treat you to a few ounces of lead in no time. The Black Douglas is among 'em, or we 've no eyes."

Away went Charles and Barks. They rode at full speed, but kept a sharp look out a-head. For several miles they dashed on, now through fine grassy lands, now through barren, hard, stony woods. At length they saw the troop very leisurely trotting along the way. At the sight, our friends cautiously cut into the bush, and rode through the woods at some little distance from the track, that the thieves might not look back and see them. Thus they went on till noon, when the thieves turned aside, and took a

course through the woods, to the left, for three or four miles. Here they dismounted, and made their fire, and hobbled out their horses. Charles and Barks dismounted too, and hobbled out their horses, but made no fire. All afternoon they kept upon the watch. Barks, who knew the country, having come out here to the diggings with hay, said they were on the Sheepwash, not more than three miles from Bendigo, and within a mile of a district pound. What a triumph if they could drive off the rascals' horses, and impound them. Charles shook his head at the idea—a most dangerous attempt!—but Barks gloried in it, and vowed he would essay it. All day, therefore, they lay close. The robbers, secure in their own estimation, sent off to the nearest part of the Back Creek for brandy, and set to for a regular carouse. By the time that evening arrived, they were all dead drunk on the ground. Barks, who had his eyes upon them as a cat watching mice, then rose, sprang upon his horse, followed by Charles; and moving stealthily through the wood, was soon where the horses fed. In a few seconds he had their hobbles all off, including those of their own cob, and gently drove them before him. Not a dog barked—not a man awoke. Barks laughed quietly to himself, and looked full of merriment at Charles, but without

making any noise, and still driving the horses on. Soon he put them into a quick trot, and then a gallop, and away they went till they reached the pound-keeper's.

"Hillo there!" shouted Barks. Out came the pound-keeper. "A few stray horses for you, mate," said Barks; "all but that cob; that is ours."

The man stood and gazed. "By the blazes!" he exclaimed, "why, every one of these is a stolen horse. Where did you find them?" They told him. "The zounds! why that is the Black Douglas! We must have him. Thank you, my good fellows."

He drove the horses into the pound. There was a reward of ten pounds for the finding of each of them advertised — that he kept to himself. There was a reward of 200*l.* for the apprehension of the Black Douglas — of that he was prudently silent. Away he rode for the police, and back cantered our friends, highly satisfied with their success. Whether the pound-keeper secured the Black Douglas we may naturally doubt; for as Charles, a week or two after, appeared at a store in the diggings upon the cob, this very fellow was there at the time, and gave an odd look at the horse, but said nothing, and walked away.

Our party reached the diggings in safety; planted their tent down in the Back Creek, in a pleasant green

valley, near a village of Chinese, and fell to work amongst the bustling, miscellaneous throng who were delving away, amidst dirt and mud and noise, in a scene of the rudest disorder. Charles soon had all the blisters that Black Douglas promised him, and in the first hole they sunk, they had a fine haul of gold! The second was a failure, and the third. The rush on the Back Creek was dying away, and they gave themselves a day to stroll through the diggings and look out for some richer spot. They closed their tent, and left it to the care of Providence, as hundreds of others did. Their cob they had sent to a station, and now they rambled through many miles of diggings, all scattered with tents, felled trees, butchers' shops, and sheep's heads; cast-off clothes, sardine-tins, and goats. Towards evening they found themselves at what are called the White Hills, near the Bendigo Creek, the waters of which were thick as paste, and yellow as gold itself with the washing out of thousands of tons of gold-containing clay and gravel. They here turned into a large tent, dignified with the name of "Crystal Palace," though it was simply of dirty canvass. Within were a number of rude tables at which sat rows of diggers in their gravel-stained shirts and trowsers, drinking and smoking. Some were singing, some loud in talk, a dozen at a time;

and towards the farther end sat a slender, tawdry-looking young woman, strumming away on a most dissonant piano, but singing to it a song which strongly excited Charles's attention, called Mary Massey.

MARY MASSEY;

THE SQUATTER'S SONG.

Stream forth, ye white flocks, in the morning;
  Ye are ten thousand and more;
And ye range from the banks of the Murray
  To the hills of Durradaghnore.

When I was a boy in Old England,
  A boy very young and small,—
I lived on the farm of Squire Massey,
  Below Squire Massey's old hall.

And oh! what a man did I think him!
  A man with that ample estate;
With his hounds and the old yellow carriage,—
  No mortal was ever so great.

I thought so: but now old Squire Massey
  Is dead, and to utter decay
Has fallen his fortune, and Mary,
  His daughter, is gone quite away.

She is gone to the rising Australia,
  To the land of white flocks and of gold;
For the boy from the farm of Squire Massey
  Remembered her goodness of old.

And the boy from the farm of Squire Massey
  Is the squatter of Durradaghnore,—
With his plains, his woods, and his mountains,
  And flocks of ten thousand and more.

And the lady of Durradaghnore,
  Mary Massey, the last of her line,
Has her hall and her new yellow carriage,
  In a land and a climate divine,

Where the flocks o'er the plains in the morning
  Stream onward, ten thousand and more;
And range from the banks of the Murray
  To the hills of Durradaghnore.

And often she thinks of Squire Massey,
  Of the stately old hall of her race;—
She sighs; but she smiles as she glances
  Around on this summer-bright place,

Where the flocks o'er the plains in the morning
  Stream onward, ten thousand and more;
And range from the banks of the Murray
  To the hills of Durradaghnore.

Our friends called for each a nobbler, a good hot mess of steaks and potatoes; and refreshed by their dinner, drew forth their pipes and patriotically blended their smoke with that of their fellow diggers. During this time they were entertained with various other songs, one of which appeared particularly popular.

THE DIGGER'S SONG OF THE BUSHRANGER.

They'll hang him, if they catch him,
  Like a dog in a string;
And I see the blue boys watch him —
  They mean him to swing.

For it's hard on the digger,
  Who goes pick-a-pick
Through the hard quartz and gravel,
  To be played such a trick;

While the sun melts his marrow,
  As he grubs for the gold,
To find when he's got it
  That he's regularly sold:

With his pile in his pocket,
  Setting out on his tramp
To his ship down at Melbourne,—
  Bailed up by this scamp.

They'll hang him, if they catch him,
  Like a dog in a string;
And I see the blue boys watch him —
  They mean him to swing.

And sarve him right, the villain!
  There a-lurking with his gun,
With his knife and his revolver,
  And thinking it good fun.

Robin Hood he was good
  'Neath the old forest oak;
But we want here no Robins
  A-robbing honest folk.

Why, it's not very pleasant,
  In the dark whipstick bush,
To be shot down like a pleasant,
  Or pulled up like a rush.

Oh! they'll hang him, if they catch him,
  Like a dog in a string;
And I see the blue boys watch him—
  They mean him to swing.

And let him swing, the villain!
  Where the diggers all march by;
Like Black Douglas and smooth Melville,
  Let him hang high and dry.

Yes, they'll hang him, if they catch him,
  Like a dog in a string;
And I see the blue boys watch him—
  They mean him to swing.

Presently two men came in, looked round, and then seated themselves at the adjoining table. The one was a big, tall, burly fellow, with a curly black head of hair, a full pudding-featured face, but red with good eating and drinking. He wore a black ordinary hat, looking very odd with its tall square crown amid that generation of wide-awakes, and shallow-crowned cabbage-trees; a pair of close black breeches, jack-boots, and a check shirt. His companion was a meek-looking fellow, not particular in costume, but with a smiling, sociable, scrape-acquaint-

ance sort of face. The two called for their nobblers, lit their short pipes with lucifer matches that with their brimstone almost took the breath of our friends; and then the big man in the black hat and breeches fell into discourse with them. He made very free inquiries as to the time of their arrival, their luck, the best quarter of the field now for gold, but was equally communicative of his own experience. At every fresh piece of information he appealed to his companion, who certified all his intelligence with a very placid smile, and "Oh yes! you know, mate; you know."

When our friends said they had not yet been so sucsessful as they expected, he observed that he could not complain; in fact, he had been singularly lucky. He had now, he said, a heap of washing-stuff containing several cart-loads, lying by the creek, ready for washing out. There was three hundred pounds' worth of gold in it if there were a penny. "Is n't it so, mate?" said he to the meek, smiling man. "To be sure, mate; why ask me, you know, mate; you know."

"Now," said the big man, "I should think it might answer your purpose to wash out that pile. I'd make you a good bargain. I 'm not fond of working in the water, unless there 's brandy in it," said he, smiling,

and lifting his glass, with a nod to our party. "I 'd sell it, at least, I would not mind doing it, though you know, Joe, I 've never offered it to any one yet."

"Of course not," said the meek man, "or you 'd have been pulled all to pieces for it; of course you know that, Ben, you know it well enough."

"Three hundred pounds' worth and sell it for one," said Purdy; "that 's all my eye."

"You can try it, mate, you can try it," said the big man; "only let me say the word, and it's gone to a hundred customers; but no compulsion; you can try it if you like."

"Let us try it, then," said our party, and out went they all together. The big man in the black hat and black breeches, and his meek companion, smiling kindly on all, led the way down to the creek. There stood a very small tent, amongst a number of others, and close to it, and to the creek, lay the heap of washing-stuff, enclosed by a sort of rude fence of boughs.

"What," said Charles, "do you leave stuff of that value here, unprotected?"

"It is protected, mate, said the big man; "we can see it from the Crystal Palace; no fear."

"No, no fear; trust you, Ben, for that," said the smiling, placid man.

"You could wash it out here," said the big man, pointing to a little dam and sluice in the creek; "that Tom's mine,—you could use it. So now try it, try it anywhere. Here are a spade and a dish."

Charles, who was become expert at the dish, took it, and Barks struck the shovel into the heap, and filled the dish. Charles washed out. There was gold, and plenty too.

"Did not I say?" said the big man: "but try it again,—try it anywhere."

"To be sure," said the meek man; "try it, try it, no treachery in Ben. All serene."

They tried the heap; here and there, it was all alike: very clear that at that rate there must be at least three hundred pounds' worth in the heap. The bargain was struck, the money paid, and they hurried away to fetch their tent to the spot. They hired a horse to draw their cart the few miles for a pound, and by the break of day they were on the spot. There was no room for their tent amid the chaotic heaps of clay and gravel all around, though the very little tent was struck and gone. They crossed the creek, set up their tent on a green flat, and came with shovels and dishes to commence washing out. They turned the water of the dam

into the Long Tom, or washing trough, and began washing in good earnest.

"Hillo there, mates, how's that?" said a tall, strong young fellow, coming up. "How's what?" asked Charles, pausing as he was shovelling in the washing-stuff.

"Why, that's my dam, that's all," said the young man.

"Your dam! the men that we bought this heap of said it was theirs."

The young man gave a very significant smile. "You've bought this heap?" "Yes." "Given much for it?" "A good sum. It is very rich stuff."

"Is it?" said the young man. "You've tried it?" "Yes, we've tried it." "Try it again, dig deep. There, give me the shovel." He struck the shovel deep into the stuff, threw out what was on it, and then plunged it still deeper. "There, try that."

Charles washed and looked, washed and looked more anxiously,—there was not a glimpse of gold. A strange conviction began to flash over him that they were duped. By this time a regular crowd of diggers had gathered round, inquiring "what was up." "Only Blessed Ben and Holy Joe again," said

the young man. "They have dipped into these new ones here; sold them this plated heap for solid washing-stuff, that's all!"

"The devil they have," resounded on all sides. There was a wonderful noise and talk and laughter. Scores of great, rude, digger fellows, came and stared and grinned enormously at the confounded trio. "Lord!" said they, "how greenhorns do abound! That Blessed Ben and Holy Joe should play that old game over so often, and yet find fresh innocents."

"Blessed Ben and Holy Joe!" exclaimed a man who looked like a store-keeper; "where are they?"

"Ay, you may ask that, mate," said another; "of course they'll make themselves scarce for a bit."

"Scarce or not," said the man, "I'll have 'em. They've stole a horse of mine, worth eighty guineas, and here's a warrant to seize them. Come along, mates," said he, earnestly, to Charles and his companions, "let us hunt them till we have them; I'll spend a thousand pounds to hang them, the canting scoundrels."

Charles and Barks went off with him, leaving Purdy to guard what gold there was in the heap. They applied at the police magistrate's for a warrant, got it, and commenced their search. For a whole

week, they traversed the diggings, gully after gully, one long mile of tents, one long wooded valley after another. Grog-shops, gambling-shops, billiard-tents, shampooing, and other sham resorts, but in vain; they could catch no glimpse of the blessed and holy brethren. This time, they began to fancy they had transferred their practice to some other field. It was on Sunday morning, as our party were in their beds, taking a needful rest after the week's fatigue, that the indefatigable store-keeper roused them, saying, he had got a new idea. "The fellows pretend to be pious; let us to-day have a peep into the chapels."

The disturbed party did not think the idea a very bright one: it was not likely, they thought, that they would show themselves in such public places. "It is not the public ones that I reckon on," said the man, "but the outsiders, what we may call the odd hole and corner saints, that cultivate queer faiths in queer places. There are plenty of them, and they seem of the sort of these fellows."

"I 'm your man," said Purdy, jumping up, and dressing quickly. He had soon breakfasted, and they set out. They left the episcopal church, and the Scotch church, and the Free Kirk, and what they called the tip-top dissenters' chapels, and bore away

into obscure quarters, where religions, too numerous to name, flourished in greater or less degrees of eccentricity. But alas! the result was the same: amid all the strange and uncouth assemblies of the gullies and the flats, no Blessed Ben or Holy Joe became visible. It was as they were on their return, wearied and dispirited, in the evening, that they caught the sound of a man's voice, as if preaching, in a large, dingy-looking tent. They looked in. It was the chapel of the Mormons, or Latter-day Saints.

The scene which presented itself was worth studying. The place was lit by candles tied on the top of long sticks stuck into the ground. The company was seated on rude planks raised on logs. A more hairy and bearded set of fellows than was there assembled you would look for in vain. They were all in their work-day dress, mere trowsers and shirts, or woollen blouses, for the most part soiled with stains that would not wash out. There was evidently no lack of Californians, of those long, lean, gaunt fellows who have ranged the wilds of America, always too much go-a-head to gather flesh. There were abundance of women, for the most part very neatly clad, and modest and serious looking. On the faces of the men there was an air of sanguine fanaticism,

a glare of the eager, impatient, sensual eye, that gave unmistakeable evidence that the only principle in them was self, the only faith was the belief in the greatest possible license. Mingled with these pilgrims of the Sandy Desert and patriarchs of the Salt Lake were heavy, dense English labourers, porters, and navvies, who had never seen the inside of a school, and few of them of a church or a chapel, gross, ignorant, and brutish. These listened with swinish eyes and watering mouths to the new gospel of the place, the gospel of goats and satyrs.

A cart-body turned bottom upwards at the farther end of the tent served for pulpit, or rather rostrum, and on this was mounted a small, erect, formal man, with a portentous brown beard reaching to his breast, and spreading wide about his ears, and a head of brown hair which hung in a wonderful luxuriance of curl. He was a slim, black-faced sort of fellow, with black twinkling eyes, which seemed set with a small, eager stare as if he were always on the very point of piercing into some wonderful mystery; and he was holding forth in a strain which indicated that he was already far gone in his sermon or harangue.

But what instantly caught the eye of Purdy and the storekeeper were Blessed Ben and Holy Joe seated to the left hand of the preacher; Holy Joe

with his saintly smile raised most placidly and unctuously towards the preacher, as if taking in whole measures of sacred felicity and instruction. Blessed Ben, with a more careful eye to the dangers of this howling wilderness of earth, sate facing the door, and evidently caught the very first glimpse of Purdy's head. The storekeeper, however, did not show himself, but, with a hint from his companion, dextrously withdrew from the door and posted off for a bevy of police. Meantime Purdy, watching his prey, also listened to the preacher, the current fragment of whose discourse was in this manner: —

"Well, my brethring, I have shown you that the days are coming, the latter days, in which the saints are to inherit the earth. There have been three dispensations: first, that of Moses, the dispensation of circumcision and rejection of swine's flesh. That is done with; we reject the circumcision, and enjoy the gammon. Then came the New Testament, with its ordinances and subjection to the higher powers. We have walked out of all that, thanks to the beatified Joseph and the golden tablets buried of angels. No longer do we twaddle of restraint and dry morals and obedience; ours is the glorious liberty of the children of God. The world is ours and all that is therein — ours to enjoy at will and without condemnation.

'Others have laboured, and we have entered into their labours.' The degenerate, out-of-date, second revelationists,—they of the New Testament, but not of the newest, not that of the great apostle of Nauvoo,—conquer countries, and we enter and enjoy. Yes, my brethren, the standard is raised, the hosts are on the march. By the great Salt Lake rises the New Jerusalem, and from it we are come forth to conquer all the earth. Yes, in this land of gold, we are growing, spreading like the morning, conquering like the noon. 'Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?' Even I, Orson Excelsior Kid, the Apostle of the Diggings, the Prince of the Gold of Ophir. I tread the wine-press alone; but soon you shall all tread it with me, and drink of the new wine of the kingdom of the enfranchised saints. Where now is condemnation—where now is law—where now is sin? All gone; all swallowed up in the glorious liberty of the sons of God. The prophecies are fulfilled—'And in that day seven women shall take hold on one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.' Isaiah, fourth chapter, first verse. This is the day, my brethring; seven women did, I say, nay, ten times seven have seized the glorified

skirts of our brother Brigham Young, and they ride after him in chariots and omnibuses. Bless the Lord for his mercies! Arise, therefore, ye favoured ones; take and eat, and drink, and grow great in the faith. All things are lawful for you. 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?'—eighth chapter of Romans, thirty-third verse. All, I say—yes, I, the great Orson Excelsior Kid, I say it—all is ours, the earth and the fullness thereof; and we are called, as the children of Israel of old, to plunder the Egyptians. For what says the great Apostle of the Gentiles, that is, of the second revelation—'Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.' Corinthians, chapter ten, verse twenty-four.

"Well then, my friends, with this glorious charter of perfect freedom, open your eyes, clear them from every film of the old law, take the beam out of thine own eye, as the blessed Scripture of the blessed Joe Smith saith, and put it into thy brother's eye: and fear no longer to use freedom of speech; lying is no longer lying, it is exploded, grown antiquated, gone out like the snuff of a candle. 'For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; yet why am I also judged as a sinner?'—third of Romans, seventh verse. Arise, therefore, my beloved brethring, and shine. Yea, shine; dazzling

the weak optics and timid minds of the outward ones, and ye shall quickly take, conquer, possess, and territorise over these vast lands of gold, and wool, and oil, and corn, and wine. Here I see in the holy visions of the elect that every man shall soon literally sit under his own vine and his own fig ——"

At this instant, when the whole assembly was wrought into a state of intensest excitement, a veritable holy agony; when Brother Orson Excelsior Kid's visions of conquest and glory were spreading marvellously over every brain; when Blessed Ben exclaimed, "Beautiful! beautiful as a dream!" and Holy Joe smiled seraphically, and echoed, "Beautiful indeed!" when a lean, dry Yankee, cried aloud, "Well, I calclate that 's kinder exilyorating;" and a little Frenchman broke out, "Mon Dieu! très grand, magnifique, pretty vell!"—just then, in that sublime moment, an unexpected miracle took place. That grand head of hair of Brother Orson Excelsior Kid's rose into the air, a flowing wig on a long stick, which was thrust through a hole in the tent behind, and a strange noise of "caw-waw-waw!" followed by a roar of boyish laughter, filled the whole assembly of Latter-day Saints with amazement. In the next moment the wig dropped into the flame of a candle, and blazed up portentously, and the great Orson Excelsior Kid

stood with his bare poll and bushy beard a spectacle unto men and angels.

There was a sudden rush of the indignant brethren to seize the audacious perpetrators of this prank; but Purdy kept strict watch over Blessed Ben and Holy Joe, who were soon in the hands of a strong body of police.

CHAP. XI.

A SAMPLE, NOT OF GOLD, BUT OF GOLD COMMISSIONERS.

HAD the body of police who captured the two Mormon saints, the Blessed Ben and Holy Joe, not been numerous and strong, there might have been mischief, for many a hand was laid on long knife and revolver, and many a great, grim, bearded fellow, only wanted a word from the great Orson Excelsior Kid to plunge the steel and fire the ball with all saintly freedom into the heads of the Philistines — in ordinary phrase, police. But though the great Orson had cried out enthusiastically in one part of his oration, "Ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened;" which he interpreted to mean, "Yea, if necessary, knock in a door or an unbeliever's skull;" yet, out of the pulpit, or rather the cart-body, Orson Excelsior had the prudence or the weakness of mortal flesh; therefore, when the sanguinary brethren looked to him for a sign, there was no sign given, but that of the poor little man hurrying away

with a huge white hat dropped over his naked head, even to his shoulders.

The two culprits were secured in the lock-up for the night; and as it was well known that such men often miraculously had disappeared out of it when wanted, strong though it seemed, the storekeeper's friends set a watch over it. The next day, at eleven o'clock, they were brought out before two commissioners and magistrates, Messrs. Light and Shadow.

Now let no one deceive himself by his knowledge of what magistrates are in England or anywhere else. Let nobody imagine a couple of portly, sage, rubicund old gentlemen, with very white hair and cunning faces, sitting in the seat of judgment on this occasion. The great country of colonies and colonisation, of vast dependencies and vast interests, old Mother England, to very young countries sends, in her wisdom, very young magistrates. These youths, unlearned in the law, — for they never knew till the happy appointment came, whether their friends, through a certain member of parliament, had got them a clerkship, or a bishopric, or a magistracy,— were, however, ready for anything, and, therefore, by government logic, qualified for anything. These two verdant justices of peace, and commissioners in charge of Her Britannic Majesty's gold-fields, were

downy-chinned lads of a tall growth. They were clad in a military costume of blue cloth, well covered with gold lace, and cloth caps with a broad gold band. Mr. Commissioner Light was a young man of handsome figure, and with a smooth pretty face, and a bust worthy of a hairdresser's window, even though it boasted plate glass. Mr. Commissioner Shadow was also a tall, fair youth, with very light hair and very quick motion, and a confident, boyish, empty air. He was in everything the echo and *fidus Achates* of Light.

Placed before this illustrious pair of representatives of the majesty and the laws of England, they surveyed Blessed Ben and Holy Joe with eyes which seemed to have seen them before, and asked what was the charge. Charles was the spokesman; and having been sworn, related the story of the *plated* heap of washing-stuff. Before he had concluded, Light and Shadow had gradually kindled up from an assumed gravity into a smile, which culminated in a downright burst of loud laughter. "Do you hear that, Shadow?" asked Light, in a delicate voice. "What a sell! — the old dodge, and still gudgeons."

"Green! green! uncommon green!" exclaimed Shadow, stamping about and rubbing his hands.

"My young fellow," said Light, in great dignity, "do you come here for us to furnish you with brains?"

"Deucedly taken in, if they do!" said some one behind the crowd.

"Who's that? Who said that?" exclaimed Shadow, turning round savagely. Of course nobody knew.

"Why did you not try the washing-stuff?" asked Light.

"So we did, but not deep enough," said Charles.

"No, certainly not deep enough by any means," replied Light, again laughing at his own wit. "Well, fellow," said he, addressing Blessed Ben, who stood very humbly, and bowed low his bushy black head at every word of the magistrate's; "what have you to say for yourself?"

"Go it, Blessed Ben, you know how to convince them," said the same voice behind.

"Who is that?" cried both the magisterial lads. "Bring them forward. We'll commit them for contempt of court." But here again the wisdom of Mrs. Glass became apparent, "First catch your hare, and then—." The police made active search, it was "Vox et præterea nihil."

The insulted majesty of the English colonial bench

again sat down. "What have you to say for yourselves, you there?"

"Oh! Lord bless your honours," said Blessed Ben, smiling quite graciously upon the bench. "What can we say? what need we say? *We* impose on anybody indeed! It's all fair, see here," presenting a paper. "That is from Mr. Geld Krieger, the German gold-buyer; he wanted to buy the heap, and examined it, and here is his certificate."

Ben handed the paper to Light with a most gracious air, and Holy Joe smiled most serenely, saying, "The idea! we trick even the babe unborn!" Mr. Commissioner Light scanned the paper a moment, and exclaimed, "Oh! most satisfactory! most entirely satisfactory. I dismiss the charge,—a most ridiculous and childish charge indeed."

But what was Charles's astonishment to see, for he happened to stand just then a little in the rear of the honest Commissioner, that within the paper was simply spread a ten pound note! Mr. Justice Light coolly folded the paper, and put it in his pocket, and Charles stood rooted to the spot in dumb surprise.

The blessed brethren were comfortably moving off towards the door, when the storekeeper said, "Stop a bit; it is my turn now."

"What do *you* say, sirrah?" asked Light, sharply.

"I am no sirrah," said the storekeeper, reddening, "but a plain, substantial tradesman, who can have law for his money. Those fellows stole my horse, and there is my warrant." Light took the warrant, just turned it over in his hand, and looking over his shoulder to Shadow, said, "I think we must defer this hearing till to-morrow. I feel greatly fatigued."

"And so do I, damnably," said Shadow; "these tedious, silly affairs are confounded bores, and luncheon has been waiting this hour. The kangaroo steamer will be regularly devilled."

So away went the two brilliant specimens of the young officials of a young colony, and Blessed Ben and Holy Joe were conducted to the lock-up, where, the next morning, there was no trace of them. Another magical certificate from the all-potent gold-buyer, Mr. Geld Krieger, had no doubt been as efficacious with the turnkey as with the magistrates. Messrs. Light and Shadow either were very irate with the turnkey, or they acted it with all the genius of Charles Kean; but their attention was, fortunately for the public treasury, immediately called to a score of rude diggers in all their dirt, who were ushered into the court with much bustle and officiousness.

They were unlucky devils, who had been caught without their licenses in their breeches-pockets, though every man protested that he had one in his tent, if he might fetch it under guard; but Light simply said, "You are each fined five pounds, or locked up till paid;" and he and the inseparable juvenile, Shadow, marched off, rather refreshed than fatigued by this summary exercise of the laws, if that name can be given to the caprices of two empty boys, set to govern forty thousand people.

Charles Fitzpatrick was so disgusted by what he had seen, that he left the tent, determined to quit the Diggings forthwith. He was passing out, very hot in his feelings, and with a desperate frown on his features, when a knowing-looking digger, with bright, sparkling, and clever eyes, accosted him in a voice which he recognised as the one that had called out in the crowd the day before. "Sold again, mate," said he. "Keep a bright look-out, and have your license constantly about you, or you'll soon be hauled up like these poor fellows. You are now a marked man. And do n't stir out of nights after dark, for the holy brethren have long knives, and are good shots, and there are swarms of them. And do n't ask me to come into your tent, for it is just as

likely to have half a dozen bullets through it, one of these fine evenings, as that bribes are pleasant in the palm here."

"Thank you, sincerely," said Charles, as he walked away, full of very strange reflections. But he was not destined to clear the Diggings quite so adroitly as he expected. He had arranged with Barks and Purdy, who wished to try their luck a little longer, to drive home the horse and cart, and leave them to their chance, when, repassing near the justice-tent, on his way from the post-office, his attention was arrested by a crowd gathered round a young woman who had fainted. He was informed that her husband had been seized in company with the Black Douglas, and a desperate band of bushrangers who had shot a couple of policemen, in the attempt to secure them, and that the whole gang, seven in number, were committed for trial, and were just sent off, guarded by a band of troopers, to Castlemaine. As Charles descended the steep hill from the government camp, greatly excited by the distress of the young woman, who appeared anything but like the wife of a bushranger, he was overtaken by the same shrewd-looking man, who had given him the friendly warnings. "This is a bad case," said he; "I do n't believe that poor girl's husband is any more guilty

or connected with these villains than you or I; but, nevertheless, they 'll hang him."

"Who is he, then?" asked Charles; "and what was he doing amongst the bushrangers?"

"The lad," said the digger, "is a young Popkins, Abijah Popkins, he is called, a young storekeeper. They tell me he 's the son of very decent parents, religious, regularly religious people, but perhaps they 've been a little too tight-laced with the lad; and then you know well enough, if a young fellow's principles are only held together by lacing, when the lace breaks, down go the principles. The young fellow has been wild here. I do n't believe he has any harm in him, but he 's weak, and he has got into a habit of visiting a sly grog-shop, one of those that government pretends to put down, and which its own police wink at for a consideration. There he has met with bad company, this Black Douglas, and Captain Melville, the two most rascally, unhanged highwaymen in the colony, and just as clever at robbery by cards and dice as by powder and ball. The young fellow has lost his money, lost his character, and would have lost his trade, if it had not been for this poor girl, his wife. They 've only been married these six months, and a better creature, poor thing, never married to trouble. Well, the lad, so far as I

can learn, has had nothing in the world to do with these rascally thieves, but to lose his money to them; did not, poor fool, know who they were even that he gambled with; but the police have long been on the look-out for Douglas and Melville, and though they did not want to turn attention to this grog-shop, which was a profitable concern to them, yet the reward for these rascals was become so great, that they were afraid some one else might just drop upon them, and whip off the prize. So all at once they come down on the tent, out rush the thieves, revolver in hand, shoot down two of the police, and off into the bush. This poor lad runs too, for he knew the place was unlawful, and did not know what they might charge him with, and he's been taken with them, and, sure as fate, they'll string him up."

Charles was greatly concerned for the unfortunate youth, and his poor young wife, whose pale, ghastly face still haunted him. When he reached the tent and mentioned the circumstance, Purdy exclaimed, —"Popkins! Abijah Popkins! Goodness, gracious! Why, the lad's no more a bushranger than I'm a grandmother. It's poor old Matthew Popkins' son; one of 'em, that is, for he has two or three. Oh, lors! oh, lors! poor fellow! Why, it will kill the old man and woman as well as the wife, poor young cretur."

"Do you know these Popkinses, then?" asked Charles.

"Do I know them? Do I know daylight when I see it?" exclaimed Purdy. "Why, old Matthew Popkins has travelled with his pot-cart into Derbyshire from Staffordshire these thirty years, to my knowledge, and of late years has had one of these quiet-looking lads with him. They tell me he made money, and's come here to make more. By leddy! but this will cut him down, though! He is a religious, very religious man, is old Matthew — belongs to the New Methodies. Oh, gracious me! the idea of one of his lads being hanged!"

"Where does the old man live?" asked Charles, his sympathy continually augmenting.

"Live! Why, warn't you, Mr. Charles, at Bongubine the other day, and not know where Matthew Popkins lives! He's just taken Lahni Mill, on the Campaspe, from Mr. Martin,—you must have seen it,—one of the beautifullest places in the colony."

Charles well remembered the place, — a perfect paradise of a situation, — and such a blow as this to fall on the inhabitants! If trouble can fall there,— so retired, so quiet, so smiling, — what spot of earth, thought Charles, can escape the bolt of calamity?

"Something must be done," said Charles; "we

must do something. This poor lad and this good family must not be lost and ruined for ever without a struggle. I have no faith in the justice here; we must move all means. Purdy, will you ride off and let the old man know?"

"Ay, that I will," said Purdy, jumping up and throwing on his jacket. "I will run to the station for the cob, and I shall reach the mill to-night." He was gone at once, and Charles again walked hurriedly up to the Popkins's store to inquire after the poor woman. He found that she was in a very sad condition, having fainted time after time, and that on recovering her consciousness her agony of distress was something awful. There was a doctor with her, and several of the neighbouring storekeepers' wives were doing all they could for her. Charles waited till the surgeon had told her that her father-in-law was sent for, and that everything possible would be done to clear her husband, and then walked seriously to his own tent. He seemed to count the hours till the old father Popkins could arrive as if it were his own case. The sight of the young woman's face, and the impression which the administration of justice here had left on him, gave him an interest in the affair such as he had never felt before.

It was yet early in the next afternoon when four

horsemen were seen coming at a great rate up the green valley of the Bendigo near Charles's tent. As they drew near he recognised Purdy and the cob. Along with him was a tall old man in black of an old country cut, who rode as if almost falling forward from fatigue, and his strong features wearing a pallid hue and solemn rigidity as of death. Near him rode a boy of seventeen or so, looking equally woe-begone; —and who is that? The short figure, drab suit, and bold, active features of Mr. Peter Martin.

Mr. Martin and Purdy turned directly towards Charles's hut; and the two other riders went on, without a turn of the head or a word spoken, up the valley.

"My dear Charles," said Mr. Peter Martin, springing from his horse, and leaving it to Purdy, "this is a sad affair. Now, a word: — I have heard all that happened on your return home; I am very sorry for it, but it does not surprise me. Another time for that. Now, there is a life to be saved — two — three — perhaps half a dozen. I don't ask you to disobey your father, and have anything to do with me. But this lad must be saved; and you and I cannot help standing side by side, as we each help, any more than two of these gum-trees. We must help — help all we can — body and soul. You and I are no more

to each other than any two constables who may act in it, or two lawyers who may plead on the two sides — but we must go on, each helping. These lives, and the happiness of a most excellent family, are too far above all other considerations to allow us to think of ourselves."

"Just so," said Charles; "I do not seek you, nor will you seek me, I am sure; but we will go on in the same group, doing all we can."

"Just so, just so!" said Mr. Martin. "And now I must get something to eat. I won't enter your tent, out of regard for your pledge to your father: but let your man bring me something under the tree there,"—pointing to one at a little distance,—"and then I will go forwards. It will be better to let the relatives have their own talk first, too."

The active little man at once strode away to the tree, where, flinging his hat and whip on the ground, he seated himself; and was soon busily discussing some cold beef and a bottle of pale ale, Barks acting as butler. Charles entered his tent and sat down, holding no further intercourse with him till he took his leave. When ready he sprang up, his horse was brought, and telling Barks to inform Charles that he thought he had better follow to the Popkinses, he rode off. Charles soon took the same way on foot;

and, on reaching the store, was ushered into the back apartment of it. The scene which presented itself on entering never again faded from his memory.

On a sort of sofa, or rather what is called in some parts of England a squab—that is, a wooden couch with a cushion upon it,—lay a young woman, the same that Charles had seen in a swoon in the street. She lay now in a state very similar. "Was she really living?" was the thought which passed over Charles's mind as he saw her. She was very young, a mere girl in appearance, and very fair. Her face was round in its contour, her features delicate and sweet; and around them lay her hair of a beautiful golden brown, giving her a sort of angelic look that seemed out of place in the wife of a storekeeper at the diggings. In circumstances of health and happiness she must have presented a very interesting appearance; but now she lay pale as marble, motionless as the dead. Did she really live? Yes; for a youngish-looking gentleman, a doctor, sat with his hand upon her pale thin wrist, and his face fixed on hers with a serious air. On a stool in the corner, behind the doctor, sat the youth whom Charles had seen riding up the valley with the old man, and the old man was down on his knees by the side of the still, corpse-like girl. Near the foot of the couch

stood Mr. Peter Martin, with a look fixed and solemn, regarding the prostrate form — but a look from which that bold, self-confident air which Charles had hitherto always seen in it, had totally vanished, and left an impression of feeling and sympathy equally remarkable. The old man was in prayer. His tall, dark figure was bowed as it were to the earth with affliction, and his long white locks spread on his broad shoulders like the snows of winter on some hoary, storm-beaten mountain. His strongly-developed features were sallow and rigid with grief; and in his prayer he seemed to wrestle with heaven under a feeling rather of the calamity and disgrace fallen upon his whole family than of sympathy concentrated on the phantom-like form before him — in which the spirit was like some slight tissue of cloud in a still evening sky, waiting only for a breath or motion of the air to bear it away for ever.

"Oh, Lord! let this cup pass from me. Let it pass, oh, thou good and merciful God! Many and long are the days in which thou hast crowned me with mercy and blessing. Thou hast made me to go on and prosper; and, now, wilt thou crush me in the latter end as with a millstone? Let it pass, oh God! let it pass. Can it really be that such terrible things

are in store for me? Oh, God! oh, Lord God! arise, arise, and let the truth appear. Thou canst do it! What is it to thee, oh Lord! who guidest the world and liftest the mountains, what is it to thee to make appear the innocence of this poor, weak, misguided lad? Weak, but not so very wicked; no, I will not believe it. No, he cannot have so forgotten all the godly teachings from his youth upward, all the warnings and the solemn ordainings of thy love. Save him, oh Lord! save him: snatch him as a brand from the burning, and give consolation to his afflicted mother and to this poor, down-smitten lamb. Wilt thou slay the innocent for the erring? Oh, Lord! wilt thou cut down this bruised reed, like the grass before the mower? Oh, no! that beseemeth thee not, oh, Lord! that is not like thee in thy ever-loving kindness. Arise, arise, in thy might, and scatter all delusions; for, if this blow falls, we all fall together, we are no better than dead men."

Here the agonised voice ceased; but the tall, strong frame was still trembling with a convulsive spasm, and you could hear the passionate, heavy breathing, and the cracking of his fingers as he wrung, and, as it were, ground his hands together. In the death-like stillness of the room, the stifled sobs of the youth in the corner, who now sate with his

face between his knees and his hands clasped on the back of his head as if he would crush it with them, were painfully loud; and, as Charles cast a glance at Mr. Martin, he saw his lips quivering with emotion, and large tears rolling rapidly down his cheeks. If ever Charles had believed Mr. Martin a bad man since he had first so lately met with him, that belief fled from this moment. While the thought went, lightning-like, through him, Mr. Martin leaned gently forward and said to the doctor, "How is it, doctor? would not you give her a little more stimulant?"

The doctor shook his head. "Let us try a little longer: if she has had enough to keep her up, that is all I want; she has too many stimulants in herself the moment she returns to consciousness; we must preserve a balance if we can—that is the great matter. But the best of all medicines is hope. Give her all the hope you can; give it, even if you have it not yourselves. Give her that, or all that I can give her is useless. Without hope—and strong hope—she dies."

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Martin, "what can we do? Poor thing! poor thing! and such a good, dear, admirable creature, a perfect heroine! ay, better, better, a saint! from all they tell me. We

must save her, doctor. I would spend anything, money or strength, to save her."

"What she wants is hope, comfort, faith that her husband will be saved. She had that; but in the inquiries of the old gentleman here, as to who could prove his clearness of any connection with this desperate gang, they vanished, and she sinks, sinks yet—her pulse fades, fades—give me another spoonful from that bottle." It was done; and the death-like form yet swallowed down the potion with pallid, motionless lips.

"But is there no one who can prove an *alibi?* You *believe* he is innocent; where has he been; with whom of late?"

"He has been absent this month and more," said the doctor. "He was wild, and frequented that Gurwood's grogshop, a notorious haunt of gamblers. His wife persuaded him to go away and leave the concern to her,—yes, she has done too much at it; all the while suffering from her anxiety about him. He comes back, goes again to the very same haunt, and is surprised there in actual play with the notorious Douglas and Melville. He rushes out with them. Each of these incarnate fiends shoots down his man, and escapes. Abijah and two others, too well known to be subordinates of the gang, are taken.

That is the case, and it looks as bad as bad can be," added the doctor, speaking low, as if afraid the apparently unconscious sufferer should hear it.

"That looks bad indeed," said Mr. Martin; "but still you think he's innocent, you say. If so, on what grounds? Where, I ask, and with whom has he been?"

"With a man of the name of Randall, a rough, but not bad-looking man; a very excellent man indeed, this poor girl says. She says he has been with him bringing over a mob of horses from Sydney to Melbourne, and was going away with him to stay on his station some time, to strengthen his good habits."

"But that is your man!" exclaimed Mr. Martin; "that is your very man! we must have him at any price. Where is he? Why is he not sent for?"

"There lies the difficulty," replied the doctor; "nobody here knows the man but Mrs. Popkins, and she has been too much agitated — too completely prostrated, to enable us to get the information."

"Then send at once to Castlemaine; we must get it from the prisoner; not a moment must be lost; there is but a week to the assizes."

The strong, excited voice of the speaker, appeared to have roused the patient from her trance-like state. The doctor raised his finger warningly. "She is

coming to herself; her pulse beats agitatedly; she breathes more strongly; she sighs." He leaned over her. The next moment a heavy, deep sigh escaped from the bosom of the poor girl; she opened her eyes an instant, closed them again, and tears were seen streaming from her closed eyelids.

"That is good," said the doctor; "I am glad to see those tears, my dear Mrs. Popkins, they will do you good. They are the first I have seen since I was called in," he added, addressing himself softly to the spectators. "But, my dear Mrs. Popkins," he continued, again addressing her, "you must not distress yourself — you have no need — here is good news." At this word the poor girl's eyes flashed open eagerly; she started up as if endowed at once with all her wonted strength; and riveting her gaze on the doctor, she exclaimed, "What news! oh, what news! what good news! Is it cleared up? Is he at liberty?"

"Not at liberty yet, dear Mrs. Popkins," said Dr. Roche, for that was the physician's name; "no! that is too much to expect in such a case; law is slow and formal; you know, it must be; but he *will* be liberated, take my word for it," smiling kindly at her.

The word law seemed to strike her like a heavy blow or a sudden cold blast; and when the doctor said "take my word for it," she seemed to collapse,

as it were, before the phrase. A shudder passed through her whole frame; and fixing her clear, blue, but anxious eyes upon him, she said faintly, "Is that all? I thought you said there was good news." Her head sunk upon her bosom, her hands were clasped rigidly together, and she appeared, pale and drooping as a broken lily, to be actually sinking into death.

"But, my dear girl," said Mr. Martin, laying his hand suddenly on her arm, and anticipating the doctor's explanation, "there is good news." "Oh where! — what is it?" again exclaimed the agitated girl, at once moving, and turning her thin, pale face, and clear, intensely eager eyes, upon him. "Oh tell me quick, quick; don't deceive me, for I cannot bear it; a word I feel now would kill me."

"But you must not be killed," said Mr. Martin, "on any account; it is you who must and can save your husband." At every word the poor girl's hope seemed to fade away: if it, after all, depended on herself, all was lost, she thought. But Mr. Martin added, rapidly, "I am a magistrate; I am here to serve you, and I will serve you, cost what it may. Now listen; you say your husband is innocent of any connection with these bushrangers."

"Oh, innocent as I am!" exclaimed the young wife; "innocent as the babe unborn!"

"Enough! then all we have to do is to prove that he was not, and could not have been with these bush-rangers on any of the occasions of crime for which they are in charge. I hear that all that is easy as to any such charge till within the last month. The people hereabout, plenty of them, can prove that."

"Oh, yes! yes! scores can," exclaimed the young woman.

"Very well; all we want is to prove that he could not have been with them during the last month, except on the day they were taken here. Where was he during that month?"

"Oh, with Mr. Randall, with Mr. Randall every day of the time."

"Good, and where is Mr. Randall to be found? once let us have him, and all is secure."

At these words, the poor girl gave a violent start, seized her hair on each temple with convulsed hands, drew her hand agitatedly across her forehead, and appeared lost in extremest terror.

"Gently, my dear girl, gently; why alarm yourself so? Tell us where this Randall is, and we will have him, if it be from the south pole."

"Oh!" exclaimed the poor girl, in the wildest, most piercing accent, "he is gone! gone! gone!

quite away. You will never find him in time." And she shook with agitation, and writhed in agony.

"But we will have him, my good girl," said Mr. Martin, confidently; "we will have him, and if not in time for the day of trial, we will have that put off. I know the governor well; he is not the man to deprive any human creature of the feeblest chance for his life; the trial shall be postponed if necessary, so now, cheer up; let us have the address of Mr. Randall, and we will be after him this moment."

The confidence of these assurances, the air of authority of the speaker, the kind, but positive tone in which he spoke, acted like a charm on the terrified girl. She looked at him with increasing wonder and calmness, her hand involuntarily seized his, her blue eyes became calmer, but full of intensest feeling, a slight flush started into her pale face, and with a faint smile she said, "Oh, sir! what comfort you give me! God bless you for ever and ever! If you save my poor Abijah, you will save us all. What shall we do to thank you?"

"Oh!" said Mr. Martin, "we'll think of that; but this Mr. Randall, do n't you see how Jonas" (our old friend Jonas of the "Adventures in the Wilds of Australia"), and my friend, Charles Fitzpatrick, are already on tiptoe to ride off for him."

The young woman glanced hastily at Charles, whom she had not noticed, drew instinctively her shawl more closely and orderly about her, and said, "But what a ride they will have! How very, very good of this young gentleman. Mr. Randall is gone to Bullarook, where he lives. It is a hundred and fifty miles off, and the latter part of the journey is a terrible one, as I have heard Mr. Randall describe it. It is through the fearful Mallee scrub, and into a dry, parched desert of sand, where it is next to impossible to procure food or water for the horses, and if the travellers get out of the track, they are very likely to perish."

"What in the world," said Mr. Martin, impatiently, "could induce the man to fix himself in such a spot? But never mind, we'll have him, or I'll go myself. Where is it, then?" pulling out Ham's squatter's map, and hastily unfolding it on his knee.

"It is Bullarook, — the desert of Bullarook, — the last station in the habitable country, and actually in the unsettled wilds itself."

"Good gracious! ay, there it is," said Mr. Martin, putting his finger on a certain number of the map; "there it is, north-east of the Lake Hindmarsh, and all beyond marked, to the very Murray on the borders of Adelaide, 'Impenetrable scrub.' Never

mind! we 'll have him out of his desert. But if he were here when Mr. Popkins was taken, why did he go away? Was that like a friend?"

"Oh, sir!" said the poor girl, "Abijah was not taken then. Mr. Randall came here with him, and it was agreed that Abijah should go along with him to Bullarook for some months. Abijah went out, saying he had to pay some little accounts, and Mr. Randall saw him, to his consternation, go into Gurwood's. He said at once, 'I will out with our horses, and go to Gurwood's, and take off your husband at once. I dare say he owes something there, but he must not stay there a moment.' Away he went; but when he got to the tent, he heard that the police had been, that the bushrangers had broke away, after shooting two of them, and Abijah was gone too, nobody knew where. The police attempted to seize Mr. Randall, because they had seen him with Abijah, but he galloped off. He sent a man over from Happy Jack's Hut to learn news of Abijah, and to tell me that he could not stay, or he should be seized too on suspicion, and then could be of no use to Abijah if he were taken, but that he hoped he would escape, and that he had left a horse for him at Fenton's station, and he must come after him: he should ride home and wait for news."

"All right then, so far," said Mr. Martin; "and you believe this Randall an honest fellow?"

"Oh, sir! a good man, a wonderfully good man; he has been more than a brother to Abijah."

"That will do," said Mr. Martin, and he looked round for Charles and Jonas. They were gone out: he followed instantly. In the next apartment, the store in fact, he found Charles hastily putting up tea, sugar, salt, and flour, for the journey. Jonas was gone for the horses. A woman with a child under her arm, which she held like a little bundle while she reached down things for Charles, said, "Shall you bring him off, think you, sir?"

"Shall we?" said Mr. Martin, "of course we shall, make yourself sure of that, mate." He knew this would go to the anxious wife. He then gave Charles the squatter's map, pointed out the stations on their way upon it, where they could refresh and lodge, and told them they must, colonial fashion, take four horses, each one in hand, so as to change them on the journey, and thus make vastly more speed. Very soon he saw them off, Jonas riding one of their own horses and leading the other, Charles on Blue Beard, Mr. Martin's horse, and leading his own cob. Away they went at full canter, meaning

to reach Fenton's station that evening, though the sun was getting low.

As soon as they were off Mr. Martin turned into the tent again, where he found old Matthew Popkins seated by the side of the couch of his daughter-in-law, with a very grave aspect, and their conversation did not seem by any means to have consoled or composed the poor afflicted girl. "A poor weak creature is Abijah," he was saying; "but why did not you let us know, Patty? I would soon have been over and read him a lecture."

"Ah, dear father, lecturing does Abby no good. He hates what he calls preaching, and gets out of the way of it. I hoped to win him to stick to business by kindness and by helping him. One does not like running about telling tales of one's own husband."

"But that won't do, Martha," said old Matthew, sternly; "see what comes of it; what trouble, what disgrace, what spotting of our good name. I have always kept a tight hand on Abijah, and he needs it."

The poor girl looked the picture of misery; her face had resumed the same expression of distress, and was again of the same marble hue as when her friends first arrived. The doctor was gone.

"Come, come, Mr. Popkins," said Mr. Martin, "I can't have you lecturing my young friend for your son's faults. It is quite enough that she has had them to bear with and to suffer from. Lecture him as much as you please when you get at him, but I put a decided veto on any lecturing here. This dear, good girl has been a wonder to the whole diggings. She has come all the way out of England out of an old affection, — there, I like to see you blush, my dear madam, — and she has carried on this business, with the help of a rough lad here, to admiration. Early and late she has been at it, sometimes hunting him, — well, well, ma'am — I won't fall into the sin I was condemning, — she has sought up her husband, and set him right again and again; but, as you say, the lad is weak, — well, now, don't be angry, my dear friend, — I don't mean in intellect — he is clever enough — but in resolution. And I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Popkins, we must have this store sold, and have Abijah and our friend here down to Lahni Mill. The store is very valuable; Mrs. Popkins has kept it so, spite of — well, never mind what; I can't have you frowning at me so, madam, — and it will fetch a good sum."

"Well, there's my other son," said Matthew Popkins.

"What, Jonas!" exclaimed Mr. Martin. "No! take my word for it, he'll never turn storekeeper; he's a lad of the bush, and will thrive there. I can't agree to his coming here."

"No, no!" said the old man; "I mean Abner."

"Oh, ay; just so! just so!—the very thing!" exclaimed Mr. Martin. "Yes, yes; he shall come here; and Abijah and Patty, they shall come to the mill. Well, now, you like that," said the vivacious Mr. Martin, going up to the side of the young woman's couch, and taking her hand. "I see you like that; and really it is a paradise of a place, that mill, and that charming valley. There Abijah will be out of the way of bad company, all except his father," he said, laughing; "and if you go, sir, to lecture him too much, you'll be the very worst company he can have. No, no; encourage him, I say; encourage him: I like encouragement. Plants, animals, everything likes sunshine. I like it; too much frost and chill will kill anything. Yes, I see you think just as I do," said he, tapping the young woman on the shoulder, who was smiling, and had regained a wonderful degree of animation, showing she liked both the talk and the prospect of getting her husband away to Lahni Mill. "I shall be delighted, we shall all be delighted, to have you there," he continued, as

if reading her thoughts, as no doubt he did. "We shall all like you, and will have fine times of it. But now ——" he paused a moment, and a cloud as of apprehension fell on that young and most sensitive countenance; "but now, while these lads are away, we must set about and get up all the evidence we can prior to the last month; and, that done, you must be off, Mrs. Popkins, to Castlemaine, and comfort your husband with your presence. I'll see that you have free access to him. And so, Mr. Popkins, send off for your son Abner, to commence store-keeping — a capital chance for him — as soon as he can get hither."

While Mr. Martin and old Matthew Popkins are doing this, with the aid of Mr. Abijah Popkins's wife, and with that of Barks and Purdy, who are despatched as messengers in every direction, we will follow our two young travellers on their journey.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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