

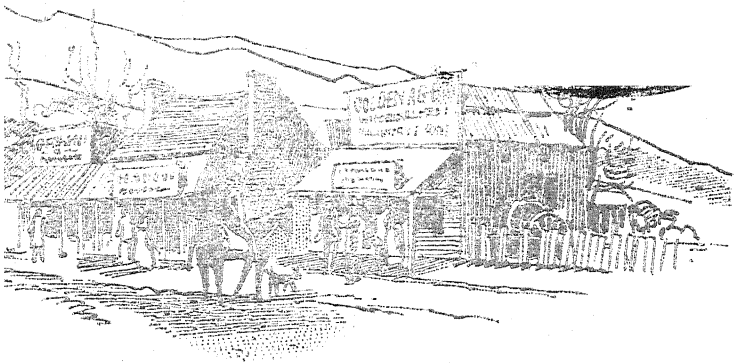


AUSTRALIAN ROUND-UP

Stories from 1790 to 1950

Edited by
COLIN RODERICK

Illustrated by Broadhurst



ANGUS AND ROBERTSON
Sydney · London

By the Same Author

Biography

IN MORTAL BONDAGE
The Strange Life of Rosa Praed

General

THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEL
20 AUSTRALIAN NOVELISTS
INTRODUCTION TO AUSTRALIAN FICTION

As Editor

HENRY LAWSON:
Twenty Stories and Seven Poems

WANDERERS IN AUSTRALIA
A Book of Travels

RALPH RASHLEIGH

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First Published 1953

PRINTED AND BOUND IN AUSTRALIA BY
HALSTEAD PRESS PTY LIMITED, NICKSON STREET, SYDNEY
Registered in Australia for transmission by post as a book

TO THE READER

This book has been made for you to enjoy. You who have taken it up and begun to read here have a right to ask me what manner of book it is.

You may, perhaps, have been so often disappointed with modern collections of so-called short stories that you have come to look upon them as a sinner does upon a sermon—something he must endure for the good of his soul, but something from which his nature shrinks.

Above all, this book is not a dose of spiritual medicine.

For too long, it would appear, the short story has been kept in a hot-house. Is it not time a gust of fresh air blew out the vague theories that have come to shroud it in mystery and made it, sometimes, a distasteful form of reading? In reality, a rattling good story is the most enjoyable of all writing.

In these stories the accent is on incident and narrative. In making this book I have not accepted the theory that a mood, a passing cloud, a flower or a mug of beer can make a short story. To tell a story, a man must have a story to tell. If he has no story, let him write his essay, sketch, vignette, study, treatise or prose poem; but let him not call it a short story.

With that I hope you will agree. If you don't, this book is not for you. If you do, you will enjoy it by the fireside in winter or in summer under a tree.

That master of the short story, Edgar Allen Poe, demanded a narrative. The *Bulletin* writers, who really set the seal on the Australian short story as a form of popular literary entertainment, had to tell a story to have their work accepted. No story, no cheque, was J. F. Archibald's maxim. And if the *Bulletin* writers take up the lion's share of the space in this book, it's because I hold that Archibald was right.

Here are stories from one hundred and sixty years of Australian life, from the days of military camp government to our own complex democracy.

The first two are not short stories proper. They are incidents taken from longer narratives written before the short story became a

conscious form of writing. With R. P. Whitworth and Marcus Clark the short story as an artistic piece of literary craftsmanship begins.

Each of these stories is meant to be read for its own sake. Each has its own strength. In combination they offer a picture of the development of Australian story-telling.

If you want to know something about those who wrote them, you will find biographical notes at the back of the book.

If you are interested in tracing the course of the short story in Australia, you may also read these stories with that in mind. The appendix will help you.

C. R.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many for kind permission to include copyright stories, particularly to the proprietors of the *Sydney Bulletin* for the stories by William Astley, A. A. D. Bayldon, Barbara Baynton, Albert Dorrington, Edward Dyson, James Edmond, Ernest Favenc, Harley Matthews, Ernest O'Ferrall, Dowell O'Reilly, R. S. Porteous, Roderic Quinn, Mary Simpson, and E. S. Sorenson. Several stories for permission to include which thanks are due to others were first printed in the *Bulletin*; references in the table of contents and the text obviate further mention here. The courteous agreement of their authors is gratefully acknowledged. Permission of the following authors, editors, publishers and executors for stories included places me under a debt of gratitude now acknowledged: A. A. D. Bayldon, Eric Bedford, Gavin Casey, Don Edwards, Ion L. Idriess, Brian James, Frank Johnston, Vernon Knowles, Henry G. Lamond, Dr George Mackaness, Harley Matthews, Myra Morris, B. O'Reilly, Ruth Murray-Prior, Nettie Palmer, Vance Palmer, R. S. Porteous, Hal Porter, Katharine Susannah Prichard, the late Roderic Quinn, H. E. Riemann, Les Robinson, Margaret Trist, Messrs Angus and Robertson, Australasian Publishing Company, Messrs Ernest Benn, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Company, Jonathan Cape Limited, Clarendon Publishing Company, the *Daily Mirror*, New South Wales Bookstall Proprietary Limited, and

Messrs Robertson and Mullens. If the wrong person has in any case been approached as copyright controller and has in good faith given consent, with the result that someone's rights have been infringed, I beg communication so as to set the matter right.

I wish to thank living writers who have made available biographical notes. For information concerning others I am indebted to Dr E. Morris Miller's *Australian Literature* (1940), the various issues of *Who's Who* (English and Australian), and A. G. Stephens's biographies in *The Bulletin Story Book*. I am grateful to the Librarians of the University of Queensland and the Commonwealth Libraries for their co-operation in this matter, and to those of the Fisher Library, University of Sydney, Queensland Parliamentary Library, the Library of the Commonwealth Parliament, and the Public Library of Victoria, for the loan of books otherwise inaccessible.

It remains for me to thank the Directors of the *Bulletin* Newspaper Company, Dr E. Morris Miller, Professor Bruce Sutherland, Mr W. E. FitzHenry of the *Bulletin* and Mr J. K. Moir for valuable suggestions, and Messrs David Lloyd and E. J. Tyrrell for the loan of books from their private collections.

After the foregoing was written the death occurred in 1949 of the man who encouraged me to make this book, Walter George Cousins, whose memory will never fade from the minds of all who knew him:

*The kindest man,
The best-condition'd and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies.*

COLIN RODERICK

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SEPTEMBER, 1790

By WATKIN TENCH

ON the 7th instant captain Nepean of the New South Wales corps and Mr White, accompanied by little Nanbaree and a party of men went in a boat to Manly Cove, intending to land there and walk on to Broken Bay. On drawing near the shore, a dead whale in the most disgusting state of putrefaction was seen lying on the beach and at least two hundred Indians surrounding it, broiling the flesh on different fires and feasting on it with the most extravagant marks of greediness and rapture. As the boat continued to approach they were observed to fall into confusion and to pick up their spears, on which our people lay upon their oars: and Nanbaree, stepping forward, harangued them for some time, assuring them that we were friends. Mr White now called for Baneelon, who on hearing his name came forth and entered into conversation. He was greatly emaciated and so far disfigured by a long beard that our people not without difficulty recognized their old acquaintance. His answering in broken English and inquiring for the governor, however, soon corrected their doubts. He seemed quite friendly. And soon after Colbee came up, pointing to his leg to shew that he had freed himself from the fetter which was upon him when he had escaped from us.

When Baneelon was told that the governor was not far off he expressed great joy and declared that he would immediately go in search of him; and if he found him not would follow him to Sydney.

“Have you brought any hatchets with you?” cried he.

Unluckily they had not any which they chose to spare; but two or three shirts, some handkerchiefs, knives and other trifles were given to them and seemed to satisfy.

Baneelon, willing to instruct his countrymen, tried to put on a shirt, but managed it so awkwardly that a man of the name of M'Entire, the governor's gamekeeper, was directed by Mr White to assist him. This man, who was well known to him, he positively forbade to approach, eyeing him ferociously and with every mark of horror and resentment. He was in consequence left to himself and the conversation proceeded as before. The length of his beard seemed to annoy him much and he expressed eager wishes to be shaved, asking repeatedly for a razor. A pair of scissors was given to him and he shewed he had not forgotten how to use such an instrument, for he forthwith began to clip his hair with it.

During this time the women and children, to the number of more than fifty, stood at a distance and refused all invitations which could be conveyed by signs and gestures to approach nearer.

"Which of them is your old favourite, Bar-an-gar-oo, of whom you used to speak so often?"

"Oh," said he, "she is become the wife of Colbee! but I have got *bul-la mur-ree dee-in* [two large women] to compensate for her loss."

It was observed that he had received two wounds in addition to his former numerous ones since he had left us, one of them from a spear which had passed through the fleshy part of his arm; and the other displayed itself in a large scar above his left eye. They were both healed and probably were acquired in the conflict wherein he had asserted his pretensions to the two ladies.

Nanbaree all this while, though he continued to interrogate his countrymen and to interpret on both sides, shewed little desire to return to their society and stuck very close to his new friends. On being asked the cause of their present meeting, Baneelon pointed to the whale, which stunk immoderately; and Colbee made signals that it was common among them to eat until the stomach was so overladen as to occasion sickness.

Their demand of hatchets being re-iterated notwithstanding our refusal they were asked why they had not brought with them some of their own? They excused themselves by saying that on an occasion of the present sort they always left them at home and cut up the whale with the shell which is affixed to the end of the throwing-stick.

Our party now thought it time to proceed on their original expedition, and having taken leave of their sable friends, rowed to some

distance, where they landed and set out for Broken Bay, ordering the coxswain of the boat in which they had come down to go immediately and acquaint the governor of all that had passed. When the natives saw that the boat was about to depart they crowded around her and brought down, by way of present, three or four great junks of the whale and put them on board of her, the largest of which Baneelon expressly requested might be offered in his name to the governor.

It happened that his excellency had this day gone to a landmark which was building on the South-head near the flag-staff to serve as a direction to ships at sea; and the boat met him on his return to Sydney. Immediately on receiving the intelligence, he hastened back to the South-head, and having procured all the fire-arms which could be mustered there, consisting of four muskets and a pistol, set out attended by Mr Collins and lieutenant Waterhouse of the navy.

When the boat reached Manly Cove the natives were found still busily employed around the whale. As they expressed not any consternation on seeing us row to the beach, governor Phillip stepped out unarmed and attended by one seaman only and called for Baneelon, who appeared, but notwithstanding his former eagerness would not suffer the other to approach him for several minutes. Gradually, however, he warmed into friendship and frankness and presently after Colbee came up. They discoursed for some time, Baneelon expressing pleasure to see his old acquaintance and inquiring by name for every person whom he could recollect at Sydney and among others for a French cook, one of the governor's servants, whom he had constantly made the butt of his ridicule by mimicking his voice, gait and other peculiarities, all of which he again went through with his wonted exactness and drollery. He asked also particularly for a lady from whom he had once ventured to snatch a kiss; and on being told that she was well, by way of proving that the token was fresh in his remembrance, he kissed lieutenant Waterhouse and laughed aloud. On his wounds being noticed, he coldly said that he had received them at Botany Bay, but went no farther into their history.

Hatchets still continued to be called for with redoubled eagerness, which rather surprized us, as formerly they had always been accepted with indifference. But Baneelon had probably demonstrated to them their superiority over those of their own manufacturing. To appease their importunity the governor gave them a knife, some bread, pork and other articles and promised that in two days he

would return hither and bring with him hatchets to be distributed among them, which appeared to diffuse general satisfaction.

Baneelon's love of wine has been mentioned; and the governor, to try whether it still subsisted, uncorked a bottle and poured out a glass of it, which the other drunk off with his former marks of relish and good humour, giving for a toast, as he had been taught, "*the King.*"

Our party now advanced from the beach; but perceiving many of the Indians filing off to the right and left, so as in some measure to surround them, they retreated gently to their old situation, which produced neither alarm or offence; the others by degrees also resumed their former position. A very fine barbed spear of uncommon size being seen by the governor, he asked for it. But Baneelon, instead of complying with the request, took it away and laid it at some distance and brought back a throwing-stick which he presented to his excellency.

Matters had proceeded in this friendly train for more than half an hour, when a native with a spear in his hand came forward and stopped at the distance between twenty and thirty yards from the place where the governor, Mr Collins, lieutenant Waterhouse and a seaman stood. His excellency held out his hand and called to him, advancing towards him at the same time, Mr Collins following close behind. He appeared to be a man of middle age, short of stature, sturdy and well set, seemingly a stranger and but little acquainted with Baneelon and Colbee. The nearer the governor approached, the greater became the terror and agitation of the Indian. To remove his fear, governor Phillip threw down a dirk which he wore at his side. The other, alarmed at the rattle of the dirk, and probably misconstruing the action, instantly fixed his lance in his throwing stick. To retreat, his excellency now thought would be more dangerous than to advance. He therefore cried out to the man, "*Wee-ree, wee-ree*", (Bad; you are doing wrong) displaying at the same time every token of amity and confidence. The words had, however, hardly gone forth when the Indian, stepping back with one foot, aimed his lance with such force and dexterity that striking the governor's right shoulder just above the collarbone, the point, glancing downward, came out at his back, having made a wound many inches long. The man was observed to keep his eye steadily fixed on the lance until it struck its object, when he directly dashed into the woods and was seen no more.

[From *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson, 1793.*]

THE BITER BIT

By JAMES TUCKER

A NUMBER of the settlers having preferred a request to that effect, the whole of the "play actors" of Emu Plains received permission to go with all their paraphernalia to perform a play at a distant part of the Nepean settlement.

Proud was the manager, great was the bustling importance of the company, and by the first light of the day appointed, the scenery, machinery, dresses and decorations of the Emu theatre having been transferred to a settler's dray, all were *en route* to the scene of action, a large barn belonging to the keeper of a very small inn, who had kindly lent the edifice for this purpose, of course solely for the amusement of his neighbours without the slightest expectation of prospective advantage to himself. Notwithstanding his disinterested feelings, however, after the *corps dramatique* had been hard at work for a couple of hours, Boniface, rubbing his hands, came in to the quondam theatre and expressed his admiration in glowing terms of all that he saw, winding up a most flowery speech by enquiring whether it was not a dry job, at the same time hinting obliquely at the excellent qualities of a beverage composed of good rum and peach cider, of both which his stock was immense, adding that as no doubt the performance would amply remunerate the company, he would not object to supplying the members thereof with refreshment for the day on credit, always providing his account should be liquidated as soon as the play was over.

These terms having been joyfully acceded to by the thirsty Thespians, a sample of the much-vaunted drink was obtained. Although it was not quite equal to nectar—as the cider was something of the sharpest and the rum rather peppery—yet to men from Emu Plains it appeared very superior. About noon a servant came, who in the name of her master the innkeeper enquired if any of the players wanted dinner. All adjourned to the kitchen, where salt beef and pork, abundance of greens and the unvarying damper awaited their appetites. This sumptuous feast was duly crowned by libations,

though sooth to say, the tender care of their host prevented their getting drunk, because the rum, though very pungent and very hot, was also very weak, being in nautical phrase only equal to three-water grog, and thus did not disturb the acting powers of even the most weak-headed among the theatricals.

The performance of the evening having closed amid rapturous applause, a good jollification was resolved on. But alas, as Burns has sung,

*The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley.*

An unforeseen difficulty arose; the innkeeper insisted on payment of his bill before any fresh supplies were afforded. On examination of this ingenious document, it appeared each performer owed him £1 2s. 6d. for drink, dinner and supper, both of these repasts being charged at 3s. per head and the remainder made up of pints of rum, gallons of cider and ditto, ditto . . . almost without end. Now as is customary in such cases, the debtors could not by any process be brought to believe that they had actually obtained even half the liquor charged against them, and the obdurate creditor vowed most solemnly that he had served the whole of it himself. To add to the mischief, it was found on investigation that after paying a few trifling claims for nails and other minor incidental expenses, the receipts would but admit of a dividend of £1 10s. to each principal player in the company and the stipulated wages of the supernumeraries—scene-shifters and others.

Indeed, as each man's share of the bill was alike, the company actually owed more than their gross receipts; but on this being explained, the landlord at length agreed to take what the lower rate of performers obtained in full from them if the others would cash up the amount of his claim on each of these. Further, he said he thought himself and the chief constable might persuade their superintendent to let the company remain where they were and play again one more night, which he kindly volunteered to do, and in the mean time (always after a settlement) would let the Thespians go on again with a fresh score on the faith of their next night's receipts.

This arrangement being at once acceded to, the disinterested landlord received instantly by far the greater portion of the collection made by the theatrical treasurer. Then the company began again to enjoy themselves, free from the dreadful thoughts of the reckoning, which was thus procrastinated 24 hours at any rate. The next

morning, betimes, manager King called a council of his trusty coadjutors and opened to them a most brilliant device of his own composition by which he doubted not to astonish the natives in general and none more so than their kind confiding host in particular, who had been so fluent of his beverage and so cunning with his chalk. This notable plan was to be put into execution at the close of the evening's amusement and was rapturously acceded to by his fellow convives, who deemed it would form a most appropriate finale to the amusement of the night.

They now partook of breakfast and after a couple of glasses of grog by way of stimulus to repair the ravages made by their last night's jollification in the sensorium of each, the most eloquent of the performers were dispatched in small parties to make a circuit of the settlers dwelling near, exhibiting in each house a play-bill. To compose this Rashleigh had exhausted nearly all his powers of persuasive oratory in setting forth the magnitude of that night's attractions at their temporary theatre, enumerating the various points of allurements quite as grandiloquently as a London manager of a minor theatre, and winding up with the awful annunciation that it was most positively their last exhibition at that place. The ambassadors were also commissioned to explain to the expected guests such reasons good as compelled them to believe the last assertion, namely, that the passes of the histrionic heroes would expire that day.

Rashleigh, backed by a new and youthful recruit whose beardless face well suited the female parts he sustained, made his rounds, meeting with many promises of attendance and much rude hospitality from all the small settlers round about. This was a period of most universal merriment, indeed, a sort of prescriptive saturnalia in society of that sort every year, but doubly so upon this occasion, when the agriculturists for the first time in seven years were blessed with overflowing garners teeming with grain. In every hut was to be found a keg filled not with choice Jamaica but with its fiery prototype from Bengal; and mirth and revelry was the order of both day and night.

Evening drew nigh as they returned to their companions, when the manager announced to our adventurer that all was prepared for the successful *dénouement* of the preconcerted plot to form the finale of the night; and after each had partaken of a refreshment it was time to dress for the play.

An early hour had been fixed upon for commencing, because, it being Saturday night, they wished the whole bill of fare, which was rather a long one, should be gone through before midnight. The barn (beg pardon, theatre) was crammed to overflowing. Many who

would not be turned away were accommodated on the roof. Each new point elicited rapturous bursts of applause. As soon as everything was done with, either of the scenery or of the valuable properties, it was slyly and noiselessly withdrawn through an opening which had been clandestinely contrived in the slabs of the barn. At last, when the drop scene fell, manager King was the only performer left in the house. All the others had followed their paraphernalia, which, as it was removed, had been placed in a dray hired for the purpose and kept concealed at a short distance among some swamp oaks in a dell by the river side, where the whole party now waited with impatience the arrival of their manager.

That eloquent personage, among whose other attributes was a most fluent gift of the gab, and who was not at all annoyed at any opportunity of exhibiting his oratory, amused the audience fully a quarter of an hour by his facetious farewells, returning thanks for the distinguished honour of their patronage. Finally, perceiving a movement towards the door on the part of some impatient persons who wished to be at home, manager King, amid a profusion of bows that would have done honour to a dancing master, each too in accordance with approved theatrical taste much lower than its predecessor, himself at length withdrew through the aperture before mentioned, carefully closing it after him and leaving to the landlord, in liquidation of his claim, the drop scene—which, by the by, was so foully abused by its antiquity that it had long been laid aside as condemned even at the Ému theatre—and about a dozen rough battered tin sconces with the ends of candle they contained. These were all the available assets they resigned to their creditor in satisfaction of his demand for the previous night's festivity, their meals that day and an awful accumulation of lush supplied these runagates by their too confiding host during the last 24 hours.

Boniface, who was himself in the theatre at the close of the performance, had vigilantly assisted the money-taker at the door, kindly volunteering his services, not only to prevent any from evaporating without payment, but also by jocular railleries and reproofs of their stinginess to stimulate those who did not offer cash, to exert unwonted liberality. After all the auditory had departed, the landlord remained near the orchestra in patient expectation of the advent of the performers from behind the scenes. As there was no other outlet from thence—that he knew of—he made himself certain they must pass by him before they could leave the scene of their histrionic display, and probably the worthy knight of the spigot consoled himself by casting up the “tottle of the whole”, as Mr Hume would say, and jingling imaginary coins in his breeches

pockets, to be derived from the proceeds of the theatrical treasurer, whose harvest he was certain from ocular demonstration must have been a pretty productive one.

At length, finding the actors did not make their appearance and hearing no sound emanate from their supposed retreat, the profound stillness of the whole theatre forming a complete contrast to the merry shouts of jolly Bacchanalians whom he could hear noisily revelling away at his own house—which incident also demanded his early attention in order that he might assist in the operations of his trusty coadjutors of the rum-keg—the landlord clambered over the rails which divided the orchestra from the pit, climbed upon the temporary stage, lifted the ragged curtain and after an awful pause plucked up heart of grace and boldly entered the *sanctum sanctorum* of the sons of Thespis.

Here the bewildered Boniface could scarcely credit the evidence of his eyes. By the almost expiring rays of a single morsel of candle end he could see neither scenery nor actors. What puzzled him more, he could by no means conceive how they had contrived to get out, as there was then no opening whatever visible; and he at last well-nigh decided in his mind that they must be conjurors as well as comedians. Brimful of wrath he hastened to his home to institute inquiries, which, it is almost needless to add, proved all in vain. Not one of the many persons there knew which way the fugitives had fled, and the advanced hour, with the darkness of the night, rendered pursuit at that moment hopeless. Vowing bitter vengeance against these delinquents, whom he stigmatized as monsters of most odious ingratitude, the irate man of reckonings was reluctantly compelled to bottle up his anger as well as he could for the present and defer until daylight any ulterior measures.

In the mean time manager King and his hopeful squad had pursued their journey merrily, keeping down in a grassy valley where the turf offered no noisy impediments to their progress until they reached one of the many rapids in that part of the Nepean which are often crossed by such wayfarers as eschew the payment of puntage. Here they waded the stream and having gone but a little distance along the opposite bank, called a halt in a little sunken spot that promised to prevent their fire from attracting the attention of any wanderers. There they kindled a blazing flame and began to busy themselves in preparing a feed, the basis of which, I regret to record, had been procured from the victimized host under the pretence of a stage supper necessary in the course of their night's performance, but which—with near two gallons of his much extolled beverage that they had secreted and brought with them to

do honour to the occasion—had not been paid for as yet; indeed, to say truth, if the wills of those about to consume it were to be consulted, the payment for the whole was like enough to be procrastinated *ad Graecas kalendas*.

Here hilarity prevailed to an unusual extent, the staple fun with which their jokes were seasoned being all levelled at the luckless landlord. Many most witty conjectures were hazarded as to the length, breadth and depth of the astonishment which that worthy and liberal soul would exhibit upon making the disagreeable discovery that he had been so deeply done. The performers did not drink much, as they conjectured that mine host would make his complaint to their commandant, and they wished to appear before that awful officer in full possession of all their powers of reason.

About sunrise they arrived at home. Having unloaded their valuable effects, each man prepared himself as best he might for the approaching interview, manager King—who in this as in all things else took the lead—promising to stand spokesman on the occasion.

About seven o'clock the landlord made his appearance accompanied by the chief constable, who could scarcely conceal his merriment at the lugubrious tale told with such unwonted energy by the suffering subject of the "pla'actors'" peculations.

The landlord made his *entrée* to the theatre, where he discovered manager King dressed in his full suit of Sunday slops lying apparently asleep in his berth. That worthy certainly performed the part of one just awakened to a miracle; for when the visitor enquired what he meant by running away without paying the debt incurred by the company, Jemmy King yawned heavily once or twice, then affected great anger at being so unceremoniously aroused and at length gave the complainant very deliberately to understand that he, for one, thought the players had already paid dear enough for all that they had received from him; and further, if the landlord expected any more money from them, why, he must get it the best way he could.

On this the other burst out into indignant exclamations against such excessive ingratitude, saying that he expected no less. At last he started off to lay his lamentation before the superintendent, from whom he confidently expected both redress and sympathy. In a few moments a summons arrived for all the *corps dramatique* to attend that awe-inspiring official, and being quickly arranged in his sight, he demanded what they had to say for themselves in reply to this charge of fraud.

King, after apologizing for occupying the time of his superior, told all the history of the first day's proceedings, laying particular

emphasis upon the overcharges made by the landlord as they appeared on the first bill, winding up his oratory by a reference to the second account and appealing to the superintendent whether he thought it at all possible the men then present, who it was perfectly evident were unaccustomed to the use of any intoxicating drinks, could have consumed the quantities of spirits charged against them in the space of about 36 hours and still preserve their sobriety so as to enable them to play both the nights, some of them sustaining three different parts on each—which he submitted it would have been quite impossible for them to do if they had even drunk half the liquor the landlord now sought to make them pay for.

The great man seemed rather struck with this defence and on examining both bills could not but admit the accuracy of King's argument. Observing that the meals had been charged at 3s. each person, he asked of what viands they consisted; and the homely qualities of the several repasts being asserted by King and admitted by mine host, the superintendent told the latter he could not help thinking that part of the charge too dear by half. As for the rest of his claim, he could not believe the men had drunk all the grog stated, because each person's share would in his opinion make and keep any ordinary individual drunk at least for a week; yet those who the landlord stated had consumed it all in a day and a half now stood before them apparently as sober as if they had never tasted anything stronger than water.

"At the same time," concluded the chief, "if you request it, I will order the whole of them to be brought before the bench of magistrates to answer any charge you may think fit to prefer against them. But I'd recommend you to remember that there is an Act of Council in force imposing a fine of five dollars for each offence in serving a convict with spirits; so that perhaps you might lose more by taking them to the court than you would clear by making them pay, even if you gained your case, which seems rather doubtful."

The landlord was compelled to give the business up for a bad job and console himself by reflecting that what with his first overcharge and what the audience assembled through means of the performance had expended at his house, he was in the whole a gainer instead of a loser by the brothers of the buskin; though he often vowed he never had been so "willainously wictimized" before in all his life.

[From *Ralph Rashleigh*. Written 1845-6. First published in the authentic text, 1952.]



BARRINGTON

By JOHN LANG

A FEW years ago I made the acquaintance of an elderly lady whose husband so far back as 1799 held an official position, both civil and military, in the colony of New South Wales. Many anecdotes she told me of celebrated characters who had in the words of one of them "left their country for their country's good." With most if not with all of these celebrities the old lady had come in contact personally.

"One morning," she began, "I was sitting in my drawing-room with my two little children, who are now middle-aged men with large families, when a gentleman was announced. I gave the order for his admission; and on his entering the door of the apartment, I rose from my chair and greeted him with a bow, which he returned in the most graceful and courtly manner imaginable. His dress was that of man of fashion and his bearing that of a person who had moved in the highest circles of society. A vessel had arrived from

England a few days previously with passengers and I fancied that this gentleman was one of them. I asked him to be seated. He took a chair opposite to me and at once entered into conversation, making the first topic the extreme warmth of the day and the second the healthful appearance of my charming children—as he was pleased to speak of them. Apart from a mother liking to hear her children praised, there was such a refinement in the stranger's manner, such a seeming sincerity in all he said, added to such marvellous neatness of expression, that I could not help thinking he would form a very valuable acquisition to our list of acquaintances, provided he intended remaining in Sydney instead of settling in the interior of the colony.

“I expressed my regret that the major (my husband) was from home; but I mentioned that I expected him at one o'clock, at which hour we took luncheon; and I further expressed a hope that our visitor would remain and partake of the meal. With a very pretty smile (which I afterward discovered had more meaning in it than I was at the time aware of) he feared he could not have the pleasure of partaking of the hospitalities of my table, but with my permission he would wait till the appointed hour, which was then near at hand. Our conversation was resumed and presently he asked my little ones to go to him. They obeyed at once, albeit they were rather shy children. This satisfied me that the stranger was a man of a kind and gentle disposition. He took the children, seated them on his knees, and began to tell them a fairy story (evidently of his own invention, and extemporized) to which they listened with profound attention. Indeed, I could not help being interested in the story, so fanciful were the ideas and so poetical the language in which they were expressed.

“The story ended, the stranger replaced the children on the carpet and approached the table on which stood, in a porcelain vase, a bouquet of flowers. These he admired and began a discourse of floriculture. I listened with intense earnestness, so profound were all his observations. We were standing at the table for at least eight or ten minutes, my boys hanging on to the skirt of my dress and every now and then compelling me to beg of them to be silent.

“One o'clock came, but not the major. I received, however, a note from him written in pencil on a slip of paper. He would be detained at Government House until half-past two.

“Again I requested the fascinating stranger to partake of luncheon, which was now on table in the next room; and again, with the same winning smile, he declined. As he was about, as I thought,

to depart, I extended my hand; but to my astonishment he stepped back, made a low bow and declined taking it.

"For a gentleman to have his hand refused when he extends it to another is embarrassing enough. But for a lady! Who can possibly describe what were my feelings? Had he been the heir to the British throne, visiting that penal settlement in disguise (and from the stranger's manners and conversation he might have been that illustrious personage) he could scarcely have under the circumstances treated me in such an extraordinary manner. I scarcely knew what to think. Observing, as the stranger must have done, the blood rush to my cheeks, and being cognizant evidently of what was passing through my mind, he spoke as follows:

"Madam, I am afraid you will never forgive me the liberty I have taken already. But the truth is, the passion suddenly stole over me and I could not resist the temptation of satisfying myself that the skill which made me so conspicuous in the mother-country still remained to me in this convict land."

"I stared at him, but did not speak.

"Madam," he continued, "the penalty of sitting at table with you or taking the hand you paid me the compliment to proffer me—yourself in ignorance of the fact I am about to disclose—would have been the forfeiture of my ticket of leave, a hundred lashes and employment on the roads in irons. As it is I dread the major's wrath; but I cherish a hope that you will endeavour to appease it, if your advocacy be only a return for the brief amusement I afforded your beautiful children."

"You are a convict!" I said indignantly, my hand on the bell-rope.

"Madam," he said, with an expression of countenance which moved me to pity in spite of my indignation, "hear me for one moment."

"A convicted felon! How dared you enter my drawing-room as a visitor?" I asked him, my anger again getting the better of all my other feelings.

"The major, madam," said the stranger, "requested me to be at his house at the hour when I presented myself; and he bade me wait if he were from home when I called. The major wishes to know who was the person who received from me a diamond necklace which belonged to the Marchioness of Dorrington, and which came into my possession at a State ball some four or five years ago—a State ball at which I had the honour of being present. Now, madam, when the orderly who opened the front door informed me that the major was not at home but that you were, that indomitable

impudence which so often carried me into the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy of our country took possession of me; and warmed as I was with generous wine—just sufficiently to give me courage—I determined to tread once more on a lady's carpet and enter into conversation with her. That much I felt the major would forgive me; and therefore I requested the orderly to announce a gentleman. Indeed, madam, I shall make the forgiveness of the liberties I have taken in this room the condition of my giving that information which shall restore to the Marchioness of Dorrington the gem of which I deprived her—a gem which is still unpledged and in the possession of one who will restore it on an application, accompanied by a letter in my handwriting.'

"Again I kept silence.

"Madam!" he exclaimed, somewhat impassionedly and rather proudly, 'I am no other man than Barrington the illustrious pick-pocket; and this is the hand which in its day has gently plucked from ladies of rank and wealth jewels which realized in all upwards of thirty-five thousand pounds, irrespective of those which were in my possession, under lock and key, when fortune turned her back upon me.'

"Barrington the pickpocket!' Having heard so much of this man and of his exploits (although, of course, I had never seen him) I could not help regarding him with curiosity; so much so that I could scarcely be angry with him any longer.

"Madam,' he continued, 'I have told you that I longed to satisfy myself whether that skill which rendered me so illustrious in Europe still remained to me in this country after five years of desuetude. I can conscientiously say that I am just as perfect in the art; that the touch is just as soft and the nerve as steady as when I sat in the dress-circle at Drury Lane or Covent Garden.'

"I do not comprehend you, Mr Barrington,' I replied. I could not help saying *Mister*.

"But you will, madam, in one moment. Where are your keys?"

"I felt my pocket, in which I fancied they were, and discovered that they were gone.

"And your thimble and pencil-case, and your smelling-salts? They are here!' He drew them from his coat-pocket.

"My anger was again aroused. It was indeed, I thought, a frightful liberty for a convict to practise his skill upon me and put his hand into the pocket of my dress. But before I could request him to leave the room and the house, he spoke again; and as soon as I heard his voice and looked in his face I was mollified and against my will, as it were, obliged to listen to him.

“‘Ah, madam,’ he sighed, ‘such is the change that often comes over the affairs of men! There was a time when ladies boasted of having been robbed by Barrington. Many whom I had never robbed gave it out that I had done so, simply that they might be talked about. Alas! such is the weakness of poor human nature that some people care not by what means they associate their names with the name of any celebrity. I was in power then, not in bondage. “Barrington has my diamond ear-rings!” once exclaimed the old Countess of Kettlebank, clasping her hands. Her ladyship’s statement was not true. Her diamonds were paste, and she knew it, and I caused them to be returned to her. Had you not a pair of very small pearl-drops in your ears this morning, madam?’

“I placed my hands to my ears and discovered that the drops were gone. Again my anger returned and I said, ‘How dared you, sir, place your fingers on my face?’

“‘Upon my sacred word and honour, madam,’ he replied, placing his hand over his left breast, and bowing. ‘I did nothing of the kind! The ear is the most sensitive part of the human body to the touch of another person. Had I touched your ear my hope of having these drops in my waistcoat-pocket would have been gone. It was the springs only that I touched, and the drops fell into the palm of my left hand.’ He placed the ear-rings on the table and made me another very low bow.

“‘And when did you deprive me of them?’ I asked him.

“‘When I was discoursing on floriculture you had occasion several times to incline your head towards your charming children and gently reprove them for interrupting me. It was on one of those occasions that the deed was quickly done. The dear children were the unconscious confederates in my crime—if crime you still consider it—since I have told you, and I spoke the truth; that it was not for the sake of gain, but simply to satisfy a passionate curiosity. It was as delicate and as difficult an operation as any I ever performed in the whole course of my professional career.’

“There was a peculiar quaintness of humor and of action thrown into this speech; I could not refrain from laughing. But to my great satisfaction, the illustrious pickpocket did not join in the laugh. He regarded me with a look of extreme humility and maintained a respectful silence, which was shortly broken by a loud knocking at the outer door. It was the major, who, suddenly remembering his appointment with Barrington, had contrived to make his escape from Government House in order to keep it. The major seemed rather surprised to find Barrington in my drawing-room; but he

was in such a hurry and so anxious that he said nothing on the subject.

"I withdrew to the passage, whence I could overhear all that took place.

"Now look here, Barrington," said my husband impetuously, "I will have no more nonsense. As for a free pardon or even a conditional pardon, at present it is out of the question. In getting you a ticket of leave I have done all that I possibly can; and as I am a living man, I will give you fair warning that if you do not keep faith with me I will *undo* what I have already done. A free pardon! What! Let you loose upon the society of England again? The Colonial Secretary would scout the idea and severely censure the Governor for recommending such a thing. You know as well as I do, that if you returned to England tomorrow and had an income of five thousand a year you would never be able to keep those fingers of yours quiet."

"Well, I think you are right, major," said the illustrious personage.

"Then you will write that letter at once?"

"I will. But on one condition."

"Another condition?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is that condition? You have so many conditions that I begin to think the necklace will not be forthcoming after all. And if it be not, by——"

"Do not excite yourself to anger, major. I give you my honour——"

"Your honour! Nonsense! What I want is the jewel restored to its owner."

"And it shall be, on condition that you will not be offended, grievously offended, with me for what I have done this day!"

"What is that?"

"Summon your good lady and let her bear witness both for and against me."

"My husband opened the drawing-room door and called out, 'Bessie!'"

"As soon as I had made my appearance, Barrington stated the case—all that had transpired—with minute accuracy; nay, more, he acted the entire scene in such a way that it became a little comedy in itself; the characters being himself, myself and the children, all of which characters he represented with such humour that my husband and myself were several times in fits of laughter. Barrington, however, did not even smile. He affected to regard the

little drama (and this made it the more amusing) as a very serious business.

"This play over, my husband again put to Barrington the question, 'Will you write that letter at once?'

"Yes,' he replied, 'I will; for I see that I am forgiven the liberty I was tempted to take.' And seating himself at the table he wrote:

"MR BARRINGTON presents his compliments to Mr ——, and requests that a sealed packet, marked DN. No. 27, be immediately delivered to the bearer of this note. In the event of this request not being complied with Mr Barrington will have an opportunity ere long of explaining to Mr ——, in Sydney, New South Wales, that he (Mr ——) has been guilty of an act of egregious folly.'

"Fourteen months passed away, when one morning my husband received a letter from a gentleman in the Colonial Office. He clapped his hands, cried 'Bravo!' and then read as follows:—

"MY DEAR MAJOR,—The great pickpocket has been as good as his word. My lady is again in possession of her brilliants. Do whatever you can for Barrington *in the Colony*; but keep a sharp eye upon him, lest he should come back and once more get hold of that necklace.'

"My husband sent for Barrington to inform him of the result of his letter, and he took an opportunity of asking the illustrious man if there were any other valuables which he would like to restore to the original owners.

"Thank you—no!' was the reply. 'There are, it is true, sundry little articles in safe custody at home; but as it is impossible to say what may be in the future, they had better for the present stand in my own name.'"

[From *Botany Bay*, 1859.]

THE TROOPER'S STORY

By R. P. WHITWORTH

WHAT I'm going to tell you happened ten years since, at the time there was the bushranging fever in New South Wales. It's concerning one of the biggest blackguards and scoundrels I ever met during the whole of my colonial experience, and that was Bill Macginnerty, *alias* Red Bill, *alias* Foxey, *alias* any number of Christian and surnames beside.

He was a Vandemonian, one of the real old sort, and—although how he ever got it I couldn't make out—he had a ticket of leave. He wasn't altogether a bushranger: he had too much cunning and too little pluck ever to go right bang on the road; but he was everything else. There wasn't a big burglary committed in Sydney or miles round it for years that he wasn't in in some way, and yet we never could bowl him out. When I say we, I mean the police generally, for at that time the mounted force didn't have much to do with common police work. We belonged to the ornamental department, and looked on ourselves as quite superior to the common constables, who had to do with thieves and bad characters in general. Escorts, patrols, guards of honour, keeping the ring at races, cricket matches, reviews, and so on—that was more in our line, although occasionally we were told off for bush duty, but not often.

Well, about Foxey. As I said, we knew he was in nearly everything going in the way of crime, and still we never could sheet anything home to him, try our best. He used to be up before the magistrates as a rogue and vagabond, an associate of thieves, a frequenter of disorderly houses, a reputed thief, or what not; and although he was occasionally potted for a month or two, he could never be convicted for anything big. He always employed a lawyer—the same lawyer—whom he used to fee well; one who was almost as full of roguery as himself, but who made a lot of money in Sydney by conducting cases that no respectable attorney would touch, until he got bowled out and was struck off the rolls.

Foxey was a little, bow-legged, under-sized fellow, with a fair

complexion, light eyes, sandy hair, and small, light, mutton-chop whiskers. He pretended to be a general dealer and such like, and used to whine before the bench that he was a poor fellow, trying to make an honest livelihood, but that the police had a down on him, and wouldn't let him. But when he'd be alone with one of the constables, Lord! the language he'd use would be awful. Sometimes, after a month or two's quod, he'd be missing for a time, and, the cunning little beggar, we never could find his traces. We were sure to hear of something big being done about then, but never could connect him with it, although we were morally certain that he'd been in it some way.

At last the bank was robbed. I won't say which bank, but it wasn't a thousand miles from Bathurst, anyhow. It was one of the most barefaced things that ever were done, I think; and how Foxey ever had the pluck to go in for it—for he was in it—licked me. It was this way. One hot-wind day, at about half-past ten o'clock in the forenoon, when everybody was half-asleep with the heat and dust, the clerk of the bank was sitting dozing over his ledger, or, like the king in the nursery song, "a-counting of his money," when in walk two men—one with a cash-bag in his hand and the other with a cheque.

"I want to open an account in this bank," says the first chap.

"Go in and see the manager, sir," says the clerk, pointing to the door.

In he walks, and, standing at the door, points a pistol at the manager's head, telling him with an oath that if he spoke or moved he'd blow his brains out. At the same time the one at the counter jumped over it, and catching the clerk, a young fellow, who had gone to the desk to compare the cheque, by the collar, put a pistol to his ear, and, threatening him with instant death if he called out, dragged him into the manager's room. There was nobody else in the bank, except the woman-servant upstairs, and no noise was made. The messenger was out with exchange cheques at the other banks in the township, and they watched their time well. Then the third of the party, my noble Foxey, as it turned out, quietly stepped into the bank, and in a few seconds had swept all the cash and notes he could find into his pockets or a small bag he was provided with, and almost before you could say knife he had unlocked and unbolted the back doors of the bank, and the three of them were away, leaving the manager and clerk locked up in the room. Of course they sung out for help, but before help could arrive, and what had been done explained, the three robbers had

disappeared into the scrubby paddocks behind the township and got clear off with the swag.

Of course the police were brought, and after they had asked any number of stupid questions and made a careful examination of the premises, as if that were of any earthly use, they started off in search. They might just as well have saved themselves the trouble, though, for the old birds who had planned and carried out that robbery were not likely to wait to have salt put on their tails, and the constables having searched a good many likely,—and more unlikely—many possible,—and more impossible—places, returned as wise as they were when they started.

The whole country was ablaze with the news in a very short time, and in due course it reached us in Sydney. There were all kinds of reports abroad: some said Gardiner's lot, some said Thunderbolt, some one, some another. I don't know why, but something told me that Foxey was in it. Whether it was that I had such a down on him, or whether it was this new game of spiritualism, or whether it was that it looked so much like him, I don't know; but certain it was I spotted him for it. In my mind it was just what he would have done, just like his cunning, to get two of his mates to do the rough work, and then step in quietly and nab the swag, never being seen, and so, of course, not being identifiable, for although both the manager and the clerk could describe the two who stuck them up, they did not see the third man, and therefore could not tell what he was like. It was a singular thing, too: plenty of people had seen two strange men knocking about the township, but never a third with them. The police up there arrested about half-a-dozen men on suspicion, more to show that they were doing something than for any other reason, I believe, but they were, of course, not the parties.

One night, after bedding down, I was sitting on a stone in the stable yard smoking and ruminating, when up comes Inspector White. He was fond of going round and looking at the horses, and passing a word or two with the men, for, although he was a regular martinet on duty, off duty he'd unbend and become quite chatty and friendly.

"Good evening, Johnson," said he.

"Good evening, sir," said I.

"Thinking about your sweetheart?" said he, for he liked to pass a quiet joke.

"No, sir," said I, "I was thinking about a very different matter."

"Ah," said he, "what may that be?"

"Well, sir," said I, "I was thinking about that sticking up of the

bank business. Do you know, sir, that I'd bet a pound I know who did it?"

"What d'ye mean?" said he, quite sharply.

"Why sir," I said, "I don't know why, but something tells me that Bill Macginnerty was at the bottom of that robbery."

He looked at me for a minute, and then, biting his moustache, a trick he had when he was thinking of anything, walked away without saying a word, but looking very thoughtful. Next day, after parade, he sent for me to his office, and who should be there with him but Inspector Doubleton and a police magistrate. I saluted and stood at attention.

"Sit down, Johnson," said he. It was a most uncommon thing for him to do; but he did, and so I sat down.

"Johnson," said he, "I'm going to give you a holiday."

"Sir," said I, quite flabbergasted, for I never knew such a thing to happen in the force before—"Sir, I'm much obliged, but I don't particularly want——"

"Oh, yes, you do," said he, taking the words out of my mouth; "you want a holiday, you know, not leave of absence, but a holiday, you understand, a holiday for the good of your health, or to see your relations, or to see the country. Yes, that's it, to see the country. You can draw on Robinson and Co., the carrying agents on Brickfield Hill, for any money you may require. You needn't report yourself at any police station in the country districts; in fact, if I were you, I should forget that I had ever been connected with the police, and if you should happen to drop across your friend Foxey, or to fossick out anything about that bank affair, you might drop me a friendly note on the quiet, you understand?"

I tumbled to it at once, but I couldn't understand about this holiday business until he afterwards explained that he wanted me to be perfectly free from restraint, to act entirely on my own hook, and to go back, as it were, into my old bush life.

"Get a fresh rig-out," said he; "not too expensive, and not too new; something suitable for the bush, you know."

I understood, and jumped at the chance. Nothing could have suited me better, and besides that, there was the chance of the reward, and a hint about promotion if I succeeded in catching my man and sheeting the charge home to him. I gave out amongst the men that I had got leave of absence to visit my friends in Melbourne. Next day I was off. I got a rig-out from a pawnshop—mole-skins, blue shirt, felt hat, and all complete; shaved off my moustache, went up by the train from Ashfield to Parramatta, and then started

on the wallaby up the country. I took my time up the road, making Liverpool the first day, and taking a stroll round as if I were in search of a job.

I found it easier dropping into my old bush life again than I had expected, all except the walk. I could put on the stoop and slouching stride of the bush hand easily enough while I had my swag over my shoulders, but the moment I took it off I felt myself stiffening up into the military form to which I had become so much accustomed, and it was only by keeping a continual watch on myself that I avoided it. As it was, I betrayed myself more than once, but I explained it away by saying that I'd once been drilled in the volunteers. I took an odd job or two here and there for the sake of appearances, always taking care to get a kind of written recommendation from my employers, saying that I was a handy man and so on, and gradually I worked my way along the country about Campbelltown, Appin, Camden, through the Illawarra district, and down into Shoalhaven, stopping at any likely-looking shanty where I might hear something of my man.

I don't know what induced me to go that way in particular, but as there were a good many of the old hands living down amongst the Shoalhaven Gullies, I didn't know but I might accidentally drop on somebody who knew him, and could tell me of his whereabouts. I didn't hear anything of him, however, until one evening, when I was at Nowra, a small township on the Shoalhaven River, and when I was thinking about making my way over by Goulburn to the Bathurst district. I saw in the bar at Thomas's hotel three or four rough-looking fellows, half-drunk, and very noisy, and one of them I felt certain I'd seen before, knocking about Sydney, and mixed up with some queer characters there. I was not afraid of being recognized, for, rough and sunburnt, blue-shirted and mole-skinned, I looked as much unlike a smart, neat, mounted trooper as it was possible I could; so I went into the bar and asked for a pint of beer. With the instinctive caution of men living on the cross, as it is called, the disputants dropped their quarrel the moment I, a stranger, entered, and took me out of winding. However, as I drank my beer, sat down, and began to read the paper, taking no notice of them, they soon resumed their noisy conversation.

I remained a little while trying to pick something out of their talk that might be useful to me, but without avail, and as they seemed inclined to be quarrelsome, I did not interfere, but after a little while finished my beer and went away. I watched where they went to, however—a shanty in the lower township; and next day, shouldering my swag, I left my lodgings and went down that way,

calling in, incidentally as it were, to get something to drink. As I expected, I found them loafing round the bar, and throwing down my blankets, I pretended to be very hot, and called for some beer and asked the landlord if he knew of a job to be got anywhere about. He asked me what I could do.

"Oh, anything," I said; "any sort of bush work, and I'm a handy man amongst horses."

Fortunately for me, he wanted a man to knock about the stable, and he gave me a job at once, telling me I should have to look after three or four horses, and depend for wages on what I could pick up from travellers, he giving me a pint or two of ale a day, my bed, and, as it is called, "the run of my Dover" (my meals in the kitchen). I took the job, and, as is usual, shouted for all hands on the strength of my new billet. My birds took a drink with me, but they were very shy, and I couldn't get them into anything but general conversation. They tried to pump me, though; so I pretended to be very soft, and told them a lot of stuff that they might believe or not. They were evidently dubious of strangers, and although I tried very hard for three or four days, I couldn't get any of them to be communicative.

At last a bright idea struck me.

I had pretended to them that I was looking out for a mate I had lost the run of, but who, I believed, was down somewhere in that part of the country, hinting covertly that he didn't want it to be known where he was, and that I had therefore great difficulty in finding his whereabouts. They evidently didn't quite know what to make of me, as I overheard them one day, when concealed behind some hay in the loft, talking about me.

"Oh, he's a soft sort of cove, I think," said one; "doesn't seem to know a great deal."

"I don't know so much about that," said another—the man I thought I knew—"he seems to me to be playing a game. I don't think he's quite so soft as he looks. I should like to know what lay he is on."

"I notice," said the third, "that whenever the traps come about he somehow gets out of the way, and doesn't show up till they're gone."

So I had, and I'd taken very good care that they should observe it, for a reason I had.

My idea was this. I could not get them to be familiar, so, having seen a notice of a horse having been stolen from Parramatta, I had written down to Inspector White, telling him to direct the Shoalhaven police to arrest a man answering my description, which I

gave him, on suspicion, and he would send up an officer to identify the person arrested, who would, of course, not be the man.

It turned out just as I expected. I had pretended to get out of the way of the police, but had taken care to let them see me, for all that; and three days afterwards a constable came up to the hotel with a warrant for my apprehension. I pretended to slink out of the way, but he saw me, as I intended he should, and called after me,

“Come here, you, I want you.”

I went up and he asked me my name.

“Jim Donovan,”—the name I had taken—I replied.

“You don’t know anybody of the name of William Doyle, I suppose?” said he.

I shifted uneasily on my heels, as if I had been bowled out, for I saw my birds watching the proceedings; but I said, “No, I don’t.”

“I thought you wouldn’t,” he replied, sarcastically, “but for all that I arrest you, William Doyle, for horse-stealing at Parramatta, and here’s my warrant,” showing it.

I pretended to be awfully frightened, but to put a bold face on the matter and to chaff the constable. He put the bracelets on me and locked me up in the watchhouse. Next morning I was brought up and remanded for evidence. I saw the three men in the court-house, and was taken back to quod, loudly protesting against the hardship of being sent back when there was nothing against me. The next day a constable came up from Parramatta; but he, of course, could not identify me, although he looked awfully puzzled, evidently thinking that he knew my features and voice, but not being able to pull me together. I was discharged in that kind of way that meant that the police were to keep a sharp look-out on my movements, and told by the bench that I had better leave that part of the country.

As I expected, my birds soon found me out and flocked round me. Whilst protesting my innocence, I hinted that I knew something about the affair, and led them to infer that I had the horse and other horses got on the cross planted; also, that if I had a good mate or two, or if I could find the mate I was in search of, I knew of a good thing to be done without any risk. Bit by bit they fell into the trap, until they asked me right out what my mate’s name was. I pretended to be unwilling to tell them at first, but after several nobblers and much pressing, I confessed that it was Bill Macginnerty, or Foxey. They looked at one another for a moment, and I saw that they knew him. But they wouldn’t tell me where he was, though, for all that. I pretended to get very drunk, and at last

lay down on the floor and simulated sleep, refusing to budge, but crying out for more drink. I slept heavily, as it appeared, and allowed them to search my pockets without hindrance. They called for more liquor, and in their half-drunken whispering I heard them talking about me and Foxy. They were evidently still suspicious of me, but I gathered enough. Next day I gammoned to be very seedy and afraid of the police, so I said I should go back to Sydney, asking them to come with me. One of them accompanied me as far as the river, watching me over the punt. I struck into the bush slowly, as if making for the beach, but hid behind a clump of trees, and saw the fellow after lingering a while start back up the road.

I had no time to lose, for I was on the track. I crossed the road up the hill to the Shoalhaven Station, and seeing Mr. Berry's manager, bought from him a horse, saddle, and bridle, and rode like mad along the beach to Gerringong, and thence to Jamberoo, where I got a fresh horse and struck for Goulburn. I got to Berrima that night, and next day reached Goulburn pretty early. I rode the distance between there and Picton, and back again, keeping both ears and eyes open, but could learn nothing. Then I took the coach from the Goulburn to Lambing Flat, and this time my luck was in, for I met my man.

It was in this way. We had passed Gunning, and were going through a tolerably thick bush, up a steep pinch, when all at once, crack! crack! went two rifles from the right of the road, and our leaders, with a wild plunge, fell bleeding in the middle of the road. In a moment four men darted out from the scrub with revolvers in their hands, calling on us to bail up. The driver, all in a tremble, let go the reins, and in the confusion I leapt from the box where I was, and darted into the bush on the other side. A shot was sent after me as I disappeared, but it missed. Once in the bush I knew I was safe, for I had the knack of hiding myself where they could never find me. From a cursory glance at the men who stuck up the coach I felt assured that one of them was Foxy. I could have sworn it from his very build.

I made my way rapidly through the scrub to the next bend in the road, and then crossed and dodged back. I was just in time, for the bushrangers had lost no time in cleaning out the passengers, and were carrying off the mail bags up the hill to the right. I heard them talking about me, the cove who had bolted into the bush; but they did not seem inclined to follow me, and went laughing and crashing through the gum bushes with savage glee. I followed at a distance, carefully taking landmarks, and presently saw them in a

little clearing ripping open the bags and abstracting the contents. If I had only had help then I might have captured the lot.

All at once I saw Foxey pick out a letter, open it, and start, exclaiming that the traps were after him. He read it, little dreaming that I could overhear nearly every word. It was one addressed to him, I supposed under some other name, at Lambing Flat, warning him, from Shoalhaven, that a stranger, a queer-looking card, who had been dismissed on a charge of horse-stealing, had been inquiring after him, and giving my description and assumed name. He read it carefully, word by word, and then proclaimed it was a plant. He knew no such person as the one described, he said, and declared his intention of going down to Melbourne for a time. Here, then, was my cue. I slipped away back to Gunning unobserved, gave information of the robbery and the direction the bushrangers had taken, but not a word about Melbourne. That I kept to myself.

My blood was up, and I had determined to capture Foxey. I got back to Sydney, had a meeting on the quiet with Inspector White, and slipped over to Melbourne in the steerage of one of the steamers. My luck was in again, for the day after I landed, I met my noble full butt in Bourke Street. I didn't feel quite sure at first, so I followed him up till he turned into one of the sale-yards. I ran round into Little Bourke Street, and went in the other way. I spotted my man, but didn't feel quite sure. He looked somewhat different to when I had last seen him. His whiskers were gone, though that was of course easily done. I wanted to hear him speak. He was standing in the midst of a crowd, and I edged my way up to him.

"A nice filly that, sir," I said to him, pointing to one of the stalls; "do you know who owns her?"

He looked at me, started back, and the next instant he was gone. I never could make it out how it was done, but he disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. I looked all round, but he was not there. The next train started at twenty-five minutes to one, and it was then a quarter-past twelve. Down I went to the station, sitting meekly on one of the benches behind the book-stall. Minute after minute passed, the bell rang, and no sign of my man. I began to think I was done, and should have to give the matter into the hands of the police, when all at once a man, muffled in a greatcoat, darted in just as the whistle sounded, and was bundled into one of the carriages as the train began to move.

It was he. I knew him by his run and by the quick glance he cast round him. I did not stay to think. Had I done so I might have known that I could have had him stopped by telegram at the next station, but with a bound I ran after the train that was smoothly

gliding from the station, and regardless of the cries of the porters and police, jumped on the guard-board of one of the carriages, holding on by the closed half-door.

It was a fearful ride. Neither the guard nor the driver had seen me, and the train whirled on at the top of its speed. The wind eddied and whistled round me as we flew along the rails, threatening every moment to hurl me from my platform. But I held on. With my body close pressed against the carriage-door, my arms inside the door, to the great consternation of those within, and my feet firmly planted on the board, I kept my stand. It was like flying through the air. Mile after mile we sped on, over bridges that seemed to fly past me with a whiz that almost made me giddy, under arches that thundered over my head, and along the rumbling open country that appeared to spin round me, until I began to feel sick and faint, and feared that I should have to let go my hold. Just then I heard a shrill whistle, and the train began to slacken speed. Before it had stopped I had left my holding-place, darted round the guard's van, and into the office for a ticket. A telegram had been flashed up, and I was followed by a constable and the stationmaster, but one magic word whispered into their ears made it all right, and I was put into the compartment I pointed out. I went in quite unconcernedly, and sat down right before the man I wanted. He looked at me suspiciously for an instant, but as I took no notice of him, he after a while lit a pipe and began to smoke. Presently, someone next to him asked him if he had a match, and he replied, "Yes, mate," at the same time producing a box. It was he. I had heard him speak. I quietly put my hand into my breast, as if to get my pipe, and the next moment I was standing over him with a revolver at his head.

"Foxey," I said, "you've led me a long chase for your pleasure; now you'll have to come back for mine. Put your hands up, move 'em, and I'll shoot you."

The passengers were at first inclined to interfere, but the word police silenced 'em. At the next station I got him handcuffed and took him back by the night train.

[From *Under the Dray*, 1872.]



THE PREMIER'S SECRET

By CAMPBELL MACKELLAR

I do not know what it was that first attracted me toward Edward Benson. He was more than thrice my age, and our positions, occupations, and mode of living were totally different. Without being able to give any reasons for it, it was however, a fact that from the moment we first met I felt a strong liking for him, and it was evident that he was drawn toward me in an equal degree, so we gradually drifted into an intimacy. Intimacy is, perhaps, not the right word, as, though my whole life was laid bare before him—all my thoughts, aspirations, temptations and woes poured into his willing ears—yet of his own life he seldom spoke, and the history of his youth was a subject on which his lips were always sealed. He was a man one did not dare question, nor could one imagine him making a confidant of anyone. That he had sprung from the people, and risen to his high station by his own genius and energy, were facts known throughout all Australia; but as to what he had been originally, or where he came from, no one knew, nor did anyone care to question.

When I first knew him he was Minister of Railways, and afterwards he became Premier. There was probably no public man in the same colony who possessed talents so great, and at the same time so little culture and general education. In those subjects to which he devoted himself none could approach him, but he often betrayed his humble origin in the most open ignorance of other subjects, and also in his rough speech and odd habits. In a land where so many of his contemporaries among the prominent men of the day were known to have risen from very humble origins, and been the carvers of their own destiny, his lack of general culture and his unknown past went almost unobserved, and he was accepted simply for himself. Of his private life the world knew nothing, as he never went into general society or mixed with any people save a few of the most prominent politicians. He was unmarried, and was said not to possess a single relation in the world, hence some little curiosity was occasionally manifested as to what would be done with his vast fortune after his death.

That part of the world which professes to know all its neighbours' affairs whispered dark stories of what his private life really was—of wild orgies and scenes of terrible sensual dissipation. These stories, however, were not generally known. I, who knew the man better than most people, knew that many of these stories were true, and indeed fell far short of the mark. A man mentally and physically very strong, possessed of fierce passions, there was so much of the animal in his nature that at times it broke beyond his control. Friends warned me of this and that; spoke angrily of our growing intimacy; but with no avail. I saw plainly all that was wrong in his life and nature, but I also saw plainly all that was great and noble.

They who sin deepest and seek the lowest depths of degradation have sometimes more of what is great and noble, and best worthy of reverence, in their natures than the pitiful world-fearing mob, who, though they may do no action which the world may censure strongly, most assuredly do no action which is worthy of great praise. I knew that this man, who had worked his own way to the highest position his chosen country could give him, and to great wealth, yet was one of the most lonely and miserable beings amongst men—no friend, no wife, no child. He was utterly alone.

What availed position, wealth, all worldly success, with the awful hunger of heart which was there? His political career had been stainless, and he gave largely and freely to many charities. He was generally acknowledged to possess great mental gifts, yet he could

not claim to be popular with any person or party. The reserve of his life and manner told against him.

I, who know myself so well, and am accustomed to search deeply my own heart and my own motives, did not feel any claim to question anything in his life.

My partiality for odd friendships has always been one of the most striking points of what people are pleased to call my eccentric character.

There are words of Holy Writ which have always seemed to me most solemn and to be carefully heeded; these are:—

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

One of Edward Benson's most marked peculiarities was a strong aversion to Chinese. He was a strong supporter of all measures for their exclusion from the country, and the sight of an innocent John Chinaman selling fruit or fish seemed to annoy and disturb him immensely. When I tell you the story of his life you will not wonder at it.

I had often promised to visit him at one of his stations, where he usually spent a few months every year, and at last managed to find time to fulfil my promise.

Bengalee, as the place was called, was a much more imposing mansion than bush houses usually are. It possessed a fine library, and the numerous rooms were filled with treasures of pictures and sculpture. There was a collection of China unequalled probably in Australia, delicate figures, vases, and cups of Rose du Barri Sèvres, of Meissen, of Nymphenburg, of Chelsea, of Bow; grotesque bronzes from Japan; wonderful porcelain and terra cotta plaques and jugs, which might have been the work of Lucca della Robbia himself; fragile glass of Murans; Florentine mosaics and brasses; a wonderful table of Sèvres and ormolu, which had belonged to Marie Antoinette, and might have caused the heart of Mr Jones, of South Kensington fame, to burn with envy in his grave, and I do not know what other rare and beautiful and priceless things that house held.

All these treasures were seen by almost no one save their owner. They had been collected during a long tour in Europe.

It was the last night of my visit. I was to leave at the unearthly hour of two in the morning, having a long drive to the nearest railway station.

It was about eight o'clock, and Edward Benson and myself had just finished dinner, but were still lingering over our wine, reluctant to leave the glorious fire which blazed and crackled on the hearth,

who wished particularly to see Mr Benson. "Send him round to the window," said Mr Benson, pointing towards a long French-window which opened into the veranda. He was reluctant to leave the fire, and supposed the man was only wanting a billet or something of that sort.

The servant opened the window, and shortly afterward the swagman, a rough, unkempt specimen of his rough, unkempt class, appeared on the veranda.

"Beg pardon, boss, but I jist were a-wantin' to tell you that there's a cove up in woolshed, as comed there tonight, and I'm thinkin' he's off his head, or got the horrors, or goin' to kick the bucket, for he's a-goin' on a-ravin' that awful that I'm blowed if I could stand it, and I'm a-goin' to clear on. I thought I would let you know, m' happen you can do something for him."

"Drinking, I suppose," muttered Benson peevishly. "Well, I'll have it seen to. You can go," he added coldly.

The man shrugged his shoulders, and turned sullenly away. The night was wet and cold, the wind howling through the trees; he would have a long tramp to the next station, and no doubt the sight of the brilliantly lit dining-room, with its wealth of plate and glass, the profusion of fruit and flowers on the table, and last but not least the blazing fire, and the shining decanters with their ruby and amber contents, would awaken many a bitter thought in his mind, to console him during his long wet night journey. The contrast between his own life and this must have been rather painful.

It surely must have been something out of the ordinary that drove him from the woolshed; swagmen as a rule are not thin-skinned.

A rather unaccountable curiosity came over me to go up and see for myself what ailed the man. Perhaps I too wished to experience the effect of the contrast between the luxurious comfort of the brilliant firelit room and the spectacle of the dingy woolshed with its occupant dying in the horrors. Perhaps a little touch of intense pity possessed me. Having made up my mind to go, I did my utmost for a long time, without avail, to persuade Benson to accompany me.

The shed was quite close to the manager's house, and he would send word up to have the man attended to—it was absurd our going up. After some time, however, he consented with a very bad grace to go with me. I remembered then that one of his peculiarities was a great dislike even to enter a woolshed; the smell and look of the place, he said, made him faint. This night,

however, something—fate perhaps—took us to the Bengalee woolshed.

Wrapping ourselves in waterproofs, and taking a lantern with us, we walked up through the drenching rain to the shed, which was at some little distance from the house.

The building was large and looked very eerie as our lantern but dimly illuminated our immediate surroundings and left the rest in total darkness. We stood inside the doorway for a moment, not knowing whereabouts the man would be. All was silent, save for the scratchings of the native cats and 'possums in the shingle and iron roof.

Suddenly from close to where we stood, there rang out a peal of wild demoniacal laughter, with an effect that was absolutely startling.

For a moment I felt unmanned, then recollecting what we had come for, turned the light of the lantern to the corner from whence the sound had proceeded.

On his back on a couple of greasy skeepskins lay the tramp. His swag was under his head as a pillow, and his tin billy lay by his side.

I placed the lantern on the floor, and kneeling down, bent over him. Edward Benson slowly approached, and mechanically knelt down on the opposite side of the man, who was but a mere wasted skeleton consumed by disease and drink. He seemed conscious of our presence and lay silently regarding us.

Dying? There was no doubt of it.

The lantern shone on his face and on our two faces, making a little circle of light round us, and here and there bringing into relief a beam or rail of the shed. We must have made an odd picture—a subject for a Rembrandt—we two kneeling in that small circle of light by the dying man.

Suddenly the eyes of the tramp seemed to light up with fire; drawing himself up on his elbow, he gazed as if fascinated into Benson's face, then with wild frenzy seized him by the arm.

"Bill Adams, by the Lord! Bill Adams!" rang the hoarse cry through the shed. "Bill Adams!" again he shrieked, with a burst of laughter.

An unearthly pallor had crept over Benson's face; he knelt immovable, gazing blankly down into the face of the swagman.

"Bill Adams—old pal—I knows you, Bill. Hist! see there;" he pointed out into the darkness; "don't you see him, Bill—Jimmy, Jimmy the Chinaman.—Hah! there, there, don't you see him, man? Press him down, boys—stop his yelling mouth! You'll never peach

no more, will you, Jimmy?—Sing louder, boys, sing louder! He's yelling in my ears—he's always a-yelling in my ears! Why won't he go away?—Blast him! press him down, boys—see, there he is again!"

Despite myself, I could not resist glancing where the man pointed, though knowing well he was only raving; then I glanced at Benson's face.

His face was half turned over his shoulder, his eyeballs gleaming red as he gazed out into the darkness as if he too saw something there; great drops of perspiration stood on his brow. Never in all my life have I seen such a face of horror as that.

"Don't you see him, Bill?" The man raved on, tossing wildly about, and pointing with frenzied hands before him. "See him grinning there! Damn you! You —— Chinaman, sneak again, will you? Turn the screw of the press, boys, that's it. Sing louder, sing louder. Don't let me hear his voice again. It's in my ears, boys, always in my ears—Jimmy, the Chinaman. Bill, your sin will find you out. Hist! Bill, he's never left me all my life—but you'll stop his mouth, Bill. I cannot bear to hear him yell like that. Sing louder—louder, boys—louder!"

I cannot render all his wild frenzied ravings, the torrents of fierce imprecations which he poured out with wild excitement.

At last he fell back exhausted, and lay breathing heavily. His face was growing more ghastly and blue, and I knew he was dying. Opposite me, silent and immovable, knelt Benson, with wild horror imprinted on his face. I spoke to him, but he did not answer me; he seemed unaware of my presence. So, for a few minutes, we remained.

Then, as I fancied, I heard distant music, but supposed it to be but imagination; a gust of wind blew open the door by which we had come in, and, with the wind, entered a burst of glorious melody—someone playing the piano at the manager's house—some strange, beautiful march, full of gladness, and graciousness, and solemnness. The dying man heard, and over his face there came a look of wonderful rest and peace, his lips moved in a gentle murmur, but I could not catch what he said.

Then the music changed into a tender, simple old ballad, and a woman's voice joined in. One could scarce distinguish the words, but the sweet old air came echoing softly through the shed.

The man listened with a smile of glad recognition.

"It's Bess, a-singing in the garden—Bess, as I loved so well! I can see thee, lass, in the old apple orchard. It warn't me as done it, Bess, so help me God, girl! I wouldn't touch a hair of his head. It

warn't me, girl. I have been a bad 'un, Bess, but I didn't touch nothing you loved. It were someone else as stole on him, Bess, by the little gate o' the orchard, and struck him down—struck him down when he were a-courtin' you, Bess. Twarn't me, Bess, though they lagged me for it. Bob Simmons won't ne'er hurt nowt you cares on, girl. Bess—Bess Dale—you'll not be hard on me, girl? Good-bye—I'm a-goin' now, Bess. I've been a bad 'un, but—good-bye, girl—good-bye——”

The music died away, and I laid the dead man's head down on his swag again.

“Come—come out of this. He is dead!” I said, touching Benson's arm.

“Dead!” he repeated, and then, with a gesture of utter despair, he threw his arms out before him. “Bess Dale—Bess Dale!—Bob Simmons!—Ah! my sin *has* found me out!”

There was such a weary, utter despair in the hoarse cry that I shuddered as I drew him from the shed. Once outside he seemed to recover himself somewhat.

“Go to the manager's house and tell them!” he said, briefly and sternly. “Let them do all that is needful!”

I went at once, without question; nor did it strike me as odd that he should order me, his guest, to do so.

I knew that with the dead man lay the secret of Edward Benson's life.

I directed the manager to do everything that was necessary, and then slowly went down towards the house. I found Benson waiting for me, and we walked down together, without speaking.

Now, indeed, I saw the contrast between the scene just left and the beautiful luxurious dining-room, with its light and warmth.

“Sit down!” he said gravely; “after what you have heard you must listen to the story of my life.”

He blew out the waxlights on the table, and turned down the crimson-shaded lamp. I did not answer, I could not; something held me silent. He came and leant on the mantelpiece, looking down on me. At this moment a servant entered, and said a Chinaman wanting work was without. With a fierce imprecation, Benson told them to drive him away from the place—Why did they come to him, instead of the manager?

I wondered the servant had the courage to speak to him of a Chinaman, his aversion to them being so well known; and this night I learnt the reason of this great aversion, and yet I wonder at the odd coincidence which brought that Chinaman there that night of all nights.

When he had somewhat recovered from the evident distress this interruption had caused him, he sat down. Leaning his head on his hand, he seemed to see before him in the fire the incidents of his life, as he told them. I sat with my back to the window, and he sat opposite to me.

So, sitting by the hearth, I listened to this tale of horror:—

“You have always known, I suppose, that I can boast of no ancient lineage—that I am a self-made man. My father was a small cottar, on the estate of a certain great English nobleman. It is not necessary for me to tell you his name, or even what country I came from. My father brought us up by blows and curses, and our whole family was continually in trouble, for poaching and other peccadilloes. What good was in me never had the chance of showing itself.

“When I became old enough to consider myself a man, I fell desperately in love with a farmer’s daughter, who, though of humble enough station, was yet a cut above me. Her name was Bessie Dale—she whom the dead man up yonder raved about. It was no wonder that he and I and many others loved her, for she was no common country wench, but I know now even better than I did then, that she was wonderfully beautiful and gentle and pure and good. I can picture her as I often saw her in the very orchard he talked about, with her chintz gown tucked up, standing amongst the tall grass with bare arms upraised above her head, plucking the apple-blossom, or going singing through the orchard that song we heard tonight, calling now and then to the cows which followed at the sound of her voice. Such a beautiful, calm, restful life that was—but why tell you all this? Know only that to none of us who wooed her then would she have anything to say. I, fierce passionate and jealous natured, vowed that none but myself should ever possess her.

“In one spring time there came a gentleman—an artist—and he, too, loved Bess Dale, and she, we could all see, was flattered and glamourous by her fine lover.

“All day he would lie at her feet in the apple orchard, making pretence to sketch her, or the trees, or feeding cattle around them, and instilling God knows what poison into her ears. Perhaps I am wrong, he may have meant no harm to her, he may have wooed and loved her honestly; but he was a gentleman, she a farmer’s lass, so we judged him by ourselves and thought the worst. Then I got to know that she met him at night by the orchard gate, and I stole secretly to watch them.

“Maddened by bitter hate and jealousy, one night I stole softly

on them in the dark, and struck him down—stabbed him in the dark, and left him lying dead at her feet in the long grass.”

He paused for a moment and sighed heavily.

“Her terrified screams brought all the inmates of the farmhouse to the spot, and the light of their lanterns shone on the terrified girl, the murdered man, and another man crouching low, with fear in his eyes and a bloodstained knife in his hand.

“It was Bob Simmons, whom we have just seen die. He had been near and seen a man rush out from the shadow of the apple trees and stab the girl’s lover at the gate, and then rush swiftly away. Horrified, he, Bob Simmons, had rushed forward and pulled the knife from the breast of the murdered man. This was the tale he told. No one believed him. It was known he hated this man who had won the heart of Bess Dale. Many things went to prove him guilty. He was tried for the murder, found guilty, and sentenced to penal servitude for life. I think he was transported to Western Australia, but I am not sure.

“I, who had done the deed, escaped even suspicion, but it did me no good, for I had to watch Bessie Dale grow whiter and more sad and frail day by day, till one day I followed, with many others, the coffin that bore her to her last resting-place.

“It was *my* sin killed her, and *my* sin wrecked and ruined Bob Simmons’ life—he had to suffer in *my* place.”

The tall old oak clock ticked away loudly, the ruddy firelight shone over the room, the logs crackled and blazed, but otherwise there was silence.

I sat in a trance, I could not have spoken to save my life. The expression of terrible despair and remorse on the man’s face haunts me yet.

“You little thought there was blood on these hands—blood on the hands of your friend,” he went on bitterly. “When Bess died, all that was bad in me came to the surface, and I went from bad to worse. Ah, me! how I suffered—such awful shame and remorse! Do not think I have not been punished.

“I eventually came out here. I knocked about under many different names, trying my hand at many a different thing, now striving to live cleanly and retrieve my past, and then giving way to terrible bursts of ill-doing and badness—herding and living with the scum of the country—and you know what that is here.

“One year I went as shearer to a certain station, of which I need not tell you the name. The shearers at the place that year were as vile and low a crew of men as it was possible to get together. Like takes to like perhaps, but, anyway, there was not a man

amongst us who was not capable of every species of iniquity. There were several old lags, whose whole lives had been criminal and spent in criminal thought and deed—for this was many years ago, remember, when yet there were many convicts and ticket-of-leave men knocking about the country. The race has almost died out now. There were, of course, several boys amongst us, employed in various ways in the shed, and it was one of our chief amusements debasing and corrupting these boys as much as in us lay. As the men got to know each other, and find kindred spirits, they learnt they need not fear revealing their past life in any way. A rougher, more utterly bad and reckless lot of devils it would not be possible to bring together, and the two worst among them were Bob Simmons—whom we have just seen die, the man whose life I made what it had become—and myself. Bill Adams, I called myself then, and he bore some other name also, so I never knew he was Bob Simmons, we never recognized or suspected each other. Since then, I have heard no word of him till tonight.

“The shearers’ cook that year was a Chinaman, who was always called ‘Jimmy, the Chinaman’. He was a sneaking hypocritical specimen of his sneaking hypocritical race. The men hated him, and were continually grumbling at and tormenting him. There were wild fierce orgies, when Jimmy, the Chinaman, was always the object of rough horse-play and bad treatment. I would be afraid to tell or even hint at what went on amongst us then—those who were weakest and least able to protect themselves were made to wait on and slave for the others, and were brutally treated. Some of our doings reached the squatter’s ears. There was a great uproar, and some talk of getting the police out to us. Someone had peached on us, and, instinctively, we all hit upon the Chinaman as culprit. We watched him, and again we found him spying on us, and sneaking off to the manager with tales of our doings. The men determined that on the last night of shearing he should be paid off for his sneaking. He was a cringing, cowardly creature, and used to grovel at our feet in terror if we threatened him.

“Never can I forget that awful night. It haunts me always. That first crime of mine has seemed to me nothing in comparison to it. I had a motive then—jealousy. I have never repented that deed—but its effects? Ah, yes! the death of gentle Bess—the life-long wreck and ruin of the dead man up there—these have been with me always, such remorse and horror! You cannot picture it, but they seem as nothing to the crime we perpetrated that awful night. It has haunted me as it haunted him.”

He stopped with a violent shudder, and remained silent for a

while, gazing into the fire with a face of awful remembrance and fear—then, pulling himself together he went on:—

“Shearing was over—it was the last night—in the morning we were all to leave.

“Can I describe to you, or can you picture to yourself, the scene that night in the shearers’ hut?

“The long narrow building, with its rough slab walls, along which ran rows of bunks, mere shelves, with bundles of straw and nondescript bedding and frowsy blankets tossed on them in disorder. A fireplace, with a huge fire of blazing logs, at either end of the hut. The long table, round which sat and sprawled the shearers, drinking, swearing, cursing and quarrelling. A few lay in their bunks, others crouched over the fire; some were playing cards, others tossing with dice; all were smoking. The air reeked with tobacco smoke, and the fumes of whisky and rum intermingled with the odour of cooking. On the table lay broken plates and scraps of meat—everything in careless disorder. All, without exception, were drunk—some sullenly drunk—others maudlin or quarrelsome. Jimmy, the Chinaman, alone was sober, for the simple reason that they would not give him anything to drink, nor allow him to leave the hut. He crouched in the corner, his opium pipe in his mouth, shivering with fright, for he knew that there was little chance of his getting through the night unmolested.

“The shearers had made up their minds that they would be revenged on him that night, though they had no particular plan. Deeper and deeper they drank, and I—oh, cursed hour!—drank deeper and longer than most. We all became quarrelsome and mad with drink—reckless what we said or did. Cards were thrown aside, broken bottles flung about recklessly.

“‘Let’s take Jimmy to the shed and try him there, boys,’ I yelled.

“In a moment, Jimmy, the Chinaman, yelling with terror, was seized and dragged off to the woolshed, which was close by, followed by a mob of men, singing, laughing, shouting, and cursing—mad with drink. Some had seized up the lanterns off the table, others carried bottles of whisky—whatever they could lay their hands on. Mounting on a wool bale, I—I, who am now an Australian Premier—I, who was then Bill Adams, the vilest and most reckless of that hellish crew—I, I say, was judge and jury and all. I tried Jimmy, the Chinaman, amidst the yells and jeers of the shearers who sprawled drunk on the bales and wool-fleeces round me—I tried and condemned him to death!

“‘Put him in a wool bale, boys, and ship him out of the country!’ I cried, with drunken glee.

"None of us knew what we did, surely; for no sooner were the words out of my mouth, than the Chinaman, yelling and gibbering with fright, was seized and tossed into the woolpress. There was some wool in it, and on top of the struggling wretch, they pressed down more; and then all the wild beast that is in all men's natures, woke in them—in us, I should say, for I too lent a hand.

"With yells and blasphemous cursing and singing—a chorus, surely of devils—we turned the screw of the press. Lower and lower it went—agonising yells came from the suffocating wretch—lower and lower it went, and louder and louder we sang to drown the cries!—Lower and lower pressing the wool down, crushing and suffocating the Chinaman beneath it!"

With gasping breath and shuddering hands held out before him, as if to ward off some dreadful sight, he paused. Great drops of perspiration streamed off his face—he seemed to see the scene all before him.

In my chair I crouched, dumb with horror. I could not speak or move. I waited for what came next.

"We sewed the wool bale up; we branded it, and tossed it amongst the other bales of wool; and on the morrow it was taken away in the drays, and afterwards shipped to England—that bale with the dead man in it."

His voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper.

"Night and day—night and day—through all these years, the dying yells of that Chinaman have rung in my ears. In the glare of day I see his cursed face. I see it when I stand in my place in the House and the people cheer me. I see it in the faces of all his cursed race—one so like another. At night he yells by my pillow—he is ever with me.

"My God! See there—there! Do you not see his cursed grinning face?" And he leapt to his feet and gazed in a paroxysm of horror towards the window. Such a picture of fear and despair!

The blood seemed to curdle in my veins, and, thrilled with fear, I, too, sprang to my feet.

There, pressed close against the glass of the window, was the ghastly, grinning face of a Chinaman!

Before it had scarcely dawned on me that it was no weird apparition—no creation of fancy—but the face of a living man, Benson strode forward with a terrible oath and thrust his hands through the glass, as if to grasp the face. Whether he did see the glass or not I cannot say, but the shock recalled him to himself. His hands were cut and bleeding, and the Chinaman had fled.

He came back to the table, drank half a tumbler of brandy as

if it were water, and, rolling his bleeding hands in a serviette, sat down again. He seemed scarcely aware of the damage to his hands.

"You see it is no fancy of mine that his face haunts me always," he said hopelessly.

"Oh, but this was no fancy," I said; "it was the Chinaman they told you of, wanting work; he was probably attracted to the window by the bright light."

"Ah, no," he answered, "you may think so. I know the cursed face too well; or, even if you are right, does it not show that their faces are ever before my eyes?"

It was useless to reason with him, and he went on:

"That bale of wool, I tell you, was shipped to England with its ghastly contents undiscovered, but——"

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "this is surely a mad dream. It is not possible men could do such a thing in sport. You are playing on my credulity."

Surely, indeed, it was some grotesque joke. I even seemed to see a certain ludicrousness in it.

"You do not mean to tell me that it passed undiscovered; that this really took place? But when the wool reached England, or on the ship, it must have been discovered. No! I cannot believe it."

"It never reached England. The ship foundered at sea, and all her cargo of wool went to the bottom. The sea holds the horrible secret. The ship was the *Loch Fennich*. You may have heard of the wreck, and the terrible sufferings of some of her passengers, cast adrift in an open boat. I swear before God that every word is true. Do I look like a man who jests?"

I *did* remember to have read an account of this wreck, which had happened long before my day. I doubted no longer; indeed, I had never doubted at all.

"Do you know," he said, "I have often feared that that bale might have floated to the top of the sea, and the crime be yet discovered. My life has been a hell upon earth.

"The day after this event, sobered and terrified with fear of detection, the shearers left the station, all of us avoiding each other and many, I believe, leaving the colony for some other part of Australia. In all these years until tonight, when I saw the face of Bob Simmons, I have heard no word of, nor seen any of my accomplices in that awful deed save one. I know not whether they are living or dead. I did not dream that anyone could ever recognize me, but see now, even in his delirium, Bob Simmons knew my face. It is strange—strange—for this other whom I have met, has seen me often daily for years; and has given not the faintest sign of

recognition—him I could not mistake, for he has marks and scars on his face which admit of no doubt as to his identity. He too is known to you—he has reached high station and great wealth, and his charities are boundless—his life flawless. His name is ——!" and he mentioned a name which filled me with unutterable surprise, the name of a man whose good deeds and charities had made him known to all—who stood high in his country's favour. Yet his life, too, held this hideous secret!

"My life," went on Benson, "after that was a continual success. I by degrees acquired lands and wealth, and worked my way up till I am Premier of this great colony, and I believe I am regarded with respect; and—but he and I, you know us both now. What is his life or mine? A hideous lie! Oh! do not think I have not been fearfully punished. I am alone in the world, ever haunted by my crime, and living in awful fear of the punishment which—escaped perhaps on earth—awaits me twofold beyond the grave.

"Is it not a strange world? The wisdom and justice of God? Can there be such things? Can there be a God? The man who suffered unjustly for my sin, whose life was wrecked and ruined through me, dies an outcast, friendless and unregretted at my door—whilst I—I, whose sin has been too great for atonement, am surrounded with everything wealth can give me, with the honour and respect of my country. Ah! there is no justice in Heaven or on earth. God himself cannot undo what has been done. For such as I there can be no forgiveness—no atonement. And if there be punishment beyond the grave, how great, indeed, must be mine? I am like a little child, I know not what to believe or trust in. I am full of doubt and fear—dreadful fear of that awful thing we call death. Oh! if it only meant rest—eternal rest—if the grave were but the end of it all! Hateful as my life is I dare—oh! I dare not die, I am not fit!"

The terrible hopelessness and despair of the man woke all my pity—the horror that had risen in me as he told his tale left me, to give place to intense sympathy and pity. I understood what the loneliness, the misery, the remorse of his life had been. I dared not add to it by *my* blame, for before me rose the words:—

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

When it was yet dark, in the early morn, I left Bengalee. I left doubting whether I ought not to have stayed beside this man, consumed with misery and fear and despair. But what could I have done?

I never looked on Edward Benson's face again, for a few days afterwards the telegraph spread the news from end to end of Australia that Edward Benson had been found dead in his bed—accidentally killed by an overdose of chloroform. The world never doubted it was accidental, and I, who guessed differently, held my tongue.

[From *The Premier's Secret, and Other Stories*, 1887.]



MONSIEUR CALOCHE

By JESSIE COUVREUR—"TASMA"

I

A MORE un-English, uncolonial appearance had never brightened the prosaic interior of Bogg and Company's big warehouse in Flinders Lane. Monsieur Caloche, waiting in the outer office, under fire of a row of curious eyes, was a wondrous study of "Frenchness" to the clerks. His vivacious dark eyes, shining out of his sallow face, scarred and seamed by the marks of smallpox, met their inquisitive gaze with an expression that seemed to plead for leniency. The diabolical disease that had scratched the freshness from his face had apparently twisted some of the youthfulness out of it as well; otherwise it was only a young soul that could have been made so diffident by the consciousness that its habitation was disfigured. Some pains had been taken to obviate the effects of the disfigurement and to bring into prominence the smooth flesh that had been spared. It was not chance that had left exposed a round white

throat, guiltless of the masculine Adam's apple, or that had brushed the fine soft hair, ruddily dark in hue like the eyes, away from the vein-streaked temple. A youth of unmanly susceptibilities, perhaps—but inviting sympathy rather than scorn—sitting patiently through the dreary silent three-quarters of an hour, with his back to the wall which separated him from the great head of the firm of Bogg & Co.

The softer-hearted of the clerks commiserated him. They would have liked to show their goodwill, after their own fashion, by inviting him to have a "drink", but—the possibility of shouting for a young Frenchman, waiting for an interview with their chief! . . . Any one knowing Bogg, of Bogg & Co., must have divined the outrageous absurdity of the notion. It was safer to suppose that the foreigner would have refused the politeness. He did not look as though whisky and water were as familiar to him as a tumbler of *eau sucrée*. The clerks had heard that it was customary in France to drink absinthe. Possibly the slender youth in his loose-fitting French paletôt reaching to his knees, and sitting easily upon shoulders that would have graced a shawl, had drunk deeply of this fatal spirit. It invested him with something mysterious in the estimation of the juniors peering for traces of dissipation in his foreign face. But they could find nothing to betray it in the soft eyes, undimmed by the enemy's hand, or the smooth lips set closely over the even row of small French teeth. Monsieur Caloche lacked the happy French confidence which has so often turned a joke at the foot of the guillotine. His lips twitched every time the door of the private office creaked. It was a ground-glass door to the left of him, and as he sat, with his turned-up hat in his hand, patiently waiting, the clerks could see a sort of suppression overspreading his disfigured cheeks whenever the noise was repeated. It appeared that he was diffident about the interview. His credentials were already in the hands of the head of the firm, but no summons had come. His letter of recommendation, sent in fully half an hour back, stated that he was capable of undertaking foreign correspondence; that he was favourably known to the house of business in Paris whose principal had given him his letter of presentation; that he had some slight knowledge of the English language; that he had already given promise of distinguishing himself as an *homme de lettres*. This final clause of the letter was responsible for the length of time Monsieur Caloche was kept waiting. *Homme de lettres!* It was a stigma that Bogg, of Bogg & Co., could not overlook. As a practical man, a self-made man, a man who had opened up new blocks of country and imported pure stock into Victoria—what

could be expected of him in the way of holding out a helping hand to a scribbler—a pauper who had spent his days in making rhymes in his foreign jargon? Bogg would have put your needy professionals into irons. He forgave no authors, artists, or actors, who were not successful. *Homme de lettres!* Coupled with his poverty it was more unpardonable a title than jail-bird. There was nothing to prove that the latter title would not have fitted Monsieur Caloche as well. He was probably a ruffianly Communist. The French Government could not get hold of all the rebels, and here was one in the outer office of Bogg & Co. coolly waiting for a situation.

Not so coolly, perhaps, as Bogg, in his aggrieved state of mind, was ready to conclude. For the day was a hot-wind day, and Bogg himself, in white waistcoat and dust-coat, sitting in the cool depths of his revolving-chair in front of the desk in his private office, was hardly aware of the driving dust and smarting grit emptied by shovelfuls upon the unhappy people without. He perspired, it is true, in deference to the state of his big thermometer, which ever here stood above eighty-five degrees in the corner, but having come straight from Brighton in his private brougham, he could wipe his moist bald head without besmearing his silk handkerchief with street grime. And it was something to be sitting here, in a lofty office, smelling of yellow soap and beeswax, when outside a north wind was tormenting the world with its puffs of hot air and twirling relays of baked rubbish and dirt. It was something to be surrounded by polished mahogany, cool to the touch, and cold iron safes, and maps that conveyed in their rippling lines of snowy undulations far-away suggestions of chill heights and mountain breezes. It was something to have iced water in the decanter at hand, and a little fountain opposite, gurgling a running reminder of babbling brooks dribbling through fern-tree valleys and wattle-studded flats. Contrasting the shaded coolness of the private office with the heat and turmoil without, there was no cause to complain.

Yet Bogg clearly had a grievance, written in the sour lines of his mouth, never too amiably expanded at the best of times, and his small, contracted eyes, full of shrewd suspicion-darting light. He read the letter sent in by Monsieur Caloche with the plentiful assistance of the tip of his broad forefinger, after a way peculiar to his early days, before he had acquired riches, or knighthood, or rotundity.

For Bogg, now Sir Matthew Bogg, of Bogg and Company, was a self-made man, in the sense that money makes the man, and that he had made the money before it could by any possibility make him. Made it by dropping it into his till in those good old times

when all Victorian storekeepers were so many Midases, who saw their spirits and flour turn into gold under their handling; made it, by pocketing something like three thousand per cent upon every penny invested in divers blocks of scrubby soil hereafter to be covered by those grand and gloomy bluestone buildings which made of Melbourne a city of mourning; made it by reaching out after it and holding fast to it, whenever it was within spirit-call or finger-clutch, from his early grog-shanty days when he detected it in the dry lips of every grimy digger on the flat, to his latter station-holding days, when he sniffed it in the drought which brought his neighbours low. Add to which he was lucky—by virtue of a certain inherent faculty he possessed in common with the Vanderbilts, the Stewarts, the Rothschilds of mankind—and far-seeing. He could forestall the news in the *Mark Lane Express*. He was almost clairvoyant in the matter of rises in wool. His luck, his foresight, were only on a par with his industry, and the end of all his slaving and sagacity was to give him at sixty years of age a liver, a paunch, an income bordering on a hundred thousand pounds, and the title of Sir Matthew Bogg.

It was known that Sir Matthew had worked his way to the colonies, acting indiscriminately as pig-sticker and deck-swabber on board the *Sarah Jane*. In his liverless, paunchless, and titleless days he had tossed for coppers with the flat-footed sailors on the fore-castle. Now he was bank director, railway director, and a number of other things that formed a graceful flourish after Sir Matthew, but that would have sounded less euphonious in the wake of plain "Bogg". Yet "plain Bogg" Nature had turned him out, and "plain Bogg" he would always remain while in the earthly possession of his round, overheated face and long, irregular teeth. His hair had abandoned its lawful territory on the top of his head, and planted itself in a vagrant fashion, in small tufts in his ears and nostrils. His eyebrows had run riot over his eyes, but his eyes asserted themselves through all. They were eyes that, without being stronger or larger or bolder than any average pair of eyes to be met with in walking down the street, had such a knack of "taking your measure" that no one could look at them without discomfiture. In the darkened atmosphere of the Flinders Lane office, Sir Matthew knew how to turn these colourless unwinking orbs to account. To the maliciously inclined among the clerks in the outer office there was nothing more amusing than the crestfallen appearance of the applicants, as they came out by the ground-glass door, compared with the jauntiness of their entrance. Young men who wanted colonial experience, overseers who applied for managerships on his stations,

youths fresh from school who had a turn for the bush, had all had specimens of Sir Matthew's mode of dealing with his underlings. But his favourite plan, his special hobby, was to "drop on them unawares".

There is nothing in the world that gives such a zest to life as the possession of a hobby and the power of indulging it. We may be pretty certain that the active old lady's white horse at Banbury Cross was nothing more than a hobby-horse, as soon as we find out in the sequel that she "had rings on her fingers and bells on her toes" and that "she shall have music wherever she goes". It is the only horse an old lady could be perpetually engaged in riding without coming to grief—the only horse that ever makes us travel through life to the sound of music wherever we go.

From the days when Bogg had the merest shred of humanity to bully, in the shape of a waif from the Chinese camp, the minutes slipped by with a symphony they had never possessed before. As fulness of time brought him increase of riches and power, he yearned to extend the terror of his sway. It was long before he tasted the full sweetness of making strong men tremble in their boots. Now, at nearly sixty years of age, he knew all the delights of seeing victims, sturdier and poorer than himself, drop their eyelids before his gaze. He was aware that the men in the yard cleared out of his path as he walked through it; that his managers up-country addressed him in tones of husky conciliation; that every eye met his with an air of deprecation, as much as to apologize for the fact of existing in his presence; and in his innermost heart he believed that in the way of mental sensation there could be nothing left to desire. But how convey the impression of rainbow-tints to eyes that have never opened upon aught save universal blackness? Sir Matthew had never seen an eye brighten, a small foot dance, at his approach. A glance of impotent defiance was the only equivalent he knew for a gleam of humid affection. He was accustomed to encounter a shifting gaze. The lowest form of self-interest was the tie which bound his people to him. He paid them as butts, in addition to paying them as servants. Where would have been his daily appetiser in the middle of the day if there had been no yard, full of regulations impossible to obey; no warehouse to echo his harsh words of fault-finding; no servile men, and slouching fast-expanding boys, to scuttle behind the big cases, or come forth as if they were being dragged by hooks, to stand with sheepish expression before him? And when he had talked himself hoarse in the town, where would have been the zest of wandering over his stations, of surveying his fat bullocks and woolly merinos, if there

had been no accommodating managers to listen reverentially to his loudly-given orders, and take with dejected, apologetic air his continued rating? The savour of life would have departed, not with the bodily comfort and consequence that riches bring, but with the power they confer of asserting yourself before your fellow-men after any fashion you please. Bogg's fashion was to bully them, and he bullied them accordingly.

But, you see, Monsieur Caloche is still waiting, in the position, as the junior clerks are well aware, of the confiding calf awaiting butchery in a frolicsome mood outside the butcher's shop. Not that I would imply that Monsieur Caloche frolicked, even metaphorically speaking. He sat patiently on with a sort of sad abstracted air; unconsciously pleating and unpleating the brim of his soft Paris hat, with long lissom fingers that might have broidered the finest silk on other than male hands. The flush of colour, the slight trembling of lips, whenever there was a noise from within, were the only signs that betrayed how acutely he was listening for a summons. Despite the indentations that had marred for ever the smoothness of the face, and pitted the forehead and cheeks as if white gravel had been shot into them, the colour that came and went so suddenly was pink as rose-coloured lake. It stained even the smooth white neck and chin, upon which the faintest traces of down were not yet visible to the scrutinizing eyes of the juniors.

Outside, the north wind ran riot along the pavement, upsetting all orderly arrangements for the day with dreadful noise and fussiness, battering trimly-dressed people into red-eyed wretches heaped up with dust; wrenching umbrellas from their handles, and blinding their possessors trying to run after them; filling open mouths with grit, making havoc with people's hats and tempers, and proving itself as great a blusterer in its character of a peppery emigrant as in its original *rôle* of the chilly Boreas of antiquity.

Monsieur Caloche had carefully wiped away from his white wrist-band the dust that it had driven into his sleeve, and now the dust on his boots—palpably large for the mere slips of feet they enclosed—seemed to give him uneasiness; but it would seem that he lacked the hardihood to stoop and flick it away. When, finally, he extended surreptitiously a timid hand, it might have been observed of his uncovered wrist that it was singularly frail and slender. This delicacy of formation was noticeable in every exterior point. His small white ear, setting close to his head, might have been wrapped up over and over again in one of the fleshy lobes that stretched away from Sir Matthew's skull. Decidedly, the two men were of a different order of species. One was a heavy mastiff

of lupine tendencies—the other a delicate Italian greyhound, silky, timorous, quivering with sensibility.

And there had been time for the greyhound to shiver long with expectancy before the mastiff prepared to swallow him up.

It was a quarter to twelve by the gloomy-faced clock in the outer office, a quarter to twelve by all the clerks' watches, adjusted every morning to the patriarch clock with unquestioning faith, when Monsieur Caloche had diffidently seated himself on the chair in the vicinity of the ground-glass door. It was half-past twelve by the gloomy-faced clock, half-past twelve by all the little watches that toadied to it, when Sir Matthew's bell rang. It was a bell that must have inherited the spirit of a fire-bell or a doctor's night-bell. It had never been shaken by Sir Matthew's fingers without causing a fluttering in the outer office. No one knew what hair-suspended sword might be about to fall on his head before the messenger returned. Monsieur Caloche heard it ring, sharply and clamorously, and raised his head. The white-faced messenger, returning from his answer to the summons, and speaking with the suspension of breath that usually afflicted him after an interview with Sir Matthew, announced that "Mister Caloosh" was wanted, and diving into the gloomy recess in the outer office, relapsed into his normal occupation of breathing on his penknife and rubbing it on his sleeve.

Monsieur Caloche meanwhile stood erect, more like the startled greyhound than ever. To the watchful eyes of the clerks, staring their full at his retreating figure, he seemed to glide rather than step through the doorway. The ground-glass door, attached by a spring from the inside, shut swiftly upon him, as if it were catching him in a trap, and so hid him in full from their curious scrutiny. For the rest they could only surmise. The lamb had given itself up to the butcher's knife. The diminutive greyhound was in the mastiff's grip.

Would the knife descend on the instant? Would the mastiff fall at once upon the trembling foreigner, advancing with sleek uncovered head, and hat held in front by two quivering hands? Sir Matthew's usual glare of reception was more ardent than of custom, as Monsieur Caloche approached. If every "foreign adventurer" supposed he might come and loaf upon Bogg, of Bogg & Company, because he was backed up by a letter from a respectable firm, Sir Matthew would soon let him find out he was mistaken! His glare intensified as the adventurous stripling glided with softest footfall to the very table where he was sitting, and stood exactly opposite to him. None so adventurous, however, but that his lips were white

and his bloodless face a pitiful set-off to the cruelly prominent marks that disfigured it. There was a terror in Monsieur Caloche's expression apart from the awe inspired by Sir Matthew's glare which might have disarmed a butcher or even a mastiff. His large, soft eyes seemed to ache with repressed tears. They pleaded for him in a language more convincing than words, "I am friendless—I am a stranger—I am——" but no matter. They cried out for sympathy and protection, mutely and unconsciously.

But to Sir Matthew's perceptions visible terror had only one interpretation. It remained for him to "find out" Monsieur Caloche. He would "drop on to him unawares" one of these days. He patted his hobby on the back, seeing a gratification for it in prospective, and entering shortly upon his customary stock of searching questions, incited his victim to reply cheerfully and promptly by looking him up and down with a frown of suspicion.

"What brought you 'ere?"

"Please?" said Monsieur Caloche, anxiously.

He had studied a vocabulary opening with "Good-day, sir. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you this morning?" The rejoinder to which did not seem to fit in with Sir Matthew's special form of inquiry.

"What brought you 'ere, I say?" reiterated Sir Matthew, in a roar as if deafness were the only impediment on the part of foreigners in general to a clear comprehension of our language.

"De sheep, Monsieur! La Reine Dorée," replied Monsieur Caloche, in low-toned, guttural, musical French.

"That ain't it," said Sir Matthew, scornfully. "What did you come 'ere for? What are you fit for? What can you do?"

Monsieur Caloche raised his plaintive eyes. His sad desolation was welling out of their inmost depths. He had surmounted the first emotion that had driven the blood to his heart at the outset, and the returning colour, softening the seams and scars in his cheeks, gave him a boyish bloom. It deepened as he answered with humility, "I will do what Monsieur will! I will do my possible!"

"I'll soon see how you shape," said Sir Matthew, irritated with himself for the apparent difficulty of thoroughly bullying the defenceless stranger. "I don't want any of your parley-vooving in my office—do you hear! I'll find you work—jolly quick, I can tell you! Can you mind sheep? Can you drive bullocks, eh? Can you put up a post and rail? You ain't worth your salt if you can't use your 'ands!"

He cast such a glance of withering contempt on the tapering white fingers with olive-shaped nails in front of him that Monsieur

Caloche instinctively sheltered them in his hat. "Go and get your traps together! I'll find you a billet, never fear!"

"*Mais, Monsieur—*"

"Go and get your traps together, I say! You can come 'ere again in an hour. I'll find you a job up country!" His peremptory gesture made any protest on the part of Monsieur Caloche utterly unavailing. There was nothing for him to do but to bow and to back in a bewildered way from the room. If the more sharp-eared of the clerks had not been in opportune contiguity to the ground-glass door during Sir Matthew's closing sentences, Monsieur Caloche would have gone away with the predominant impression that "Sir Bang" was an *enragé*, who disapproved of salt with mutton and beef, and was clamorous in his demands for "traps", which Monsieur Caloche, with a gleam of enlightenment in the midst of his heart-sickness and perplexity, was proud to remember meant "an instrument for ensnaring animals". It was with a doubt he was too polite to express that he accepted the explanation tendered him by the clerks, and learned that if he "would strike while the iron is hot", he must come back in an hour's time with his portmanteau packed up. He was a lucky fellow, the juniors told him, to jump into a billet without any bother; they wished to the Lord they were in *his* shoes, and could be drafted off to the Bush at a moment's notice.

Perhaps it seemed to Monsieur Caloche that these congratulations were based on the Satanic philosophy of "making evil his good". But they brought with them a flavour of the human sympathy for which he was hungering. He bowed to the clerks all round before leaving, after the manner of a court-page in an opera. The hardiest of the juniors ran to the door after he was gone. Monsieur Caloche was trying to make head against the wind. The wind blast was bespattering his injured face. It seemed to revel in the pastime of filling it with grit. One small hand was spread in front of the eyes—the other was resolutely holding together the front of his long, light paletôt, which the rude wind had sportively thrown open. The junior was cheated of his fun. Somehow the sight did not strike him as being quite so funny as it ought to have been.

II

The station hands, in their own language, "gave Frenchy best". No difference of nationality could account for some of his eccentricities. As an instance, with the setting in of the darkness he regularly disappeared. It was supposed that he camped up a tree with the birds. The wit of the wool-shed surmised that "Froggy" slept with

his relatives, and it would be found that he had "croaked" with them one of these odd times. Again, there were shearers ready to swear that he had "blubbered" on finding some sportive ticks on his neck. He was given odd jobs of wool-sorting to do, and was found to have a mania for washing the grease off his hands whenever there was an instant's respite. Another peculiarity was his aversion to blood. By some strange coincidence, he could never be found whenever there was any slaughtering on hand. The most plausible reason was always advanced for necessitating his presence in some far-distant part of the run. Equally he could never be induced to learn how to box—a favourite Sunday morning and summer evening pastime among the men. It seemed almost to hurt him when damage was done to one of the assembled noses. He would have been put down as a "cur" if it had not been for his pluck in the saddle, and for his gentle winning ways. His pluck, indeed, seemed all concentrated in his horsemanship. Employed as a boundary-rider, there was nothing he would not mount, and the station hands remarked, as a thing "that beat them once for all", that the "surliest devils" on the place hardly ever played up with him. He employed no arts. His bridle-hand was by no means strong. Yet it remained a matter of fact that the least amenable of horses generally carried him as if they liked to bear his weight. No one being sufficiently learned to advance the hypothesis of magnetism, it was concluded that he carried a charm.

This power of touch extended to human beings. It was almost worth while spraining a joint or chopping at a finger to be bandaged by Monsieur Caloche's deft fingers. His horror of blood never stood in his way when there was a wound to be doctored. His supple hands, browned and strengthened by his outdoor work, had a tenderness and a delicacy in their way of going to work that made the sufferer feel soothed and half-healed by their contact. It was the same with his manipulation of things. There was a refinement in his disposition of the rough surroundings that made them look different after he had been among them.

And not understood, jeered at, petted, pitied alternately—with no confidant of more sympathetic comprehension than the horse he bestrode—was Monsieur Caloche absolutely miserable? Granting that it were so, there was no one to find it out. His brown eyes had such an habitually wistful expression, he might have been born with it. Very trifles brought a fleeting light into them—a reminiscence, perhaps that, while it crowned him with "sorrow's crown of sorrow", was yet a reflection of some past joy. He took refuge in his ignorance of the language directly he was questioned as to his bygone

life. An embarrassed little shrug, half apologetic, but powerfully conclusive, was the only answer that the most curious examiner could elicit.

It was perceived that he had a strong objection to looking in the glass, and invariably lowered his eyes on passing the cracked and uncompromising fragment of mirror supported on two nails against the planking that walled the rough, attached kitchen. So decided was this aversion that it was only when Bill, the blacksmith, asked him chaffingly for a lock of his hair that he perceived with confusion how wantonly his silken curls were rioting round his neck and temples. He cut them off on the spot, displaying the transparent skin beneath. Contrasted with the clear tan that had overspread his scarred cheeks and forehead, it was white as freshly-drawn milk.

He was set down on the whole as given to moping; but, taking him all round, the general sentiment was favourable to him. Possibly it was with some pitiful prompting of the sort that the working manager sent him out of the way one still morning, when Sir Matthew's buggy, creaking under the unwelcome preponderance of Sir Matthew himself, was discerned on its slow approach to the homestead. A most peaceful morning for the initiation of Sir Matthew's blustering presence! The sparse gum-leaves hung as motionless on their branches as if they were waiting to be photographed. Their shadows on the yellowing grass seemed painted into the soil. The sky was as tranquil as the plain below. The smoke from the homestead reared itself aloft in a long, thinly-drawn column of grey. A morning of heat and repose, when even the sunlight does not frolic and all nature toasts itself, quietly content. The dogs lay blinking at full length, their tails beating the earth with lazy, measured thump. The sheep seemed rooted to the patches of shade, apathetic as though no one wore flannel vests or ate mutton-chops. Only the mingled voices of wild birds and multitudinous insects were upraised in a blended monotony of subdued sounds. Not a morning to be devoted to toil! Rather, perchance, to a glimmering perception of a golden age, when sensation meant bliss more than pain, and to lie was to enjoy.

But to the head of the firm of Bogg & Company, taking note of scattered thistles and straggling wire fencing, warmth and sunshine signified only dry weather. Dry weather clearly implied a fault somewhere, for which somebody must be called to account. Sir Matthew had the memory of a strategist. Underlying all considerations of shorthorns and merinos was the recollection of a timid

pected again for his slim white hands—to be doubly suspected and utterly condemned for his graceful bearing, his appealing eyes, that even now Sir Matthew could see with their soft lashes drooping over them as he fronted them in his darkened office in Flinders Lane. A scapegoat for dry weather, for obtrusive thistles, for straggling fencing! A waif of foreign scum to be found out! Bogg had promised himself that he would “drop on to him unawares”. Physically, Bogg was carried over the ground by a fast trotter; spiritually, he was borne along on his hobby, ambling towards its promised gratification with airy speed.

The working manager, being probably of Bacon’s way of thinking, that “dissimulation is but a faint kind of policy”, did not, in his own words, entirely “knuckle down” to Sir Matthew. His name was Blunt—he was proud to say it—and he would show you he could make his name good if you “crossed” him. Yet Blunt could bear a good deal of “crossing” when it came to the point. Within certain limits, he concluded that the side on which his bread was buttered was worth keeping uppermost, at the cost of some hard words from his employer.

And he kept it carefully uppermost on this especial morning, when the quietude of the balmy atmosphere was broken by Sir Matthew’s growls. The head of the firm, capturing his manager at the door of the homestead, had required him to mount into the double-seated buggy with him. Blunt reckoned that these tours of inspection in the companionship of Bogg were more conducive to taking off flesh than a week’s hard training. He listened with docility, nevertheless, to complaints and ratings—was it not a fact that his yearly salaries had already made a nest-egg of large proportions?—and might have listened to the end, if an evil chance had not filled him with a sudden foreboding. For, pricking his way over the plain, after the manner of Spenser’s knight, Monsieur Caloche, on a fleet, newly broken-in two-year-old, was riding towards them. Blunt could feel that Sir Matthew’s eyes were sending out sparks of wrath. For the first time in his life he hazarded an uncalled-for opinion.

“He’s a good working chap, that, sir!”—indicating by a jerk of the head that the lad now galloping across the turf was the subject of his remark.

“Ah!” said Sir Matthew.

It was all he said, but it was more than enough.

Blunt fidgeted uneasily. What power possessed the boy to make him show off his riding at this juncture? If he could have stopped

him, or turned him back, or waved him off!—but his will was impotent.

Monsieur Caloche, well back in the saddle, his brown eyes shining, his disfigured face flushed and glowing, with wide felt hat drawn closely over his smooth small head, with slender knees close pressed to the horse's flanks, came riding on, jumping small logs, bending with flexible joints under straggling branches, never pausing in his reckless course, until on a sudden he found himself almost in front of the buggy, and, reining up, was confronted in full by the savage gleam of Sir Matthew's eyes. It was with the old scared expression that he pulled off his wideawake and bared his head, black and silky as a young retriever's. Sir Matthew knew how to respond to the boy's greeting. He stood up in the buggy and shook his fist at him; his voice, hoarse from the work he had given it that morning, coming out with rasping intensity.

"What the devil do you mean by riding my 'orses' tails off, eh?"

Monsieur Caloche, in his confusion, straining to catch the full meaning of the question, looked fearfully round at the hind-quarters of the two-year-old, as if some hitherto unknown phenomenon peculiar to Australian horses might in fact have suddenly left them tailless.

But the tail was doing such good service against the flies at the moment of his observations, that, reassured, he turned his wistful gaze upon Sir Matthew.

"Monsieur," he began apologetically, "permit that I explain it to you, I did ga-lopp."

"You can ga-lopp to hell!" said Sir Matthew with furious mimicry. "I'll teach you to ruin my 'orses' legs!"

Blunt saw him lift his whip and strike Monsieur Caloche on the chest. The boy turned so unnaturally white that the manager looked to see him reel in his saddle. But he only swayed forward and slipped to the ground on his feet. Sir Matthew, sitting down again in the buggy with an uncomfortable sensation of some undue excess it might have been as well to recall, saw this white face for the flash of an instant's space, saw its desperation, its shame, its trembling lips; then he was aware that the two-year-old stood riderless in front of him, and away in the distance the figure of a lad was speeding through the timber, one hand held against his chest, his hat gone and he unheeding, palpably sobbing and crying in his loneliness and defencelessness as he stumbled blindly on.

Run-away boys, I fear, call forth very little solicitude in any heart but a mother's. A cat may be nine-lived, but a boy's life is

centuple. He seems only to think it worth keeping after the best part of it is gone. Boys run away from schools, from offices, from stations, without exciting more than an ominous prognostication that they will go to the bad. According to Sir Matthew's inference, Monsieur Caloche had "gone to the bad" long ago—*ergo*, it was well to be rid of him. This being so, what utterly inconsistent crank had laid hold of the head of the great firm of Bogg & Company, and tortured him through a lengthy afternoon and everlasting night, with the vision of two despairing eyes and a scarred white face? Even his hobby cried out against him complainingly. It was not for this that it had borne him prancing along. Not to confront him night and day with eyes so distressful that he could see nothing else. Would it be always so? Would they shine mournfully out of the dim recesses of his gloomy office in Flinders Lane, as they shone here in the wild bush on all sides of him?—so relentlessly sad that it would have been a relief to see them change into the vindictive eyes of the Furies who gave chase to Orestes. There was clearly only one remedy against such a fate, and that was to change the nature of the expression which haunted him by calling up another in its place. But how and when?

Sir Matthew prowled around the homestead the second morning after Monsieur Caloche's flight, in a manner unaccountable to himself. That he should return "possessed" to his elaborate warehouse, where he would be alone all day—and his house of magnificent desolation, where he would be alone all night, was fast becoming a matter of impossibility. What sums out of all proportion would he not have forfeited to have seen the white-faced foreign lad, and to be able to pay him out for the discomfort he was causing him—instead of being bothered by the sight of his "cursed belongings" at every turn! He could not go into the stable without seeing some of his gimcracks; when he went blustering into the kitchen it was to stumble over a pair of miniature boots, and a short curl of hair, in silken rings, fell off the ledge at his very feet. There was only one thing to be done! Consulting with Blunt, clumsily enough, for nothing short of desperation would have induced Sir Matthew to approach the topic of Monsieur Caloche, he learned that nothing had been seen or heard of the lad since the moment of his running away.

"And 'twasn't in the direction of the township, neither," added Blunt, gravely. "I doubt the sun'll have made him stupid, and he'll have camped down some place on the run."

Blunt's insinuation anent the sun was sheer artifice, for Blunt, in his private heart, did not endorse his own suggestion in the least

degree. It was his belief that the lad had struck a shepherd's hut, and was keeping (with a show of common-sense he had not credited him with) out of the way of his savage employer. But it was worth while making use of the artifice to see Sir Matthew's ill-concealed uneasiness. Hardly the same Sir Matthew, in any sense, as the bullying growler who had driven by his side not two days ago. For *this* morning the double-seated buggy was the scene of neither complaints nor abuse. Quietly over the bush track—where last Monsieur Caloche, with hand to his breast, had run sobbing along—the two men drove, their wheels passing over a wideawake hat, lying neglected and dusty in the road. For more than an hour and a half they followed the track, the dusty soil that had been witness to the boy's flight still indicating at intervals traces of a small footprint. The oppressive calm of the atmosphere seemed to have left even the ridges of dust undisturbed. Blunt reflected that it must have been "rough on a fellow" to run all that way in the burning sun. It perplexed him, moreover, to remember that the shepherd's hut would be now far in their rear. Perhaps it was with a newly-born sense of uneasiness on his own account that he flicked his whip and made the trotter "go", for no comment could be expected from Sir Matthew, sitting in complete silence by his side.

To Blunt's discerning eyes the last of the footprints seemed to occur right in the middle of the track. On either side was the plain. Ostensibly, Sir Matthew had come that way to look at the sheep. There was, accordingly, every reason for turning to the right and driving towards a belt of timber some hundred yards away, and there were apparently more forcible reasons still for making for a particular tree—a straggling tree, with some pretensions to a meagre shade, the sight of which called forth an ejaculation, not entirely coherent, from Blunt.

Sir Matthew saw the cause of Blunt's ejaculation—a recumbent figure that had probably reached "the quiet haven of us all"—it lay so still. But whether quiet or no, it would seem that to disturb its peace was a matter of life or death to Sir Matthew Bogg. Yet surely here was satiety of the fullest for his hobby! Had he not "dropped on to the 'foreign adventurer' unawares"? So unawares, in fact, that Monsieur Caloche never heeded his presence, or the presence of his working manager, but lay with a glaze on his half-closed eyes in stiff unconcern at their feet.

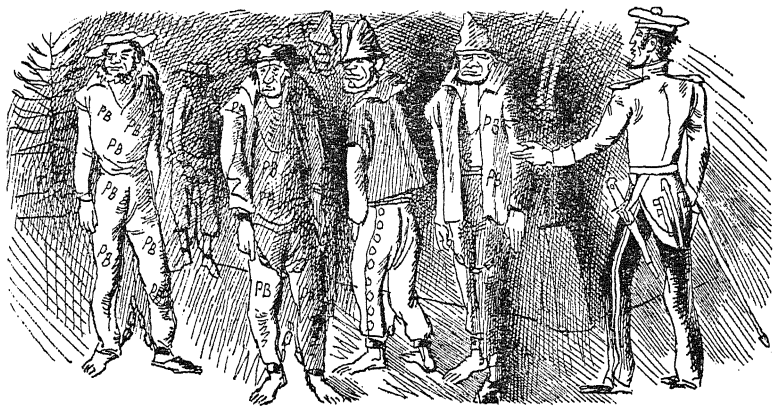
The clerks and juniors in the outer office of the great firm of Bogg & Co. would have been at some loss to recognize their chief in the livid man who knelt by the dead lad's side. He wanted to feel his heart, it appeared, but his trembling fingers failed him.

Blunt comprehended the gesture. Whatever of tenderness Monsieur Caloche had expended in his short lifetime was repaid by the gentleness with which the working manager passed his hand under the boy's rigid neck. It was with a shake of the head that seemed to Sir Matthew like the feat of his doom that Blunt unbuttoned Monsieur Caloche's vest and discovered the fair, white throat beneath. Unbuttoning still—with tremulous fingers, and a strange apprehension creeping chillily over him—the manager saw the open vest fall loosely asunder, and then——

Yes; then it was proven that Sir Matthew's hobby had gone its extremest length. Though it could hardly have been rapture at its great triumph that filled his eyes with such a strange expression of horror as he stood looking fearfully down on the corpse at his feet. For he had, in point of fact, "dropped on to it unawares"; but it was no longer Monsieur Caloche he had "dropped on to", but a girl with breast of marble, bared in its cold whiteness to the open daylight, and to his ardent gaze. Bared, without any protest from the half-closed eyes, unconcerned behind the filmy veil which glazed them. A virgin breast, spotless in hue save for a narrow purple streak, marking it in a dark line from the collar-bone downwards. Sir Matthew knew, and the working manager knew, and the child they called Monsieur Caloche had known, by whose hand the mark had been imprinted. It seemed to Sir Matthew that a similar mark, red-hot like a brand, must now burn on his own forehead for ever. For what if the hungry Australian sun, and emotion, and exhaustion had been the actual cause of the girl's death? He acknowledged, in the bitterness of his heart, that the "cause of the cause" was his own bloodstained hand.

It must have been poor satisfaction to his hobby, after this, to note that Blunt had found a tiny pocket-book on the person of the corpse, filled with minute foreign handwriting, of which nothing could be made! For, with one exception, it was filled with French quotations, all of the same tenor—all pointing to the one conclusion—and clearly proving (if it has not been proved already) that a woman who loses her beauty loses her all. The English quotation will be known to some readers of Shakespeare, "So beauty blemished once for ever's lost!" Affixed to it was the faintly-traced signature of Henriette Caloche.

[From *A Sydney Sovereign and Other Tales*, 1890.]



UNDER THE WHIP OR THE PARSON'S LOST SOUL

By WILLIAM ASTLEY—"PRICE WARUNG"

As the observation that Human Destiny is affected by remote trials is true of every rank and grade of Society unconvicted or otherwise, it was not to be expected that the felony of Norfolk Island in 184— should be exempt from obedience to this particular decree of nature. Convictdom enjoyed many privileges. It had not, for instance, to trouble its cropped head as to the means of sustaining life; there was no occasion for it to bother itself as to what it should eat or drink or put on, or where it should sleep. A loving and beneficent Government relieved Convictdom of responsibility in all these matters, and thus saved Convictdom from much mental wear and tear. But even the potent Government could not prevent the destiny of the individual and collective felon from being influenced by trifles. The System could confer immunity upon its erring children from most of the worries of existence, but here it was powerless.

Consequently, the fact that it was the merest trifle which for ever on this earth locked the door of possible reform on Convict Walter Edward Tappin, No. 18969, per *Governor Ready*, was not at all a singular one.

Tappin was the ex-Mayor of an English city. Originally trans-

ported for twenty-one years for forgery, to V.D.L., he had been forwarded on to Norfolk Island as a "colonially-convicted man with a concurrent sentence" for a second offence committed at Hobart Town. The first few months at the Settlement had been spent by him in sullen resignation to his fate; he had become entitled to have "C." put against his name on the Annual Abstract of Gaol Strength; and the good conduct thus denoted had earned for him the highly-esteemed post of a prison-writership. His duties therein had brought him into contact with the arch-fiend and arch-traitor Knatchbull (afterwards hanged for murder in Sydney), and the evil genius of that aristocratic scoundrel had cast its wonted spell over the ex-Mayor. Knatchbull urged him to join in one of the many conspiracies which he initiated only to betray, and Tappin consented. Of course he was "split upon". He was removed from his post (to which Knatchbull was appointed as a reward for his treachery) and, at the next sessions of the special Commission, received a third sentence—that of "life". This meant servitude in Longridge Quarry-gang. There a slight breach of the gang-regulations had obtained for him the punishment of three days "cells". He had been returned to the gang a couple of days when Destiny did him the particularly bad turn to be hereinafter described. It caused Mr Darrell, superintendent at Longridge, to be vexed by a trifle with which he, Convict Tappin, had as much to do as the proverbial "unborn child" of convict phraseology.

On the evening on which Super. Darrell, who occupies a niche in the proud temple of British history as "an able and conscientious official", locked the door on Convict Tappin's chances of reform, he sat in his "den" at the Ridge Barracks receiving the daily reports from his subordinates. The prisoners had just been locked up, and the night-guards set. The day-duty men—warders, overseers, and sub-overseers—were not, however, yet freed for their rest and recreation. They had to report the proceedings of the previous twelve hours, and be themselves reported on. There was this great merit in the System: if it encouraged its humbler instruments to crush every spark of manliness and virtue out of the convict nature by deceit and persecution, it subjected the instruments themselves to like degradation. A constable or overseer might gain promotion and increase of pay by successfully concocting a charge against one prisoner, or by laying a trap for another; but at any moment he might tumble into a pitfall prepared for himself by a brother-officer who wanted his billet. The penal establishment of Van Diemen's Land (Norfolk Island at this time was controlled by the V.D.L. Government) had reduced spying to a science. The name

of spy is abhorrent to British ears. Nevertheless, a Secretary of State for the Colonies framed with his own hand a recommendation that the System should be "administered by secret espionage". And a suggestion from a Noble and Right Honourable authority was, of course, an instruction.

As became an able and conscientious official, Super. Darrell made the Secretary of State's recommendation the basis of his administration. John Price had not yet arrived on the island, and the head Longridge official was virtually independent of the Civil Commandant; there was no one to interfere with him. He exercised a summary jurisdiction over officers and prisoners; and thirty or forty times during each week inflicted punishment without even formal reference to headquarters. Of course, this procedure was illegal, for he was not a magistrate. Legality was, however, the last thing thought of by the rulers of Norfolk Island at this period. During a term of five years, *every summary sentence* pronounced by the Island authorities—aggregating one hundred and twenty thousand days' "cells", and including hundreds of special punishments, such as the "spread-eagle", "gag-and-bridle", the "tube-gag", and double-irons—was illegal.

On this particular night, the first two overseers reporting to the Superintendent had come in for "a wiggling".

"Don't tell me," said the Super. to Farm-overseer Rootem; "don't tell me that twenty prisoners have gone the whole day without committing a breach of the Regulations. I know better, sir—the thing's absolutely impossible. You'd better look out, Rootem. If you're not more vigilant, I'll have to change you to a gang where there are no quarters." It is scarcely necessary to say that Overseer Rootem acted upon the hint thus given, and for two months subsequently did not fail to report daily at least one instance of misconduct on the part of a prisoner or prisoners. It did not give him much trouble to invent a charge. That Outer Farm was too comfortable a residence to abandon for a mere whim of conscience.

To Works-Overseer Greenwood the Super. was still franker. "I'm not satisfied, Greenwood, by a long way, with the work you're getting out of that gang. I'm not going to allow any snuffing sympathy with doubly-convicted felons to stop the progress of Her Majesty's buildings. That brickwork ought to have been done a week ago. Report the fellows if they won't work."

"The work would have been done, sir; but you took two of my best hands to build that chimney at the old barracks. The hands I have can't lay a course a-day between 'em," replied Greenwood. "They're too old and weak, sir."

"I warn you not to make insolent observations," sharply exclaimed Darrell.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Greenwood, submissively. "I——"

"Don't interrupt, sir. I am the judge of what quantity or quality of labour you require to get through the work, and if you can't get the proper return from what I choose to allow you, I shall put you down as either incapable or insubordinate. Sign the duty-book, sir, and go, sir, and remember what I say."

Greenwood went out from the Super's presence with these words lingering in his ears. As he walked to his pretty little cottage on the Cascades Road he made up his mind that next day poor, broken-backed "Lifer" Kelly would have to carry another score of hods full of bricks and mortar. Also, that the bricklayers (several of whom had been laying bricks for "Government" for thirty years or so, having been engaged on Governor Macquarie's early Sydney monstrosities) would have to work more actively. He knew every man in the gang was physically incapable of doing more than he was already doing, for had he not already driven them to the extreme of effort?—but then the Super. said that the seventy-year-old wretches—the "invalids" of the Island—*must* turn out more work, and the Super. had to be obeyed, or else (what was not to be thought of) he, the Overseer, would suffer. If the extra task-work so operated on Kelly's weakened frame that he fell from the scaffolding ladder and broke his leg; or if decrepit "Ned the Bricky", goaded to unreasoning madness by the new demand upon his energies—save the mark!—turned upon the prisoner next to him and drove his trowel into the man's back between the shoulder-blades; if these things should happen (and, as a matter of fact, they respectively *did*, one and three days later)—well, the System, that beautiful and logical System, would be to blame, and not he, who was but one of its humblest instruments.

The Super. had been put into a good humour by the necessity for reprimanding his two subordinates. To prove the strict impartiality of the man we have only to remark that he derived as much pleasure from brow-beating an officer as from torturing a prisoner.

The next officer to follow Greenwood with his report was Overseer Mitchell, of the tramway-team. He laid complaints against convicts Gooch and Johnson, of his gang. The former had refused to haul on the truck-rope at the same instant as the others, while the latter had just qualified himself by an obscene expression for the only punishment, short of hanging, known to the Administrators of the System, which had not yet been inflicted upon him. He had

passed through all but two of the gradations of penalty; there was scarcely a note in the whole gamut of physical suffering to which his nature had not thrilled; of all the reformatory machinery patronized by the System he had but to make, in his own person, the acquaintance of the tube-gag and the gallows. Super. Darrell, having heard Mitchell's allegation, ordered Johnson "ten hours of the tube-gag" on the morrow, and Gooch to receive a "dozen" lashes before he next went out to work with the team. By a "dozen" was, of course, meant the "Botany Bay dozen", which was neither the arithmetical dozen, nor the baker's dozen, but a simple "twenty-five". On the following morning, accordingly, Convicts Gooch and Johnson, as they filed through the door of D dormitory, would be told to "fall out for punishment". This would be their first intimation, perhaps, that they had offended; certainly the first that they had been newly-sentenced. You see, to compel for enquiry the attendance of prisoners accused of breaches of the Regulations would have wasted a lot of Her Majesty's time, and the formality of the presence of the accused was therefore generally dispensed with.

Overseer Mitchell plumed himself on his report putting him up a peg in the Super's estimation. Saluting and wishing his chief a flunkeyish "Good-night", he retired.

He had stepped twenty paces down the gravelled path when he was called back to the Super's office. The evening dusk had fallen, but there was still light sufficient for the men waiting their turn to perceive, as he returned through their ranks, that Mitchell's face was paler than when he came out.

"Hello," loudly whispered a constable, "who's been putting you away, Mitchell?"

Everybody knew what was the significance of that recall after "report". It conveyed the interesting intelligence that the officer sent for had been informed against by a fellow-official—most likely by an immediate subordinate who wanted his billet.

This was the case with Mitchell. His sub-overseer and armed guard, Crunch, had accused him of speaking disrespectfully of the Superintendent. Mr Crunch's motive may have been, as he asserted, a profound regard for the Superintendent's fame. It is possible, however, that the circumstances that he had just been granted permission to marry, and that the increment of £2 6s. 8d. to his salary, which he would receive monthly could he supplant Mitchell, would be useful in his wedded state, had something to do with his "peaching" on the Overseer.

Mitchell denied, on examination, that he had spoken disrespectfully of the Super. Pressed, however, he was obliged to admit that

he had said that the Super's name should have been "Darehell", not Darrell. "But, sir," he pleaded, "I meant it as a compliment. You're such a plucky 'un, sir, saving your presence, that I meant as you'd face Old Nick himself, sir, if needed."

"Compliment or not," growled Super. Darrell, "it was a liberty to take with your superior for which there was no excuse. Unless you show respect for the System and the men who are in authority under it, how can you expect prisoners to do so? You are suspended from duty pending the receipt of a reply to a recommendation which I shall make to the Commandant that you be superseded in your post of Overseer." Mitchell once more retired, clearly assured that he had lost his billet, as not once in a hundred cases did the C.C. refuse to ratify the Longridge Superintendent's recommendation.

Darrell's good humour vanished at the disclosure of Mitchell's slip of the tongue. It was the merest of trifles; but, trivial circumstance as it was, it sufficed to create deep annoyance. Like all tyrants, Darrell was keenly susceptible to any affront to his dignity. To think that these uncouth subordinates of his, perhaps—horrible thought!—even the convicts themselves, dared to pun on his name, and to make his characteristics a jest, was to wound him in his most vulnerable part, his vanity. The more he thought of it the more he regretted having let Mitchell off so slightly. He fumed and fretted in his wrath till the pleasing notion occurred to his mind that other reports had to come in, and possibly that other offenders might be charged and punished, and that happening, he could then vent the rest of his spleen upon them. By a sad chance it was at Convict Tappin's expense that he was to regain his composure and complacency.

The next officer to report was the Overseer of the Quarry-gang. "Tappin, sir, the forger, per *Governor Ready*, him as got the cells last week——" began the man.

"Well, what of him, now?" snarled Darrell. "More talking?"

"No, sir; but he's stubborn since he came out of the cells; goes more slowly about his work, an' though he don't say nuthin' when he's spoken to, he takes no notice."

The fact was that Tappin's three days of incarceration in the dark cells had done more to break his spirit than all previous punishments.

"There'll be one man short in the tramway-team tomorrow morning; Johnson's down for punishment. Tappin will take his place. We'll see if His Worship will shirk his work when under the whip."

The Super. objected to the nick-name when he was its subject. But none on the Island had a stronger recollection for the by-names and false-names of the convicts—and every notable scoundrel had one or two such—and none used them in intercourse with the felony more insolently. Tappin he more frequently referred to as “His Worship” than by his own name or register-number.

With a stroke of his quill the Super. made the entry necessary to record the transfer from “A Gang” at the Quarry to “D Gang”, which was formed by the tramway-team.

In his heart, Super. Darrell knew the proceeding was a terribly unjust one, and that he was venting upon the ex-Mayor some of the ill-temper which had been occasioned by the Mitchell incident. He knew that membership in the D Gang was, by a tradition of Island management, reserved for beasts and brutes; for men with indescribable stains upon them; for murderers and worse than murderers. He knew that Tappin, whatever his offences, and whatever the ignominy of his experiences in the penal colonies, had still retained a sense of manliness which would go far to save him, under ordinary conditions of punishment, from descending to the lowest abysses of crime. He knew that every fibre of the man’s nature would revolt against the infernal companionship to which his sentence would condemn him.

He knew all this, and, notwithstanding, made the entry in the Punishment Book:—

Tappin, W. E., 18969, Governor Ready: Insubordination and neglecting work, 2nd offence within 7 days. Transfer to Gang D for 12 months.

“There,” he said, as he initialled the record, “I think that will do for Mayor Tappin.”

Do? We should rather think it would. A month—one brief month—of D Gang membership would have ruined, body and soul, any man of average moral stamina. To a creature like Tappin, naturally a moral invertebrate, a year signified perdition upon perdition.

Chaplain Taylor kept for his information and for that of Bishop Nixon three memorandum-books, respectively lettered in his neat hand:—

PROBABLE

POSSIBLE

IRREDEEMABLE (*humanly-speaking*).

In the first he was accustomed to enter the names of the Protestant convicts who, so to speak, constituted the *élite* of his flock—the poor souls in whom he conceived that remorse or suffering were per-

forming a genuine "work of grace". Among the "Possible" he included the men in whose conversation and acts he had discovered some avenue for possible reform, some feeble-flickering spark which the gentle breath of Christian charity and broad humanity might fan into an undying flame of good. In the second list he had placed Tappin's name. When the Chaplain heard of the unfortunate wretch's removal to D Gang he went into Super. Darrell's office and begged the loan of a pen for a minute. To him Darrell courteously handed his own. Mr Taylor took it, and, as he drew a line through a "Possible" name and entered the same name on his "Irredeemable" list, he put a question to the "Chief".

"May I ask, Mr Darrell, is this the pen with which you recorded Tappin's last sentence?"

"Yes," said Darrell. "But why do you ask?"

"It is a coincidence, isn't it, that the pen with which I transfer Tappin to my list of the damned, you should have used for precisely the same purpose?" said the Chaplain.

"You speak in riddles, Mr Taylor," said Darrell. "I keep no 'list of the damned', as you call it."

"Oh, yes, you do!" retorted the parson. "But you call it D Gang roll, and you have put Tappin on it."

Not a whit did Chaplain Taylor exaggerate the fact. When at 5.30 a.m. on the day following the report, Tappin filed out of A Gang dormitory, he was ordered to shift his blanket to that of D Gang.

He stood dazed. He hardly comprehended the order.

"Do you hear, Tappin?" shouted the Mustering Warder.

"I don't understand, sir," stammered No. 18969.

"I spoke clearly enough, man, I will instruct you again," said the Warder. "Listen, now." And slowly, each distinctly-enunciated syllable lashing Tappin's consciousness like a whip of wire, the fellow (mingling with his tone of authority an accent of derision) said:

"Eighteen—nine—six—nine, I beg pardon, His Worship—will—take—his—blanket; he will give it to the Wardsman—of—D Gang; he will then join D Gang to which—he is—transferred by—the Superintendent's—order—for neglecting—his work."

Everyone in the muster-yard understood what this studied orator meant by the manner of his speech. Warders and constables, overseers and convicts, saw that this was the Mustering Warden's playful little way of conveying to "His Worship" that the link between himself and decent human society was to be severed beyond hope of re-welding. And as the Mustering Warden was the Senior Official

present, of course, all in the yard, save Tappin, could do nothing less than express their appreciation of his joke by the merriest of laughter. Power, when it jesteth, can always find a chorus. How they did laugh, to be sure! The cooks, in the distant kitchen, stopped in the ladling out of the maize-meal porridge, to laugh in sympathy, although they were not acquainted with the cause for the merriment. A fine joke, truly! Only the robbery from a poor mortal of the last shred of his humanity. Henceforth he was to be a beast; a creature with the form of a man, but with the instincts, and habits, and cunning of the lower animals. Henceforth he was to draw as the beast draws, and bear as the beast bears, and be whipped as the beast is whipped, and to have no vent for his agony save the inarticulate groan of the beast.

The members of D Gang were termed "demons", in the Island vernacular, and, from what has been already said, it will be seen that the name had a greater proportion of truth than is usually contained in punning designation. Their dormitory was the *arcantum* of Vice, and they, themselves, presumably, and by reason of their inclusion in the gang, were past-masters in crime. If we regard the convict population of the Island as constituting a Legion of Dishonour, an Order of the Gallows, then the "D-Gangers" would be its Grand Crosses. One simple statistical fact shows their character. Not ten per cent of their number died natural deaths. By process of law, by warder's bullet, by the accidental or purposed violence of fellow-felons, ninety-one per cent of "D-Gangers" lost their register-mark. At this time they formed with three others, that dread secret society of the "Ring". This was the amiable circle to which Tappin was welcomed.

Members of the A Gang worked in the quarries in irons. "D-Gangers", as was befitting their superior distinction, worked in double-irons.

As the smith of D Gang bent down to rivet the additional anklet on Tappin's hitherto unironed leg, he found an opportunity to whisper:

"Yer'll hev ter join th' Ring ter-night, yer Worship; so keep yer pluck up."

"Never," murmured Tappin.

"Oh, we'll see 'bout that," grinned the fellow. "We don' 'low none in this 'ere gang 'less they're 'Ringers'."

Several times during the awful task hours that followed Tappin received similar intimations. Overseer Crunch was lenient with the gang that day, doubtless in consequence of his promotion; at

each stopping-place he gave his cattle a few seconds' more breathing-time than usual; and thus the ruffians found time to speak to one another and to Tappin.

To Tappin and to Gooch (the latter had got his "twenty-five", and was working with his stripped and *salted* back) Crunch was particularly kind. They were the foremost of the twenty pairs which formed the team, and would have come in for many flickings of the driver's enormous whip but for Crunch.

"Driver," he said sympathetically, "don't give Gooch too much today. He's still sore. And His Worship's a new hand—we've got to break him to the whip gently."

It was probably due to Crunch's "humanity" that Tappin survived to the end of the day. Had the full routine of the gang been manifested to him during his first day in its strength, very likely he would have thrown himself down beneath the ponderous truck, and been ground to fragments by its wheels. He would not have been the first to whom the tramway truck, designed by the System, had proved a veritable car of Juggernaut.

Nevertheless, and lightened of much of its customary torture as the day had been, Tappin, who had been a man when harnessed up in the early morning, shuffled into the barrack-yard at sunset a desperate, maddened animal.

As he lapped the greasy water which the Establishment called ration soup, a constable notified him that Chaplain Taylor wished to see him.

"Lor'," cried Gooch, "fancy a 'Ringer' a parson's pet!"

The exquisite humour of the idea tickled everyone. All, constables, mess-men, prisoners, swelled the volume of hideous laughter.

"I'll show you if I'm a parson's pet," shouted Tappin, and, rising, he clink-clanked along the pavement to where Chaplain Taylor was standing by the yard-entrance, side by side with the Muster Warder.

He lifted his hand—to salute the officer? No! But—to strike Chaplain Taylor full in the face.

Unto this had the whip of Her Majesty's Penal System brought an English ex-Mayor!

"I am sorry you did this, Tappin," said Chaplain Taylor, mildly, a few minutes later, as the unreasoning wretch was brought handcuffed into the room where the clergyman had retired to bathe his face. "Very sorry."

"Damn your sorrow!" yelled Tappin; "damn your sympathy! Damn you! Damn——" Then he changed his tone suddenly. "No," he said, "I won't curse God—yet. If you can get me out of D ward,

Mr Taylor, before 'silence' bell rings tonight, I'll apologize, sir—I'll apologize to you, and I won't curse my Maker, sir. Oh, do, Mr Taylor—do, sir!"

"I came to tell you, Tappin, not to lose heart yet—till tomorrow at least. I have already seen the Commandant, who won't interfere with the Superintendent's sentence; but tomorrow some of the garrison ladies are coming to visit Longridge, and one of them is a new arrival—not long in the colonies from home. I will beseech her to use her influence with the Commandant and the Superintendent to get you removed from D Gang. An English lady will never consent to be drawn by a man like you; and Mr Scragge will almost certainly comply with her request."

The Rev. Mr Taylor had only the slightest acquaintance with the lady he referred to—a Mrs Browning. Had he known her more intimately he would not have hazarded the conjecture as to what she would do were she offered a ride in a carriage drawn by human beings. As a matter of fact, the lady had already taken one such ride, and was now looking forward to the trip of the next day with particular pleasure.

"I'll wait, sir," replied Tappin, tamed somewhat. "I'll wait, sir, for a day or two, if the Ring will let me, before——"

"Before what?" hopefully asked the clergyman.

"Before I give myself up to the Devil entirely!" answered the ex-Mayor, with a great, gasping sob.

On his way homewards to the settlement, Chaplain Taylor overtook Father McIndoe—best and lankiest of priests.

In after years, Father McIndoe became the object of loving reverence to a numerous section of the Sydney population; but no faithful son or daughter of Mother Church held him in greater affection than did that sturdy Anglican, Chaplain Taylor.

Strangely dissimilar in numberless points, they were strangely alike in two. Each had an intense hatred of the System, and an intense pity for the System's victims.

"Well, brother," queried the Protestant, as he linked arms with the priest. "Any news?"

"No, nothing new—only another triumph for the System," replied the Father.

"Body or soul?"

"Body, this time—old Kelly, the hodman, fell from a scaffold and broke his leg."

"Ah, mine's much worse. It's a soul!" said the Church of England parson.



“NUMBER ONE NORTH RAINBOW”

By JOHN ARTHUR BARRY

“ANOTHER duffer!”

“Rank as ever was bottomed!”

“Seventy-five feet hard delving, and not a colour!”

The speakers were myself, the teller of this story, and my mate, Harry Treloar.

We were sitting on a heap of earth and stones representing a month's fruitless, dreary labour. The last remark was Harry's.

“That makes, I think,” continued he, “as nearly as I can guess, about a dozen of the same species. And people have the cheek to call this a poor man's diggings!”

“The prospectors are on good gold,” I hazard.

“So are the publicans,” retorts he, “and the speculators, and the

storekeepers, and, apparently, everybody but the poor men—ourselves, to wit. This place is evidently for capitalists. We're nearly 'dead-brokers', as they say out here. Let's harness up Eclipse and go over to old Yamnibar. We may make a rise there. It's undignified, I allow, scratching amongst the leavings of other men and other years; dangerous, also, but that's nothing. And many a good man has had to do the same before us."

No life can equal that of a digger if he be "on gold", even moderately so; if not, none so weary and heart-breaking.

It's all very well to talk, as some street-bred novelists do, of "hope following every stroke of the pick, making the heaviest toil as nought", and all that kind of thing; but when one has been pick-stroking for months without seeing a colour; when one's boots are sticking together by suasion of string and greenhide; when every meal is eaten on grudged credit; when one works late and early, wet and dry, and all in vain, then hope becomes of that description which maketh the heart sick, very sick, indeed. Treloar was, in general, a regular Mark Tapley and Micawber rolled into one. But for once, fate, so adverse, had proved too much for even his serenely hopeful temper.

He was Anglo-Indian. Now he is Assistant-Commissioner at Bhurtpore, also a C.S.I.; and when he reads this, will recollect and perhaps sigh for the days when he possessed a liver and an appetite, and was penniless.

Our turnout was rather a curious one. The season was dry, and, feed being scarce, Treloar had concluded that at such a time, a bullock would be better able to eke out a living than a horse. Therefore, a working bullock drew our tilted cart about the country.

"You see, my boy," said Treloar, when deciding on the purchase, "an ox is a beggar that always seems to have something to chew. Turn a horse out where there's no grass, and he'll probably go to the deuce before morning. But your ox, now, after a good look around, seeing he's struck a barren patch, 'll draw on his reserves, bring up something from somewhere, and start chewing away like one o'clock. That comforts his owner. I vote for the ox. He may be slow, but he generally appears to have enough in his stomach to keep his jaws going; and, in a dry time, that is a distinct advantage."

So Eclipse was bought, I merely stipulating that Treloar should always drive.

I have an idea, that after a while, as the old "worker" sauntered along, regarding the perspiring Harry, and his exhortations and exclamations, often in Hindustani, with a mild stare of surprise, as he slowly stooped for a dry tussock, or reached aloft for an over-

hanging branch, the latter somewhat repented him of his experiment. But he never said so. And, to do him justice, Eclipse was not a bad "ox"; and, when he could get nothing better, justified Harry's expectations by seeming able to chew stones. But his motto was decidedly *festina lente*.

Yamnibar, "old Yamnibar", at last. Behind us, on the far inland river, we had left a busy scene of activity. Hurrying crowds of men, the whirr of a thousand windlasses, the swish of countless cradles, and ceaseless pounding by night and by day of the battery stamps. And now what a contrast.

A wide, trackless valley, covered with grave-like mounds, on which grass grew rankly; with ruined buildings and rotting machinery, and, here and there, pools of stagnant water, whilst the only thing save the sweep of the wind that reached our ears was a distant rhythmical moaning, coming very sadly in that desolate place—the sounding of the sea on the rock-bound coast not far away.

The only signs of life, as Eclipse, pausing now and again, and taking a ruminative survey of the valley, drew us by degrees down the sloping hills, were the buglings of a squad of native companions flying heavily towards the setting sun.

"What a dismal hole!" I muttered, as the "ox", spying some green rushes, bolted at top speed—about a mile an hour—towards them.

"Let's try and find a golden one," laughed my mercurial friend. "Here we have a whole goldfield to ourselves. Just think of it! 'Lords of the fowl and the brute'—Eclipse and *Kálee* and the brolgas. Take the old chap out of the *gharri*, and we'll pitch our camp."

I ought to have spoken of *Kálee* long ago. Indeed, when one comes to think of it, I ought to have called this story after her. But man is an ungrateful animal—worse than most dogs. Not that the great deerhound with the faithful eyes, who might have stepped out of one of Landseer's pictures, was forgotten—far from it. But for her we should possibly now, both of us, be bundles of dry bones, with all sorts of underground small deer making merry amongst them.

She ought, according to her merits, to hold pride of place here. But she was as quiet and unobtrusive as she was faithful and affectionate, whereas Eclipse was nothing of the kind, only a noisy blusterer, thinking of no one but himself. Therefore, as happens so often with us, has he stolen a march on a failing memory for prior recognition. But the "ox" is grass, and *Kálee* still lives in the

great Eastern Empire, and has two servants to wait upon her. O
Dea certe!

"Behold!" said Treloar, as we lay and smoked in the moonlight, after supper, in front of our tent, which we had pitched between the door-posts of what had evidently been a building of some size, but of which they were the sole remains. "Behold, my friend, the end of it all! But a few years are passed, and where now, are the busy thousands that toiled and strove and jostled each other, below there, in earth's bowels, in the fierce race for gold? Look at it now! Think of the great waves of human hopes and disappointments and joys that have rolled to and fro across this miserable patch of earth! Think of the brave hearts that came hot with the excitement of the quest, and departed broken with the emptiness of it. Also, of those others, who never departed, but lie at rest beneath that yellow clay. Just a little while, in the new-born one, is centred alike the glow of success and the cold chill of failure; all the might of swift fierce endeavour, every passion, good and bad, that convulses our wretched souls. And then, after a brief season, its pristine form defaced and scarred, comes the rotting solitude of the tomb! Why 'tis, in some sort, the story of our corporeal life and death!

"Over the Mountains of the Moon,
Down the Vale of Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride," the shade replied,
"For there lies El Dorado."

Behold, my friend, the Valley of the Shadow that has passed, wherein many a bold soul has gone down to Hades, 'unhouselled, disappointed, unaneled'. Do their ghosts wander yet, I ask?"

"Oh bother!" I mutter sleepily. "I'm tired. Let's turn in."

Fortunately such outbursts were rare. But when the fit came on, I knew too well the uselessness of attempting to stop it.

Awakened towards the small hours by the roarings of Eclipse, triumphantly apprising the world at large that his belly was full, I found the lantern still burning, and could see Treloar's eye, "in a fire phrenzy rolling" as he scribbled rapidly. Years afterwards I read in the *Bombay Pioneer*, "How the Night Falls on Yamnibar", and thought it passable.

It was anything but pleasant work, this groping about old workings. It was also very dangerous. Many were the close shaves we had of being buried, sometimes alive, at others flattened out.

The soil, for the first twenty or thirty feet, was of a loose, friable description. Thence to the bottom averaging eighty feet, was "standing ground", that is, it needed no timbering. But, in many cases, the slabbing from the upper parts had rotted away and fallen

down, followed by big masses of earth, which blocked up the entrance to the drives where our work lay.

Then after, with great trouble, clearing the bottom, generally yellow pipeclay, and exploring the dark, cramped passages for pillars, we had, before beginning to displace these, to support the roof by artificial ones. Timber had at the time of the rush been plentiful; as a consequence pillars were scarce. Also the field having in its prime been a wonderfully rich one, it had been repeatedly fossicked over. This made them scarcer still.

Often after a heavy job of clearing out and heaving up mullock, water and slabs, all the time in imminent peril of a "fall" from some part of the shaft, would we discover, on exploring the drives, that they were simply grooves of props—not a natural support left standing.

Such a network of holes and burrows as the place was, I can compare it to nothing but a Brobdingnagian rabbit-warren.

The flat had been undermined, claim breaking into claim, until the wonder was that the whole top crust didn't cave in. In some places this had happened, and one looked down into a dismal chaos of soil, rotten timber, and surface water.

As I have remarked, it was risky work, this hunting for a few solitary grains amongst the rotten treasure-husks left by others, especially without a local knowledge of the past, which would have been so invaluable to us. But there came to be, nevertheless, a sort of dreary fascination in it.

We had heard that, on this same field, years after its total abandonment, a two hundred ounce nugget had been found by a solitary fossicker in a pillar left in an old claim.

Very often, I believe, did the picture of that big lump rise before us as we crawled and twisted and wriggled about like a pair of great subterranean yellow eels, not knowing the moment a few odd tons of earth might fall and bury us.

One day an incident rather out of the common befell. Lowering Treloar cautiously down an old shaft to make, as usual, a preliminary survey, I presently heard a splash and a cry of "Heave-up!" Up he came, a regular Laocoön, in the close embraces of a thumping, lively carpet snake, whose frogging ground he had intruded upon.

He had, by luck, got a firm grip of the reptile round the neck and was not bitten. He was, however, badly scared.

Doubtfully he listened as, while releasing him from the coils, I assured him that the thing was perfectly harmless.

Was I quite certain on this point? he wished to know. Of course I was; and I quoted all the authorities I could think of.

Then, before despatching it, would I let it bite me? As an ardent ophiologist, he took the utmost interest in such a fact, and would like to become as confident as myself of it.

But I pointed out earnestly that this was simply trifling, and that we had no time to spare. Practical demonstration is a very capital thing in many cases. But *ver non semper vires*, and our friend of the curiously-patterned skin might not be *always* innocuous.

We took three ounces out of the pillar in Snake Shaft. That night, on returning to our camp, we found an old man there. He was the first person we had seen for a month; and so we were inclined to be cordial. There was nothing particularly remarkable about the newcomer, except that he had a habit of tightly shutting one eye as he looked at you.

I have called him old because his hair was grey; but he was still a very powerful man, and likely to prove a tough one at close quarters.

"Come and have some supper, mate," said Treloar.

"Call me Brummy, an' keep yer dorg orf," replied the other, as he poured out a pannikin of tea. "I don't fancy a big beast like yon a-breathin' inter the back o' a feller's neck."

And indeed *Kálee's* attentions were marked. She sniffed around and around the newcomer, bristled all her hair up, and carried on a monologue which sounded unpleasant.

"No," he resumed in answer to a question, as Treloar sent *Kálee* to her kennel. "I was never on this here field before. Down about the Lachlan's my *towri*. Everybody there knows Brummy. I'm goin' to do a bit of fossickin' now I got this far. Ain't a-thinkin' o' inter-ferin' wi' you. Surfiss is my dart—roun' about the old tailin's and puddlers. Down below's too risky in a rotten shop like this. I leaves that game to the young 'uns. An'" (with a sly grin) "old Brum does as well as the best on 'em in the long run."

Soon after this he went away and pitched a ragged fly further along the flat.

Next day, as we were having a smoke and a spell after rigging two new windlass standards, he came up to us, and in a furtive sort of manner, began to try to discover the position of those claims which we had already prospected. Having no motive for concealment, we told him as well as we could, also pointing out most of them from where we sat.

He appeared quite pleased as we finished, and marched off with his old tin dish banging and rattling against the pick on his shoulder.

"That old man," remarked Harry presently, "is a dangerous old man. Moreover, he is a liar."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"The first," he replied, "I feel—as *Kálee* did. Now for the second count in the indictment. Did you not hear him tell us that this was his first visit to Yamnibar? Well, when he asked so carelessly if we had tried the big shaft over yonder—the one where you can see the remains of a horse-whim—and you said that we had not, a momentary gleam of satisfaction passed across his face. We'll try that hole tomorrow morning. Luckily, our new standards are finished."

"Pooh!" I said. "My dear fellow, your legal training has made you too suspicious. The poor old beggar may have an idea of prospecting that very shaft himself."

"He probably has," replied Treloar quietly. "Only don't forget that he doesn't like underground work."

However my companion had his own way, which, except in such matters as that of the snake-test, he generally did; and next morning saw us fixing our windlass at the summit of the big heap of mulloch which towered above its fellows.

We seldom got anything in such claims. They had mostly been worked by rich companies, and every ounce of wash-dirt removed.

It was pretty late by the time we had removed sufficient of the débris from the bottom of the shaft—too late to do more that night. As we walked over to our camp, we caught a glimpse of Brummy following us.

"He's been watching," said Treloar.

"Nonsense!" I replied impatiently. "You're becoming a monomaniac."

That evening our neighbour came over to our fire; and in consequence *Kálee*, in low threatening communion with herself, had to be put upon the chain.

"Goin' to try the big un?" he asked presently.

"Yes," said Harry; "there may be something there. One can never tell."

"Not much danger!" he blurted out. "The coves as worked Number One North Rainbow weren't the chaps to leave much behind 'em. Leastways"—he quickly added, seeing his mistake, "so I've heerd say."

Treloar gave me a look which meant "How now?" but neither of us took further notice.

"I've heard tell, too," he continued, "as that claim's häänted."

"Oh!" said Treloar airily, and as if in constant association with

them, "we don't mind ghosts. It's the living, not the dead, that force us betimes to keep a sharp look-out."

"Well, mates," retorted Brummy, rather sulkily, "I ain't quite cunnin' enuff yet to chew tacks, but I ain't not altogether a born hidjiot; an' if anybody was to offer me a thousan' poun' to go down that 'ere shaft, where you got your win'less rigged, an' up them drives, I wouldn't do it."

"I was down it today," I remarked, "and didn't notice anything out of the common."

"Mebbe not, mebbe not—yet," said he. "But the yarns I've listened to—on the Lachlan, over yander—consarnin' that 'ere Rainbow claim 'd make your 'air stick up stiff."

During the night, feeling restless and unable to sleep, I got up and went outside. The weather was very hot, and, for some time, I sat and listened to the faint wash of the sea, longing for a plunge in its cool depths. Suddenly in the great expanse of gloom, my eyes caught the glimmer of a light. As nearly as I could guess, it was moving slowly towards the shaft we were to descend in the morning.

"There goes your aged friend," said a voice at my shoulder, which made me start with the unexpectedness of it.

"Too hot and close to sleep," explained Treloar. "Come out for a breath of air."

"Let's shepherd the old chap, and see what his little game is. Bring the lantern. Needn't show a light. We know the way well enough. I expect he's after ghosts."

As, breathless, we arrived at our windlass, Treloar gave a grunt of disappointment on seeing that everything was exactly as we had left it—rope coiled neatly round the barrel, green-hide bucket hanging over the mouth.

"It must have been a Jack-o'-lantern," said he; "or perhaps the old sinner's gone down some other shaft. Yes, by Jingo! look there!" he exclaimed, pointing to where, a couple of hundred yards distant, a flash of light was visible for a moment. "He's gone down the Snake Shaft! Those ladders are as rotten as pears; and he'll break his wicked old neck if he isn't careful. I wish him joy of all he'll find there, even if he gets to the bottom safely. What came we out for to see? Let's make back."

It was my turn down next morning, and when I got to the end of the hundred and odd feet of the häanted shaft, I lit my candle, and, at random, entered one of the four roomy drives that had been put in so many long years ago.

So extensively had it been quarried, that I was only obliged to

stoop slightly. Not a trace of earthen pillar here. A valuable property this, and a clean-swept one. Travelling warily along, I suddenly stumbled over a ridge of mullock, into what was evidently another drive altogether.

My course, so far, had been downwards. The new tunnel sloped slightly upwards.

Evidently both claims had been driving for a "gutter". One of them had got to the end of its tether before reaching it. The surface limits of "golden holes" are pretty strictly defined; but roguery, as well as miscalculation, has been known to produce curious effects in adjoining claims. Not that, just then, I bothered myself with any such speculation. I was on the look-out for a lump of that rich water-worn conglomerate which had made Yamnibar, in the days of its youth, the talk of the world. Sitting down to rest a minute, the candlelight fell brightly on the shining steel of a pick.

I had noticed how freshly the earth smelled and wondered thereat. The pick was fresh too. One could swear that it had not left its owner's grip five minutes. Without a doubt it had been used to remove the thin curtain of earth between the rival drives.

Looking more closely, fresh knee and footprints were plentiful.

What the deuce did it mean?

Crawling along the new drive, which was much smaller than the Rainbow's, I at length emerged into a shaft that struck me as familiar.

The "Snake", or I was a Dutchman!

I knew it by the ladders, for one thing; for another, by a piece of timber at the entrance to the opposite drive—the one in which we had made our three-ounce rise.

I tried the rungs of the rude ladders. Not half so rotten as we had taken them to be. Also covered with fresh earth left by recent boots.

Only fifty feet to the top, and up I went safely enough. Treloar was sitting smoking, with his back towards me as I approached.

I startled him finely when I spoke.

"This is the hole the old man wants," he remarked, after hearing my story. "He knew he couldn't very well get down our rope and climb up it again. But he knew that one of the 'Snake' drives ran nearly into one of these. I suspect he must once have been employed in one or other of the claims. Either that, or he's been fossicking here before. You know we've come across plenty of traces of such. Cunning old dodger! But what *can* he be after? I'll tell you what. We'll both go down and try another of the drives. We'll leave Kálee on top to watch. I'll bet you she'll sing out pretty soon."

I said nothing, for I was beginning to have doubts respecting Brummy's veracity.

This time I lowered Treloar first. Then, whilst he held the rope taut I slipped comfortably down.

We chose the opposite drive to the one I had explored, and moved in, Treloar leading.

"Hello!" said he presently, "someone's been here before us. See there's been a good-sized pillar taken out. Why, here's some of the dirt left yet! And—good God!" he suddenly exclaimed, "what's this?"

Pushing up alongside him, and holding my candle forward, I saw, lying at full length, a human skeleton. And yet it was not a complete skeleton. Here and there, rags and tatters of flesh, dry and hard as leather, stuck to the frame. A pair of heavy boots, with the ankle bones protruding, lay detached, and remnants of clothing were still visible. But the head was what fixed our gaze, the first horror of the thing over. The forepart of the skull had been smashed completely in. Nearby lay a small driving-pick, thickly encrusted as with rust.

"Neither rats, nor mice, nor snakes did that," whispered Treloar, pointing to the awful fracture.

"Surely," I replied, with a shiver, "this can't be the thing old Brummy's searching for. No wonder he insisted on the place being haunted."

"Not that poor valueless shell," answered my friend, who was now kneeling, "but this! and this! and this!" holding up, as he spoke, three fine nuggets, whose dull gleam had caught his eye in a heap of loose drift on which the skeleton partially lay.

"Never!" I exclaimed. "He never would have had the pluck to face back again if *that* is some of his work."

"If it is," said Treloar, quickly springing to his feet, thereby bumping the roof with his head, "we shall soon hear of it. Back man! Back for your life! Hark! By G—d! there's *Kálee* now. Good dog, hold him!" as if it were possible for her to hear at that depth.

Pushing and scrambling along, we got to the entrance of the drive, where the muffled sounds resolved themselves into a furious hullabaloo of barks and curses. Then, as we paused for a moment, swish, swish, down came the windlass rope, falling all of a heap. Just as we were on the point of pushing out, what feeble light there was at the bottom changed into total darkness, and with a terrific smash, a heavy mass fell at our feet. Then silence broken only by low groans and hoarse fierce growls.

With trembling hands we relit our candles, and saw more distinctly.

Upon the rope coils lay Brummy, quite still. Squatted on his breast, the great hound watched him narrowly—so narrowly that her lolling red tongue nearly touched the face of the prostrate man. Blood oozed slowly from his mouth and ears.

With reluctance the dog obeyed her master's call, and, apparently uninjured, crouched in a corner, panting loudly, while we examined Brummy.

"*Habet!*" said Treloar, as we turned him over. "Back's broken! See here," (producing a loaded revolver from a hip-pocket), "the old man meant business. It's only guessing, mind. But he probably thought we should attempt to escape up the Snake Shaft, and would have shot us off the ladders like magpies. Well done, Goddess *Kálee*. You've proved yourself worthy of your name for once, anyhow."

With a good deal of trouble we got the rope through the drive into the Snake Shaft and on to our windlass again. It had been cut clean off with a tomahawk. We hove the man and the dog up. We let the other thing alone for a while. But the one we had thought dead was still alive, with a little life. As the cool air blew on his face he opened his eyes. It was all he could do. Black beady eyes, once sharp and piercing, now fast dulling with the death film. And he lay there and watched me, staring fixedly. It was a bright sunshiny day, the birds were singing cheerily about us, and the wash of the sea was very faint. From the expression on his face I thought he was listening to it. Presently Treloar returned from the camp with some brandy, and poured a spoonful between the clenched teeth. The spirit revived him a little, and he spoke. He said—

"Curse you!"

More brandy, and he spoke again.

"Is he there yet?"

"He's there yet," answered Treloar. "How long ago was it?"

"Ten year."

"What did you kill him for?"

More brandy; and then as his eyes brightened, he laughed, actually laughed up at us, saying, in a strong voice—

"Why you fool, for the big lump, o' coorse! A 'undred an' eighty ounces! Too big to share, I reckon. I'd a-smashed a dozen men for it in them days, let alone a poor softy like Jim."

"There must be thirty or forty ounces down there," I remarked.

"Why didn't you take that too?"

"Never you mind," he said. "I come back for it now. And if it hadn't been for that there infernal dorg, I'd ha' had it."

"And how about us?" asked Treloar, as, obeying the look in his eyes, he gave him another drink.

The dying man smiled significantly, but said nothing. There was a long pause, during which Brummy shut his eyes, and breathed stertorously, while *Kálee*, drawing herself noiselessly along on her belly, came closer, and looked into his face, but with no anger in her gaze now.

"There's one thing I can't understand," said Treloar, in a low voice, "and that is how he continued to get up this shaft again with the gold."

Quietly as he spoke, Brummy heard him and muttered—

"Would yer like to know?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Treloar earnestly. "We have wasted far too much precious time already in vain talk. Can we do anything to make your mind easier? You know you can't last much longer. In God's name try and prepare yourself to meet Him."

Very slowly came the reply, in short gasps—

"I'm easy enough. If I could choke the pair o' ye by winkin' I'd do it. I'm gittin' cold a'ready. But I'm cursin' ye to mysen all the time. If I kin git back I'll häant ye."

Another long silence, and then he murmured—

"Take that dorg away, Jim, or I'll put the pick into yer! There, you got it now, ole man! Ah, would yer?"

Then the flickering light in the eyes failed altogether, and, I take it, a very defiant, murderous old soul went forth to meet its Maker.

Kálee, smelling at the body, sat upon her haunches and wailed loudly and dismally after the manner of her kind, answered from the flat by Eclipse, marvelling at the disturbance of his friend, with sonorous bellowsings.

This was the requiem of him as he passed to join the other shades of Yamnibar. Slain by a dog and the cunning of his own hand.

[From *Steve Brown's Bunyip and Other Stories*, 1893.]

THE LAST OF SIX

By ERNEST FAVENC

PERHAPS no more desolate, depressing scenery can be found anywhere in the world than on the mangrove-flats of Northern Queensland. As you row slowly up some saltwater creek, nothing is visible on either side but low banks of oozy mud, awash at high tide, covered with writhing and distorted trees. Now and then a branch creek breaks the monotony of the scrub, for the shore is here a perfect labyrinth and network of watercourses, whilst the only living denizens visible are armies of hideous crabs, and an occasional evil-looking alligator, which glides noiselessly off the mud into deep water as your boat approaches.

By day it is dismal enough; by night it is worse. The venomous mosquitoes buzz about you in myriads, strange cries resound through the twisted roots of the trees left bare by the receding tide; and, as the night wears on, a white mist, cold and dank, breathes deadly clamminess over all.

It was just sunrise in this delectable region. The rays had even gilded the sombre upper branches of the mangroves with a sparkle of golden colour, although as yet the sullen mist was still rising in white wreaths from the bosom of the sluggish tide. Anchored in mid-stream was a small boat, apparently without occupants, but presently the sail that in a tumbled heap had been lying on the bottom, was disturbed, and a sleepy man emerged from beneath its shelter; as he stood up, another threw the sail back and got up too. They were both towzled, dirty and looking about as cross-grained as men might be expected to do who had passed the night cramped up in the bottom of a boat, with millions of mosquitoes thirsting for their blood—and getting it.

“No wind!” said the first; “pull again, I suppose, until ten o’clock!” And he stepped forward and commenced to haul up the heavy stone that served as anchor.

“I suppose so;” returned the other, “tide against us too; but I

think it's just on the turn"—and he settled himself down on the after-thwart and prepared to put out an oar.

"My God! he's coming back!" cried the first and elder man, dropping into the bottom of the boat the stone he had just hauled up. The other sprang up and gazed stupidly at the object indicated, that, carried down by the still-receding tide, passed slowly within an oar's length of the boat.

It was the dead body of a man; the shoulders and the back of the head alone visible, but the horror of it was unmistakable—it needed no second glance to tell its character.

"Pull," suddenly cried the younger, dropping on his seat, his voice rising to a shriek; "he's coming aboard!" Released from her anchorage, the boat had started to voyage downstream in company with the dead man. A few desperate strokes took them away from the corpse and then they rested on their oars and gazed at each other with the sweat of fear upon their faces.

"The very alligators won't touch him!" murmured the younger man at last; "let's get out of this. I'm not fit for anything after yesterday."

They pulled a few strokes in silence, then the elder spoke. "Let's get back to camp before we do anything. I'm like you, done up altogether. We'll turn down this creek and then we shan't have to pass him again." And he indicated the direction of the corpse.

The boat was headed down a branch creek, and now went with the tide aided by a few lazy strokes from the men, who silently kept on their course. In about an hour's time the creek widened and the sound of the surf was audible; then suddenly they shot out from the gloomy, reeking mangrove swamp into sight of the ocean, and a fresh sea breeze came with a puff in their faces, as if to welcome their return.

"We're close to the camp," said the elder man, as they rested on their oars; "we might have got here last night instead of catching fever and ague in that accursed place."

"There's so many of these creeks," returned the other; "we could not have made sure in the dark. However, let's land and go across the spit."

Pulling the boat well up the sand and making her fast with a long painter to a straggling mangrove-tree, they stepped ashore; then, having taken the sail out and spread it to dry on the sand they shouldered their oars and ascended the low spit. Before them, within a short half-mile, lay a semi-circular bay protected by a sandbank, on which the long surf rollers were breaking white. Within shelter of the bank lay a small lugger, and on the beach,

above high water-mark, were rough sheds and frame erections indicating that it was a *bêche-de-mer* station.

As the two men approached the camp, a woman came out to meet them; a few aborigines and a kanaka or two were also visible. The woman who advanced was dark in complexion, with wild black eyes and hair. She was rudely dressed and barefooted; there was an air of semi-madness about her that was startling, yet fascinating—such awful horror shone in her eyes.

"Well," she said in fairly good English, "you found them?"

"One of them," said the elder man, "and when we've had a feed we'll go and look for the other."

"One of them!" cried the woman; "which?—which?"

"The one you call Alphonse—the big one."

"Oh!" shrieked the woman, "where is he? Why is he not here?"

"Why! he's in that creek out there, and there he can stop for me; after what you told us he's not fit to be buried."

"Dead!" she returned in an awestruck whisper. "But no! the devil cannot die."

"Devil or not, he's dead; dead enough, and nearly turned our stomachs this morning, for his ugly carcase came drifting right on top of us after we thought he went out to sea yesterday."

"Now, missus," said the other, "suppose you let us get something to eat, for it was nigh this time yesterday when we started."

"You have brought good news," said the woman, "the devil is dead, I will wait on you"—and she hastened to the rude cooking-place and soon returned with food and tea.

The meal finished, the two men lit their pipes, the woman watching them anxiously.

"You will go again?" she said at last timidly. One man looked at the other, and then the elder spoke—

"Well, we'll have another hunt; but I warn you, there's little hope."

"No matter," she said, "but let me go with you."

"I suppose it's not much odds," returned the man. "Come, Jim, the tide's turning now." They shouldered the oars and, followed by the woman, walked back to the boat. The tide was about the same height as when they landed, only now it was flowing. Stepping in they pushed off, and were soon once more amongst the mangroves.

The two trepang-fishers had picked up a leaky boat with a starving crew, a strange crew—two men and a woman—escapees from New Caledonia, whom they brought to the station and fed. The fishers had no intention of handing them over to justice—or,

let us say, to the law; the affair was no business of theirs; but if they took them in to Cooktown the capture of their guests would be certain. Then the refugees organized a plan. The two men would take their boat and pull up one of the salt-water creeks to the open country; here they would sink the boat, and make their way, as best they could, through the bush till they happened upon some of the outlying stations. The woman, who spoke good English, could go with the fishermen to Cooktown and take her chance; it was impossible she could stand the hardship of a bush tramp. To this plan the woman vehemently objected, and begged the man she called her husband not to go. Apparently he consented; but during the night the two men slipped away, and in the morning the woman found herself deserted. Then followed a scene of wild lamentation, during which the horrified Englishmen learned some of the ghastly details of the voyage from New Caledonia—horrors that made them shudder and vow that if one of the men ever turned up he should be delivered over to justice. With frantic passion the woman appealed to them to go after the two fugitives and persuade her husband to return; for, she said, the other man had an old and bitter grudge against him, and had only lured him away to his death. Overcome by her entreaties, the two men started and found the body of one man floating in the mangrove creek; of the other they could see nothing, and, returning, were benighted.

Arrived at the spot where the two creeks joined, the boat, with the woman in the stern, was headed up stream with the tide, and they pulled quietly between the dreary groves of trees.

"Have you been up there?" she said suddenly, pointing to an opening on the right.

"No," said one of them, and they turned up the branch.

"There it is!" she exclaimed quickly. "I knew it, I felt it."

Sure enough there was the Frenchman's boat just ahead of them, ashore on a small open space, a chance patch of clear ground. They pulled up to her; but the dead body of the second man was visible before they got there. The woman was quite calm, and stood by while her companions examined the corpse. The man had been stabbed in the side and had bled to death; a hideous stain was in the old boat.

"How did Pierre kill him?" she muttered to herself in French.

"Ah, I know; he was stabbed from behind, then he turned and knocked the devil overboard. Then he fell and died."

"You will take him back and bury him," she said, in a sad, almost sweet voice. "See, it will be no trouble; just tow the boat;" and she

indicated her meaning with a wave of the hand. Then she took her seat in the boat with her dead, the men having thrown the sail over the body, and so they started back.

Arrived at the junction she spoke again. "You will wait, will you not? He will come back, perhaps—I must see myself that the devil is dead."

The men looked at each other, and then, with a few strokes of their oars kept the boat motionless in the tideway.

"He comes!" said the awfully quiet voice of the woman, and with indescribable horror the men saw the now bloated corpse come up the stream once more.

As if influenced by some terrible attraction in the glaring eyes of the woman, the ghastly thing approached the side of the boat where she sat. She rose to her feet, in her hand one of the oars.

"Dog! Devil!" she cried, dashing it into the face of the corpse. "O you, who ate my child before my eyes. You! who lived on man's flesh to save your life—you who have assassinated my husband! Wolf! what are you now? Dead, dead! And you who ate others shall be eaten by the foul things of this place!" At every epithet she spurned the corpse with the oar until with a hideous, life-like action it slowly turned over and disappeared.

The spellbound men, who had not understood a word of what she said, for she spoke in French, now started into action, and called to her to sit down. She obeyed; and, hastening to leave the scene, the two men, their hearts in their throats, were soon back at the mouth of the creek.

They buried the murdered man, and next morning the lugger hoisted sail for Cooktown, having on board the woman, the last survivor of the party of six who had escaped from New Caledonia.

[From *The Last of Six: Tales of the Austral Tropics*, 1893.]



NINIA

By LOUIS BECKE

I

AWAY out upon the wide Northern Pacific there is a group of three little islands. They are so very, very small that you need not seek to discover them on a map of the Pacific Ocean; but if any of you have a chart of the North or West Pacific, then you would easily be able to find them. Run your eye up north, away past the Equator, in the direction of China, and you will see, to the north of New Guinea, a large cluster of islands named the "Caroline Islands", some of which are named, but most are not—only tiny dots no bigger than a pin's head serve to mark their position. Perhaps however—if you get a German chart—you may see one of the largest of the small dots marked "Pingelap", and Pingelap is the name of the largest of the three little islands of my story; the others are called Tugulu and Takai.

Now, although Pingelap and Tugulu and Takai are so close

together that at low tide one may walk across the coral reef that encircles the whole group from one island to another, yet are they lonely spots, for there is no other island nearer than Mokil, which is ninety miles away.

But yet, although the three islands are so small, a great number of natives live upon them—between four and five hundred. There is only one village, which is on Pingelap, and here all the people lived. The island itself is not more than two miles in length, and in no place is it more than a quarter of a mile in width; and Tugulu and Takai are still smaller. And from one end to the other the islands are covered with a dense verdure of coconut palms, with scarcely any other tree amongst them, so that when seen from a ship two or three miles away, they look exactly like a belt of emerald surrounding a lake of silver, for in their centre is a beautiful lagoon surrounded on three sides by the land, and on the west protected from the sweeping ocean rollers by a double line of coral reef stretching from little Takai to the south end of Pingelap.

There are hundreds of beautiful islands in the Pacific, but not any one of them can excel in beauty lonely little Pingelap. There are two reefs—an outer and an inner. Against the outer or ocean reef huge seas for ever dash unceasingly on the windward side of the island, and sometimes, in bad weather, will sweep right over the coral and pour through the shallow channel between Tugulu and Pingelap; and then the calm, placid waters of the lagoon will be fretted and disturbed until fine weather comes again. But bad weather is a rare event in those seas, and usually the lagoon of Pingelap is as smooth as a sheet of glass. And all day long you may see children paddling about in canoes, crossing from one shining beach to another, and singing as they paddle, for they are a merry-hearted race, the people of these three islands, and love to sing and dance, and sit out in front of their houses on moonlight nights and listen to tales told by the old men of the days when their islands were reddened with blood. For until fifteen years before, the people of Pingelap and Tugulu were at bitter enmity, and fought with and slaughtered each other to their heart's delight. And perhaps there would have soon been none left to tell the tale, but that one day an American whaleship called the *Cohasset* touched there to buy turtle from Sralik, the chief of Pingelap, and Sralik besought the captain to give him muskets and powder and ball to fight the Tugulans with.

So the captain gave him five muskets and plenty of powder and bullets, and then said—

"See, Sralik; I will give you a white man too, to show you how to shoot your enemies."

And then he laughed, and calling out to a man named Harry, he told him to clear out of the ship and go and live ashore and be a king, as he was not worth his salt as a boatsteerer.

And so this Harry Devine, who was a drunken, good-for-nothing, quarrelsome young American, came ashore with Sralik, and next day he loaded the five muskets and, with Sralik, led the Pingelap people over to Tugulu. There was a great fight, and as fast as Sralik loaded a musket, Harry fired it and killed a man. At last, when nearly thirty had been shot, the Tugulu people called for quarter.

"Get you together on Takai," called out Sralik, "and then will we talk of peace."

Now Takai is such a tiny spot, that Sralik knew he would have them at his mercy, for not one of them had a musket.

As soon as the last of the Tugulu people had crossed the shallow channel that divides Tugulu from Takai, the cunning Sralik with his warriors lined the beach and then called to the Tugulans—

"This land is too small for so many."

And then Harry, once the boatsteerer and now the beachcomber, fired his muskets into the thick, surging mass of humanity on the little islet, and every shot told. Many of them, throwing aside their spears and clubs, sprang into the water and tried to swim over to Pingelap across the lagoon. But Sralik's men pursued them in canoes and clubbed and speared them as they swam; and some that escaped death by club or spear, were rent in pieces by the sharks which, as soon as they smelt the blood of the dead and dying men that sank in the quiet waters of the lagoon, swarmed in through a passage in the western reef. By and by the last of those who took to the water were killed, and only some eighty or ninety men and many more women and children were left on Takai, and the five muskets became so hot and foul that Harry could murder no longer, and his arm was tired out with slaughter.

All that night Sralik's warriors watched to see that none escaped, and at dawn the hideous massacre began again, and club, spear, and musket did their fell work till only the women and children were left. These were spared. Among them was Ninia, the wife of Sikra, the chief of Tugulu. And because she was young and fairer than any of the others, the white man asked her of Sralik for his wife. Sralik laughed.

"Take her, O clever white man—her and as many more as thou carest for slaves. Only thou and I shall rule here now in this my island."

So Harry took her and married her according to native custom, and Ninia was his one wife for nearly fifteen years, when one day he was quietly murdered as he lay asleep in his house with his wife and two children; and although Sralik wept loudly and cut his great chest with a shark's teeth dagger, and offered sacrifices of turtle flesh to the white man's *jelin* (spirit), Ninia his wife and many other people knew that it was by Sralik's orders that Harry had been killed, for they had quarrelled over the possession of a whaleboat which Harry had bought from a passing ship, and which he refused either to sell or give to Sralik.

However, Sralik was not unkind to Ninia, and gave her much of her dead husband's property, and told her that he would give her for an inheritance for her two daughters the little islet—Takai.

And there in the year 1870 Ninia the widow, and Ninia her eldest daughter (for on Pingelap names of the first-born are hereditary) and Tarita, the youngest, went to live. With them went another girl, a grand-daughter of the savage old Sralik. Her name was Ruvani. She was about eleven years of age, and as pretty as a gazelle, and because of her great friendship for Ninia—who was two years older than she—she had wept when she saw the mother and daughters set out for Takai.

Fierce-hearted Sralik coming to the doorway of his thatched hut heard the sound of weeping, and looking out, he saw Ruvani sitting under the shade of some banana trees with her face hidden in her pretty brown hands.

When he learned the cause of her grief his heart softened, and drawing his little grand-daughter to him, patted her head, and said—

“Nay, weep not, little bird. Thou too shalt go to Takai; and see, because of thee my heart shall open wide to Ninia and her daughters, and I will give her four slaves—two men and two women—who shall toil for you all. And when thou art tired of living at Takai, then thou and thy two playmates shall come over here to me and fill my house with the light of thine eyes.”

So that is how Ninia, the widow of the wandering white man, and her two daughters and their friend came to live at the little islet called Takai.

II

The months went by and Ruvani, the chief's grand-daughter, still lived with her friends, for she was too happy to leave them. Sometimes, though, on bright moonlight nights, the three girls would paddle across to the big village and gather with the rest of

the village girls in front of the chief's house, and dance and sing and play a game called *n'jiajia*; and then, perhaps, instead of going home across the lagoon in their canoe, they would walk around on the inner beaches of Pingelap and Tugulu. And long ere they came to the house they could see the faint glimmer of the fire within, beside which Ninia the widow slept awaiting their return.

Stealing softly in, the girls would lie down together on a soft white mat embroidered with parrots' feathers that formed their bed, and pulling another and larger one over them for a coverlet, they would fall asleep, undisturbed by the loud, hoarse notes of a flock of *katafa* (frigate-birds) that every night settled on the boughs of a great *koa* tree whose branches overhung the house. Sometimes when the trade-winds had dropped, and the great ocean rollers would beat heavily upon the far-off shelves of the outer reef, the little island would seem to shake and quiver to its very foundations, and now and then a huge wave would curl slowly over and break with a noise like a thunder-peal, the frigate-birds would wake from their sleep and utter a solemn answering squawk, and the three girls nestling closer together would whisper—

“’Tis Nanawit, the Cave-god, making another cave.”

Ere the red sun shot out from the ocean the eight dwellers on Takai would rise from their mats; and whilst Ninia the widow would kindle a fire of broken coconut shells, the two men slaves would go out and bring back young coconuts and taro from the plantation on Tugulu, and their wives would take off their gaily-coloured grass-girdles and tie coarse *nairiris* of coconut fibre around them instead, and with the three girls go out to the deep pools on the reef and catch fish. Sometimes they would surprise a turtle in one of the pools, and, diving in after the frightened creature, would capture and bring it home in triumph to Ninia the widow.

Such was the daily life of those who dwelt on Takai.

One day, ere the dews of night had vanished from the lofty plumes of the coconut palms, there came to them a loud cry, borne across the waters of the silent lagoon, over from the village—

“A ship! A ship!”

Now not many ships came to Pingelap—perhaps now and then some wandering sperm-whaler, cruising lazily along toward the distant Pelew Islands, would heave-to and send a boat ashore to trade for turtle and young drinking coconuts. But it was long since any whaleship had called, and Ninia the widow, as she looked out seawards for the ship, said to the girls—

“’Tis not yet the season for the whaleship; four moons more

and we may see one. I know not what other ships would come here.”

By and by they saw the ship. She sailed slowly round the south point of Pingelap and backed her foreyard, and presently a boat was lowered and pulled ashore.

Little Tarita, clapping her hands with joy, darted into the house, followed by Ruvani and Ninia, and casting off their wet girdles of banana fibre—for they had just come in from fishing—they dressed themselves in their pretty *nairiris* of coloured grasses, and put on head-dresses of green and gold parrots' feathers, with necklaces of sweet-smelling berries around their necks, and were soon paddling across the lagoon to see the white strangers from the ship, who had already landed and gone up the beach and into the village.

It is nearly a mile from Takai to the village, and before the girls reached there they heard a great clamour of angry voices, and presently two white men dressed in white and carrying books in their hands came hurriedly down the beach, followed by a crowd of Sralik's warriors, who urged them along and forced them into the boat.

Then seizing the boat they shot her out into the water, and shaking their spears and clubs, called out—

“Go, white men, go!”

But although the native sailors who pulled the boat were trembling with fear, the two white men did not seem frightened, and one of them, standing up in the stern of the boat, held up his hand and called out to the angry and excited people—

“Let me speak, I pray you!”

The natives understood him, for he spoke to them in the language spoken by the natives of Strong's Island, which is only a few hundred miles from Pingelap.

The people parted to the right and left as Sralik, the chief, with a loaded musket grasped in his brawny right hand, strode down to the water's edge. Suppressed wrath shone in his eyes as he ground his musket on the sand and looked at the white man.

“Speak,” he said, “and then be gone.”

The white man spoke.

“Nay, spare us thy anger, O chief. I come not here to fill thy heart with anger, but with peace; and to tell thee of the great God, and of His Son Christ, who hath sent me to thee.”

Sralik laughed scornfully.

“Thou liest. Long ago did I know that some day a white-painted ship would come to Pingelap, and that white men would come and

peak to us of this new God and His Son who is called Christ, and would say that this Christ had sent them, and then would the hearts of my people to be stolen from Nanawit the Cave-god, and Tuarangi the god of the Skies, and I, Sralik the king, would become but as a slave, for this new God of theirs would steal the hearts of my people from me as well."

The white man said sorrowfully—

"Nay, that is not so. Who hath told thee this?"

"A better white man than thou—he who slew my enemies and was named Haré (Harry). Long ago did he warn me of thy coming and bid me beware of thee with thy lies about thy new God and His Son Christ."

Again the missionary said—

"Let me speak."

But Sralik answered him fiercely—

"Away, I tell thee, to thy white-painted ship, and trouble me no more;" and he slapped the stock of his musket, and his white teeth gleamed savagely through his bearded face.

So the two missionaries went back, and the *Morning Star* filled away again and sailed slowly away to the westward.

That night as the three girls lay on the mats beside the dying embers of the fire, they talked of the strange white men whom Sralik had driven away.

Ninia the widow listened to them from her corner of the house, and then she said musingly—

"I, too, have heard of this God Christ; for when Haré, thy father, lay in my arms with the blood pouring from his wound and death looked out from his eyes, he called upon His name."

Young Ninia and her sister drew closer and listened. Never until now had they heard their mother speak of their white father's death. They only knew that some unknown enemy had thrust a knife into his side as he lay asleep, and Ninia the widow had, with terror in her eyes, forbidden them to talk of it even amongst themselves. Only she herself knew that Sralik had caused his death. But tonight she talked.

"Tell us more, my mother," said girl Ninia, going over to her, and putting her cheek against her mother's troubled face, and caressing her in the darkness.

"Aye, I can tell thee now, my children, for Sralik's anger is dead now. . . . It was at the dawn, just when the first note of the blue pigeon is heard, that I heard a step in the house—'twas the death-men of Sralik—and then a loud cry, and Haré, thy father, awoke

to die. The knife had bitten deep and he took my hands in his and groaned.

"'Farewell,' he said, 'O mother of my children, I die!' Then he cried, 'And Thou, O Christ, look down on and forgive me; Christ the Son of God.'

"With my hand pressed to his side, I said: 'Who is it that thou callest upon, my husband? Is it the white man's God?'

"'Aye,' he said, 'this Christ is He whom I have so long denied. He is the Son of the God whose anger I fear to meet now that my soul goes out into darkness.'

"'Fear not,' I said, weeping, 'I, Ninia, will make offerings to this white God and His Son Christ, so that their anger may be softened against thy spirit when it wanders in ghost-land.'

"So he groaned and was dead. And for six or more moons did I put offerings to the white God upon thy father's grave as I had promised. No offerings made I to our own gods, for he despised them even as he despised his own. But yet do I think his *jelin* is at rest in ghost-land; else had it come to me in the night and touched me on the forehead as I slept."

III

A month had gone by since the day that Sralik had driven away the "Christ ship", as the people called the *Morning Star*, and then word came over from Sralik to Ruvani, his grand-daughter, to come over and take her part in a night-dance and feast to the rain-god, for the year had been a good one and the coconut trees were loaded with nuts. For this was the dancing and feasting.

All that day the eight people of Takai were busied in making ready their gifts of food for the feast which was to take place in two days' time. In the afternoon, when the sun had lost its strength, the three girls launched their canoe and set out for a place on the northern point of Pingelap, where grew in great profusion the sweet-smelling *nudu* flower. These would they get to make garlands and necklets to wear at the great dance, in which they were all to take part.

In an hour or two they had gathered all the *nudu* flowers they desired, and then little Tarita, looking up, saw that the sky was overcast and blackening, and presently some heavy drops of rain fell.

"Haste, haste," she cried to the others, "let us away ere the strong wind which is behind the black clouds overtakes us on the lagoon."

Night comes on quickly in the South Seas, and by the time they had seated themselves in the canoe it was dark. In a little while a

sharp rain-squall swept down from the northward, and they heard the wind rattling and crashing through the branches of the palms on Tugulu.

Ninia, who was steering, boldly headed the canoe across the lagoon for Takai, and laughed when Ruvani and Tarita, who were wet and shivering with the cold rain, urged that they should put in at the beach on Tugulu and walk home.

"Paddle, paddle strongly," she cried. "What mattereth a little rain and wind? And sing, so that our mother will hear us and make ready something to eat. Look, I can already see the blaze of her fire."

Striking their paddles into the water in unison, they commenced to sing, but suddenly their voices died away in terror as a strange, droning hum was borne down to them from the black line of Tugulu shore; and then the droning deepened into a hoarse roaring noise as the wild storm of wind and fierce, stinging rain tore through the groves of coconuts and stripped them of leaves and branches.

Brave Ninia, leaning her lithe figure well over the side of the canoe, plunged her paddle deep down and tried to bring the canoe head to wind to meet the danger, and Ruvani, in the bow, with long hair flying straight out behind her, answered her effort with a cry of encouragement and put forth all her strength to aid.

But almost ere the cry had left her lips, the full fury of the squall had struck them; the canoe was caught in its savage breath, twirled round and round, and then filled.

"Keep thou in the canoe, little one, and bale," cried Ninia to Tarita, as she and Ruvani leapt into the water.

For some minutes the two girls clung with one hand each to the gunwale, and Tarita, holding the large wooden *ahu*, or baler, in both hands, dashed the water out. Then she gave a trembling cry—the baler struck against the side of the canoe and dropped overboard.

Ninia dared not leave the canoe to seek for it in the intense darkness, and so clinging to the little craft, which soon filled again, they drifted about. The waters of the lagoon were now white with the breaking seas, and the wind blew with fierce, cruel steadiness, and although they knew it not, they were being swept quickly away from the land towards the passage in the reef.

The rain had ceased now, and the water being warm none of them felt cold, but the noise of the wind and sea was so great that they had to shout loudly to each other to make their voices heard.

Presently Ruvani called out to Ninia—

"Let us take Tarita between us and swim to the shore, ere the sharks come to us."

"Nay, we are safer here, Ruvani. And how could we tell my mother that the canoe is lost? Let us wait a little and then the wind will die away."

Canoes are valuable property on Pingelap, where suitable wood for building them is scarce, and this was in Ninia's mind.

They still kept hold of their paddles, and although afraid of the sharks, waited patiently for the storm to cease, little thinking that at that moment the ebbing tide and wind together had swept them into the passage, and that they were quickly drifting away from their island home.

All that night Ninia the widow and her four slaves sought along the beach of Tugulu for the three girls, who they felt sure had landed there. And when the day broke at last, and they saw that the gale had not ceased and that the canoe had vanished, they ran all the way over to the village, and Ninia threw herself at Sralik's feet.

"Thy grand-daughter and my children have perished, O chief."

The chief came to the door of his house and looked out upon the wild turmoil of waters.

"It is the will of the gods," he said, "else had not my whaleboat been crushed in the night;" and he pointed to the ruins of the boatshed upon which a huge coconut tree had fallen and smashed the boat.

Then he went back into his house and covered his face, for Ruvani was dear to his savage old heart.

And Ninia went back to her lonely house and wept and mourned for her lost ones as only mothers weep and mourn, be they of white skins or brown.

Away out into the ocean the canoe was swept along, and Ruvani and Ninia still clung to her, one at the head and one at the stern. Once there came a brief lull, and then they succeeded in partly freeing her from water, and Tarita using her two hands like a scoop meanwhile, the canoe at last became light enough for them to get in.

They were only just in time, for even then the wind freshened, and Ninia and Ruvani let the canoe run before it, for they were too exhausted to keep her head to the wind.

When daylight broke Ninia, with fear in her heart, stood up in the canoe and looked all round her.

There was no land in sight! Poor children! Even then they could not have been more than twenty miles away from the island, for Pingelap is very low and not visible even from a ship's deck at more than twelve or fifteen miles.

But she was a brave girl, although only fourteen, and when Tarita and Ruvani wept she encouraged them.

"Sralik will come to seek us in the boat," she said, although she could have wept with them.

The wind still carried them along to the westward, and Ninia knew that every hour was taking them farther and farther away from Pingelap; but, although it was not now blowing hard, she knew that it was useless for them to attempt to paddle against it. So, keeping dead before the wind and sea, they drifted slowly along.

At noon the wind died away, and then, tired and worn out, she and Ruvani lay down in the bottom of the canoe and slept, while little Tarita sat up on the cane framework of the outrigger and watched the horizon for Sralik's boat.

Hour after hour passed, and the two girls still slept. Tarita, too, had lain her weary head down and slumbered with them.

Slowly the sun sank beneath a sea of glassy smoothness, unrippled even by the faintest air, and then Ninia awoke, and, sitting up, tossed her cloud of dark hair away from her face, and looked around her upon the darkening ocean. Her lips were dry and parched, and she felt a terrible thirst.

"Tarita," she called, "art sleeping, dear one?"

A sob answered her.

"Nay, for my head is burning, and I want a drink."

The whole story of those days of unutterable agony cannot be told here. There, under a torrid sun, without a drop of water or a morsel of food, the poor creatures drifted about till death mercifully came to two of them.

It was on the evening of the second day that Ninia, taking her little sister in her own fast-weakening arms, pressed her to her bosom, and, looking into her eyes, felt her thirst-racked body quiver and then grow still in the strange peacefulness of death. Then a long wailing cry broke upon the silence of the night.

How long she had sat thus with the child's head upon her bosom and her dead sightless eyes turned upward to the glory of the star-lit heavens she knew not; after that one moaning cry of sorrow that escaped from her anguished heart she had sat there like a figure of stone, dull, dazed, and unconscious almost of the agonies

of thirst. And then Ruvani, with wild, dreadful eyes and bleeding, sun-baked lips, crept towards her, and, laying her face on Ninia's hand, muttered—

“Farewell, O friend of my heart; I die.”

And then, as she lay there with closed eyes and loosened hair falling like a shroud over the form of her dead playmate, she muttered and talked, and then laughed a strange weird laugh that chilled the blood in Ninia's veins. So that night passed, and then, as the fiery sun arose again upon the wide sweep of lonely sea and the solitary drifting canoe with its load of misery, Ruvani, who still muttered and laughed to herself, suddenly rose up; and with the strength of madness, placing her arms around the stiffened form of little Tarita, she sprang over the side and sank with her.

Ninia, stretching her arms out piteously, bowed her head, and lay down to die.

She was aroused from her stupor by the cries of a vast flock of sea birds, and, opening her eyes, she saw that the canoe was surrounded by thousands upon thousands of bonita that leaped and sported and splashed about almost within arm's length of her. They were pursuing a shoal of small fish called *atuli*, and these every now and then darted under the canoe for protection. Sometimes, as the hungry bonita pressed them hard, they would leap out of the water, hundreds together, and then the sea birds would swoop down and seize them ere they fell back into the sea.

Ninia, trembling with excitement and the hope of life, watched eagerly. Presently she heard a curious, rippling noise, and then a rapidly-repeated tapping on the outrigger side of the canoe.

Oh! the joy of it; the water was black with a mass of *atuli*, crowded together on the surface, and frightened and exhausted.

She thrust her hands in among them and threw handful after handful into the canoe, and then her dreadful thirst and hunger made her cease, and, taking fish after fish, she bit into them with her sharp teeth, and assuaged both hunger and thirst.

As she tore ravenously at the *atuli* the sky became overcast, and while the bonita splashed and jumped around her, and the birds cried shrilly overhead, the blessed rain began to fall, at first in heavy drops, and then in a steady downpour.

Taking off her thick grass girdle, she rolled it up into a tight coil and placed it across the bottom of the canoe, about two feet from the bows, so as to form a dam; and then, lying face downward, she drank and drank till satisfied. Then she counted the *atuli*. There were over forty.

All that day the rain squalls continued, and then the wind settled and blew steadily from the east, and Ninia kept the canoe right before it.

That night she slept but little. A wild hope had sprung up in her heart that she might reach the island of Ponape, which she knew was not many days' sail from Pingelap. Indeed, she had once heard her father and Sralik talking about going there in the whale-boat to sell turtle-shell to the white traders there.

But she did not know that the current and trade winds were setting the canoe quickly away from Ponape towards a group of low-lying atolls called Ngatik.

The rain had ceased, and in the warm, starlight night she drifted on to the west, and as she drifted she dreamed of her father, and saw Ninia the widow, her mother, sitting in the desolate house on Takai, before the dying embers of the fire, and heard her voice crying:

"Oh thou white Christ God, to whom my husband called as he died, tell me, are my children perished? I pray Thee because of the white blood that is in them to protect them and let me behold my beloved again."

The girl awoke. Her mother's voice seemed still to murmur in her ears, and a calm feeling of rest entered her soul. She took her paddle, and then stopped and thought.

This new God—the Christ-God of her father—perhaps He would help her to reach the land. She, too, would call upon Him, even as her mother had done.

"See, O Christ-God. I am but one left of three. I pray Thee guide my canoe to land, so that I may yet see Ninia my mother once more."

As the dawn approached she dozed again, and then she heard a sound that made her heart leap—it was the low, monotonous beat of the surf.

When the sun rose she saw before her a long line of low-lying islands, clothed in coconuts, and shining like jewels upon the deep ocean blue.

She ate some more of the fish, and, paddling as strongly as her strength would permit, she passed between the passage, entered the smooth waters of the lagoon, and ran the canoe up on to a white beach.

"The Christ-God has heard me," she said, as she threw her wearied form under the shade of the coconut palms and fell into a heavy, dreamless slumber.

And here next morning the people of Ngatik found her. They took the poor wanderer back with them to their houses that were clustered under the palm-groves a mile or two away, and there for two years she dwelt with them, hoping and waiting to return to Pingelap.

One day a ship came—a whaler cruising back to Strong's Island and the Marshall Group. The captain was told her story by the people of Ngatik, and offered to touch at Pingelap and land her.

Ninia the widow was still living on Takai, and her once beautiful face had grown old and haggard-looking. Since the night of the storm four ships had called at Pingelap, but she had never once gone over to the village, for grief was eating her heart away; and so, when one evening she heard that a ship was in sight, she took no heed.

Her house was very sad and lonely now, and as night came on she lay down in her end of the house and slept, while the other four people sat round the fire and talked and smoked.

In the middle of the night the four slaves got up and went away to the village, for they wanted to be there when the boat from the ship came ashore.

At daylight the ship was close in, and the people in the village saw a boat lowered. Then a cry of astonishment burst from them when they saw the boat pull straight in over the reef and land at Takai, about a hundred yards from the house of Ninia, the white man's widow.

Only one person got out, and then the boat pushed off again and pulled back to the ship.

Ninia the widow had risen, and was rolling up the mat she had slept upon, when a figure darkened the doorway. She turned wonderingly to see who it was that had come over so early from the village, when the stranger, who was a tall, graceful young girl, sprang forward, and, folding her arms around her, said, sobbing with joy—

“My mother. . . . The Christ-God hath brought me back to thee again.”

[From *The Ebbing of the Tide*, 1895.]

HIS COUNTRY—AFTER ALL

By HENRY LAWSON

THE Blenheim coach was descending into the valley of the Avetere River—pronounced Aveterry—from the saddle of Taylor's Pass. Across the river to the right, the grey slopes and flats stretched away to the distant sea from a range of tussock hills. There was no native bush there; but there were several groves of imported timber standing wide apart—sentinel-like—seeming lonely and striking in their isolation.

"Grand country, New Zealand, eh?" said a stout man with a brown face, grey beard, and grey eyes, who sat between the driver and another passenger on the box.

"You don't call this grand country!" exclaimed the other passenger, who claimed to be, and looked like, a commercial traveller, and might have been a professional spieler—quite possibly both. "Why, it's about the poorest country in New Zealand! You ought to see some of the country in North Island—Wairarapa and Napier districts round about Pahiatua. I call this damn poor country."

"Well, I reckon you wouldn't if you'd ever been in Australia—back in New South Wales. The people here don't seem to know what a grand country they've got. You say this is the worst, eh? Well, this would make an Australian cockatoo's mouth water—the worst of New Zealand would."

"I've always thought Australia was all good country," mused the driver—a flax-stick. "I always thought——"

"Good country!" exclaimed the man with the grey beard, in a tone of disgust. "Why, it's only a mongrel desert, except some bits round the coast. The worst dried-up and God-forsaken country I was ever in."

There was a silence, thoughtful on the driver's part and aggressive on that of the stranger.

"I always thought," said the driver, reflectively, after a pause—"I always thought Australia was a good country," and he placed his foot on the brake.

They let him think. The coach descended the natural terraces above the river bank, and pulled up at the pub.

"So you're a native of Australia?" said the bagman to the grey-beard, as the coach went on again.

"Well, I suppose I am. Anyway, I was born there. That's the main thing I've got against the darned country."

"How long did you stay there?"

"Till I got away," said the stranger. Then, after a think, he added, "I went away first when I was thirty-five—went to the islands. I swore I'd never go back to Australia again; but I did. I thought I had a kind of affection for old Sydney. I knocked about the blasted country for five or six years, and then I cleared out to 'Frisco. I swore I'd never go back again, and I never will."

"But surely you'll take a run over and have a look at old Sydney and those places, before you go back to America, after getting so near?"

"What the blazes do I want to have a look at the blamed country for?" snapped the stranger, who had refreshed considerably. "I've got nothing to thank Australia for—except getting out of it. It's the best country to get out of that I was ever in."

"Oh well, I only thought you might have had some friends over there," interposed the traveller in an injured tone.

"Friends! That's another reason. I wouldn't go back there for all the friends and relations since Adam. I had more than quite enough of it while I was there. The worst and hardest years of my life were spent in Australia. I might have starved there, and did do it half my time. I worked harder and got less in my own country in five years than I ever did in any other in fifteen"—he was getting mixed—"and I've been in a few since then. No, Australia is the worst country that ever the Lord had the sense to forget. I meant to stick to the country that stuck to me, when I was starved out of my own dear native land—and that country is the United States of America. What's Australia? A big, thirsty, hungry wilderness, with one or two cities for the convenience of foreign speculators, and a few collections of humpies, called towns—also for the convenience of foreign speculators: and populated mostly by mongrel sheep, and partly by fools, who live like European slaves in the towns, and like dingoes in the bush—who drivel about 'democracy', and yet haven't any more spunk than to graft for a few cockney dudes that razzle-dazzle most of the time in Paris. Why, the Australians haven't even got the grit

to claim enough of their own money to throw a few dams across their watercourses, and so make some of the interior fit to live in. America's bad enough, but it was never so small as that. . . . Bah! The curse of Australia is sheep, and the Australian war cry is 'Baa!'"

"Well, you're the first man I ever heard talk as you've been doing about his own country," said the bagman, getting tired and impatient of being sat on all the time. 'Lives there a man with a soul so dead, who never said—to—to himself' . . . I forget the darned thing."

He tried to remember it. The man whose soul was dead cleared his throat for action, and the driver—for whom the bagman had shouted twice as against the stranger's once—took the opportunity to observe that he always thought a man ought to stick up for his own country.

The stranger ignored him, and opened fire on the bagman. He proceeded to prove that that was all rot—that patriotism was the greatest curse on earth; that it had been the cause of all war; that it was the false, ignorant sentiment which moved men to slave, starve, and fight for the comfort of their sluggish masters; that it was the enemy of universal brotherhood, the mother of hatred, murder and slavery, and that the world would never be any better until the deadly poison, called the sentiment of patriotism, had been "educated" out of the stomachs of the people. "Patriotism!" he exclaimed scornfully. "My country! The darned fools; the country never belonged to them, but to the speculators, the absentees, land-boomers, swindlers, gangs of thieves—the men the patriotic fools starve and fight for—their masters. Ba-a!"

The opposition collapsed.

The coach had climbed the terraces on the south side of the river, and was bowling along on a level stretch of road across the elevated flat.

"What trees are those?" asked the stranger, breaking the aggressive silence which followed his unpatriotic argument, and pointing to a grove ahead by the roadside. "They look as if they've been planted there. There ain't been a forest here surely?"

"Oh, they're some trees the Government imported," said the traveller, whose knowledge on the subject was limited. "Our own bush won't grow in this soil."

"But it looks as if anything else would——"

Here the stranger sniffed once by accident, and then several times with interest. It was a warm morning after rain. He fixed his eyes on those trees.

They didn't look like Australian gums; they tapered to the tops, the branches were pretty regular, and the boughs hung in ship-shape fashion. There was not the Australian heat to twist the branches and turn the leaves.

"Why!" exclaimed the stranger, still staring and sniffing hard. "Why, dang me if they ain't (sniff) Australian gums!"

"Yes," said the driver, flicking his horses, "they are."

"Blanky (sniff) blanky old Australian gums!" exclaimed the ex-Australian, with strange enthusiasm.

"They're not old," said the driver; "they're only young trees. But they say they don't grow like that in Australia—'count of the difference in the climate. I always thought——"

But the other did not appear to have heard him; he kept staring hard at the trees they were passing. They had been planted in rows and cross-rows, and were coming on grandly.

There was a rabbit trapper's camp amongst those trees; he had made a fire to boil his billy with gum leaves and twigs, and it was the scent of that fire which interested the exile's nose, and brought a wave of memories with it.

"Good day, mate!" he shouted suddenly to the rabbit trapper, and to the astonishment of his fellow passengers.

"Good day, mate!" The answer came back like an echo—it seemed to him—from the past.

Presently he caught sight of a few trees which had evidently been planted before the others—as an experiment, perhaps—and, somehow, one of them had grown after its own erratic native fashion—gnarled and twisted and ragged, and could not be mistaken for anything else but an Australian gum.

"A thunderin' old blue-gum!" ejaculated the traveller, regarding the tree with great interest.

He screwed his neck to get a last glimpse, and then sat silently smoking and gazing straight ahead, as if the past lay before him—and it *was* before him.

"Ah, well!" he said, in explanation of a long meditative silence on his part; "ah, well—them saplings—the smell of them gum leaves set me thinking." And he thought some more.

"Well, for my part," said the tourist in the coach, presently, in a condescending tone, "I can't see much in Australia. The bally colonies are——"

"Oh, that be damned!" snarled the Australian-born—they had finished the second flask of whisky. "What do you Britishers know about Australia? She's as good as England, anyway."

“Well, I suppose you’ll go straight back to the States as soon as you’ve done your business in Christchurch,” said the bagman, when near their journey’s end they had become confidential.

“Well, I dunno. I reckon I’ll just take a run over to Australia first. There’s an old mate of mine in business in Sydney, and I’d like to have a yarn with him.”

[From *While the Billy Boils*, 1896.]



AFTER THE ACCIDENT

By EDWARD DYSON

ONE man sat upon a heap of broken reef near the face, with his broad palms supporting his chin. His thin, hollow cheeks showed, between the outspread fingers, a sickly yellow in the candlelight. One candle in a spiked holder burned against the side of the drive. Two billies and two full crib-bags hung near on dog-hooks driven in an upright leg, and at the man's feet lay a couple of picks and a shovel. Kyley sat with his back to the face, staring with glowing, vindictive eyes into the gathered gloom down the drive, where the passage to the shaft was choked to the roof with splintered timber and fallen mullock, and where the head of a second man was dimly visible. Only the head and shoulders of this other were free; the rest of his body was hidden under the débris. The second man was thrown face downwards; across his back, pinning his arms, lay the great cap-piece, which alone seemed heavy enough to have crushed the life out of him. Beyond this the tumbled reef and splintered slabs were piled to the roof.

But the buried miner was not dead. The tough red-gum log, forced down by the mighty pressure, had ploughed its way diagonally down the side of the drive and pinched him to the floor, stopping when the pressure of another inch must have been followed by certain and speedy death. A stout iron truck was jammed under the log beside him, torn and doubled like a cardboard box. The young man could lift his chin a few inches from the floor of the drive and turn his face from one side to the other, but was incapable of any other movement.

Presently he spoke. His voice came with an effort, and sounded feebly shrill, like that of a very old man.

"Dick, Dick! in the name o' God, speak, man! D' ye think there's a chance for us?"

Dick Kyley dropped his hands, and there was an expression of grim satisfaction in his gaunt face as he replied deliberately:

"There's a chance for *me*, William."

The buried man lifted his clay-smirched face, startled by the other's tone, and gazed eagerly at his mate, and continued gazing for fully a minute, puzzled and frightened by the incongruous levity in the face that confronted him. Then, the position becoming painful, he dropped his cheek in the wet clay again.

"What d' ye mean?" he asked anxiously. "Why only for you?"

"Because, William, I don't think you've got a dog's show."

The reply was without a trace of sympathy; there was, in fact, a touch of malicious banter in the mincing tone of the "William". William Hether had never been anything but "Hether" or "Bill" to his shift-mate before.

Again Hether looked anxiously into Kyley's face. Its cadaverous hollows were filled with dark shadows, and the high-lights brought out the salient features in a grotesque caricature that struck Hether as simply fiendish. He turned from the sight, with a new horror in his heart.

"This is no time to fool a man, Dick," he said humbly. "How can there be any chance for you if I ain't in it?"

Kyley arose, plucked the candle from the wall, and advancing close to his mate, held the flame low down and showed him a small pool of water gathered upon the floor within eighteen inches of his face.

"That's why," he said.

Hether understood, and a cry broke from his lips.

"Keep it back, Dick!" he gasped.

"William," said Kyley, calmly replacing the candle and resuming his former position on the reef, "you're a fool. The water's coming

in from the face, as usual. The fall has dammed the gutters, and it can't get away; consequently, in less'n five hours the pool will be above your ears. And you know what that means."

"But you can build a dam around me. Get the shovel—quick! Make a dam with that loose reef an' the clay off the floor. Dick, Dick! give us a chance, for God's sake, man!"

Hether stopped short, staring at the other, who sat calmly regarding him. Presently he spoke again in a quavering whisper:

"You won't see a man drown without lendin' a hand t' help him?"

"No, I won't see it," replied Kyley, "because I'm goin' to douse this light. A candle burns up the air, an' I'll want all there is here, I reckon, before the boys reach me."

Driven almost wild with terror, a terror occasioned no less by the grim significance of Kyley's leering countenance and the brutality of the words than by the horrors of his position, Hether began to plead piteously, with tears and moanings. The pain of broken bones and the sickness of exhaustion had quite unmanned "Big Bill" Hether, but his agony did not touch the heart of Kyley, who seemed to have forgotten that death also threatened him in the delight that the young man's sufferings awakened within his breast.

"Why 've you rounded on me, Dick? What 've I done—what 've I ever done?" moaned the helpless man.

"I'm not goin' to lift a finger to keep you out of hell," answered the other, "because of *her*, William—because of Hannah."

Bill turned his face to the light again, and once more he stared at Kyley, sharply, inquiringly, reading every line of his fateful countenance. Then a groan of despair broke from him.

"I'll go away, Kyley," he said. "True's Christ, if we get out I'll go away, an' you'll never hear of me again. Only make a dam. Quick, man, quick—it's comin'! God! This is worse than murder. Dick——"

The water, having filled the depression at the side of the drive, was now running down and forming a pool in the hollow under Hether's chin.

Kyley turned and blew out the candle. For a long time Hether continued to supplicate in the darkness, and Kyley, leaning comfortably against the face, heard the thin voice, weakening to an almost inarticulate whisper, beseeching by all that is good on earth and holy in heaven for a little grace—another poor chance of life—and answered never a word. By a painful effort the young man continued to keep his mouth above the gathering water, but gradually the torture that afflicted his extended neck became unendurable, and now in his last extremity he railed at Kyley as a murderer, and

abused him with curses in weak childish tones that were nevertheless pregnant with passion and sounded distinctly and with terrifying emphasis in that black chamber of death.

Suddenly there was silence. Dick Kyley listened, and presently heard a bubbling sound in the water. That ceased, and all was still. He felt now that his vengeance was complete—that Hether was dead, and at that moment the fierce emotions of resentment and revenge-hunger that had possessed and upheld him departed in a breath, and left him weak and cowed. His limbs trembled, and beads of perspiration gathered about the roots of his hair and rolled coldly upon his brow and cheeks. He was thinking, too, of his own wretched case. He heard, fitfully, a distant drumming, the sound of timber being driven home, and knew that the rescue parties were working as hard as men may work, but whether theirs would be a job of hours or days he could not tell, and already he fancied he detected some taint of vitiation in the air.

Dick Kyley, sitting alone in the blackness of his prison, waiting for salvation or death, was soon the victim of an ungovernable fear, a supernatural terror entirely new to him, and the more awful for its novelty. From the moment he believed Hether dead he began to fear him. He strove with all the energy of his strong sense to drive him from his thoughts, but do what he might his mind would revert to the dread subject, and his eyes turn, staring intently into the darkness, where at times they seemed to detect a yet blacker form in the pitch-black night that filled the drive—the shape of the dead man's head. The horror grew, and with it an agonizing conviction that Hether's dead face was staring at him with dead but seeing eyes. Imagination had pictured the pallid cheeks stained with blood and clay, and the wide, accusing eyes, till the vision became a reality to him. Tortured beyond endurance, Kyley fumbled in his pocket and found a match, which he struck upon the shovel blade. As the light filled the chamber a groan of relief broke from the miner's labouring breast. Only the back of Hether's head was visible; his face was sunk to the temple in the water. Dick extinguished the match—his last—and sat down again, only to struggle with another relay of horrors that presently arose against him.

William Hether still lived. He had discovered that by taking a deep breath and sinking his face till the forehead rested upon the clay he was enabled to allay the pain in his neck and to continue the struggle. He persisted in this course, noiselessly, for the sound of the rescuers at work had filled him with a glorious hope, and

with that hope had come a fear that Kyley might be moved to murder him if he thought his rescue possible.

So another hour fled. The water in the drive, which had now found a broad level, continued to rise slowly. Kyley had lost the power of appreciating time, and sat huddled against the wall, distraught with fear and despair. Hether's face was haunting him again, standing forth visibly, threatening and awful in the tomb-like darkness. His mad fancy stretched every hour of his imprisonment into a long day, and he believed that it was his fate to be stifled by the foul gases from his mate's decomposing corpse. Even now the taint was in his nostrils. Although he was listening all the time with agonized intensity, he no longer heard the hammering of the miners beyond; his mind was too full of its unspeakable fear—he awaited the attack of the inhuman thing that his irresponsible faculties had fashioned out of the impenetrable gloom at the end of his narrow prison.

At this crisis Hether called again, in a piercing voice, full of the supreme terror:—

“Help! help! Kyley, you murderer! fiend! devil——”

At the first sound of the voice, Kyley sprang back against the end of the drive, and shrieked, with all the power of his lungs, again and again; and there he remained, crouched down, pressing his face into the gravel, clutching his ears, shivering and moaning.

Three hours later the rescuers broke through, and found Hether under the fall, with his head in a pool of water, dead, and Kyley squatting at the face, babbling of spectres and devils.

It is still Mr Richard Kyley's belief that he is a conspicuous figure in hell.

[From *Below and On Top*, 1898.]

QUILP

By ALBERT DORRINGTON

I HAVE sold tea on a large and small scale around Geelong and Mount Brown. I have originated a peculiar brand of dyspepsia from Murray Bridge to the Towers. My blends are unequalled. And I know my business. An ordinary man may sell tea, if he has a decent moustache, a pair of legs, and can talk lies over the fence. It happens, however, that in appearance I am but once removed from the ape.

Years ago a man discovered me on the Circular Quay. He gave me some advice and half-a-sovereign, because I was uglier than anything he had ever seen. "Go into the country," he said, "and sell something. Tell fortunes, you ugly little beggar!" This man put bread in my way when he taught me the trick of fortune-telling.

I detest your cities—your Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane—bah! What a race of weaklings you are—and what mongrel species! The cinematograph man in quest of local colour couldn't do better than visit Coogee some Sunday afternoon; he'll find colour, and in plenteous shades; ebony and cinnamon—especially cinnamon; and your tawny silk-coated Jap, stalking hither, stalking thither, jingling cash. Last Sunday I was at Coogee, the gilded horror rolled up precisely at three—a shapely girl of eighteen, lissom of body, alert, and cursed with a fair face and skin. At the first glance she appeared alone, but from the tail of her eye she was watching the crawsome Thing in her wake—an undersized Chow, very undersized, almost lacking arm-power to carry his own nasty infant. Angelina evinced no shame at the obvious relationship; she had kept ahead because the blood of meat ran in her veins, and she could not help out-distancing this slant-eyed product of a cabbage—her husband.

Suddenly she swung round, arms akimbo and threatening: "Don't dashed well fall down with that precious kid! Hurry, you thing—hurry!" Parts of him looked young, but the salient skull was older than Yorick's. He spurted obediently, and nearly fainted; he wasn't a healthy Chow.

Some climax came along the beach—half-a-dozen Ah Goons out for the Seventh. Angelina snickered over her ribboned shoulder, naming them fluently in a guggling half-Chow lingo; how they squirmed and wiggled, these old flames of hers! (A soft curse from a ginger-whiskered man in the shade.) Up strolled some girl-friends of Angelina's. They were unfeignedly glad to see her, and greeted Ah Cow with cheerful blasphemy; and Cow, wrung to his parental depths, introduced baby—a beady-eyed little squeaker. "He was christened this morning at the Army," said Angelina, with simple pride; "we are calling him Reggy."

Cow blinked feebly in the sun—Cow, the father of Reginald. (God ha' mercy, gentlemen!) "Pitty ickle sing!" Kisses one, two, three—twice round; kisses on his Mongol lips, kissés on his little flipper. Various narrow-girthed ladies hovered round, attracted, interested to the sympathy-point. . . .

. . . Bah to your cities—bah! and bah again! The human can overcome the brutal in the Bush—can, does, will; because there is in the Bush sweating work to drive forth the animal—not now, not all at once, but sooner or later; and there is Nature's salt to keep the maggots from the carcase. What matter if she be fierce and cruel! she is sweet. But I'll tell you what I saw in Melbourne once—what I saw and watched in a suburban slum street.

There was a woman seated in a doorway—a study in feline immobility; yet her half-closed eyes saw each living thing that moved in the street. And there was an urchin toiling in the rain-flushed gutter before her, the object of her ferocious interest. She knew that the piling of rotting garbage in the floodway meant the swamping of her house; and he was labouring with impish stealth to reach that end.

A denizen of the street stopped with a mortar-board over his shoulder. "Them two are at it again," he confided to me. "She hates the little bloke like poison: dunno why; he uster play with her dead kid, and they've been fightin' ever since the funeral. See!"

The boy had found that his dam was producing some effect—the water swirled over the pavement and touched the woman's feet. She did not move. Then the boy doubled forward and laughed—laughed in jerks with his hands gripping his knees.

The slow venom in his laugh brought the woman to a sitting posture. Her mouth twitched as though something had cut it. She began to sing, and the boy ceased capering in the filth. The words of her song caricatured his ill-shaped head, his squinting eyes, his dubious parentage. She was Irish, and had doubtless discovered long before that it is easier to wound in rhyme than in prose. Her

feet beat time in the slush. She clasped her hands fervently and jeered.

The boy stood white and palpitating in his childish fury. Then suddenly he moved away, affecting a grotesque limp that only permitted him to pass her with painful slowness. She stopped singing; something in his pretended limp struck her into a fit of blind coughing that left her grovelling in the doorway.

"By cripes, look at her!" said the man. "The kid beats her. Y' see, her Jimmy wot pegged out uster limp like that; an' this kid's imitatin' it—makes her think a bit, y'see. By cripes, look at her!"

And the boy went limping up the street.

In the Bush I have seen many things to shudder at; but nothing with the hell-sought malice of those mockers. On the contrary . . .

Once on a dusty track of western New South Wales, a bark humpy appeared near the mirage-haunted horizon. I hurried forward. A woman was crouching on a sand heap in front. And her face! O, Tussaud! it was supreme in its ugliness—the teeth and mane of a lion, and with a skin so scrofulous that it suggested leprosy. I was Apollo by the side of her. She was whining a baby-song, and every time her dry lips opened I could hear the clash of teeth. At the sound of my footsteps she picked herself up and hopped across the track, her red eyes squinting east and west.

"Do you want a drink, sir?"

She collared my bridle and stood like the embodiment of Dirt beside my clean horse.

"No, Madam Nightmare, I do *not* want a drink. Go away. Cover your head."

She followed me some distance, screaming invitations to return and look at her baby. Curiosity gripped me at last, and I followed her back to her kennel. The place was miraculously clean inside.

In the centre of the hovel was a wicker cradle; she lifted the snowy covering and exposed the sweetest baby I have ever seen—a clutching, crowing bit of white humanity. I stooped for a moment and permitted its rosy fingers to grip mine, while thoughts of wicked enchanters held me for six heart-beats. Out into the road again, hat in hand, and face turned from the woman.

"Good-bye, mother. God be with you!" Felt that I had to say it.

"He is, mister—He is." She flung out a claw towards the cherub in the cradle.

I shall never forget how, at the end of one hot January day, I dragged myself along the sun-split road that follows the Darling into Wilcannia. A woman's voice crooned from a tidy little cottage;

there was a smell of new bread and pastry. I hurried past. Suddenly her voice filled the air, and the household swarmed to the gate. "Here's Quilp! quick, come and see Quilp!" I turned in the middle of the road and put on a Cheshire smile. God! how those kids howled when I limped off like Richard the Third!

There's a piece of country on the Darling that I bar at present. I'm living down something I said there a year ago.

It was getting late when I crawled into Puncher's Crossing, with the horse going on three legs. Several cockies passed me on the way, but they had always pulled up for a chat and a kindly word. Into their ears went my secret, the secret that fled to every homestead within ten miles before sundown. "Monsieur Pompadour, the magician, is coming—the magician who pierces the heart's depths by glancing at your little fat hand. Spread the happy tidings!"

Fin Maloney owned the pub, store and newspaper at Puncher's; and after being sniffed at by a regiment of wall-eyed cattle-pups and mongrels, into Fin's pub I hobbled.

Maloney's pub is misnamed "The Swag and Pannikin"; it should have been called "The Coffin and Grave". Maloney looked into my room and asked me if I would take a stiff nobbler of his lightning whisky. I was lying on the bed, and I snored gently. Maloney went away.

It was eight o'clock when I ventured from my room. There were noises in the parlour; heavy breathings and suppressed mirth, as if the whole female community of Puncher's Crossing had collected in the little oven of a room. I threw myself into a chair on the veranda, and waited for the ladies to stir. It was three minutes before I discovered that a mop of yellow hair was peering at me from the half-closed door. I maintained a commendable silence. Eve spoke.

"Say, mister, would yer like ter come inside?"

I glanced at her tenderly, and made a sweeping gesture of assent. I usually planted a few hundredweight of tea after each performance; and business is business. I followed the elderly baby with the hair.

There were fifteen girls inside, and one big man. He offered me some tobacco, which was taken as men take salt in the East. Then he spoke to Maloney's portrait by a Chinese artist, hanging just over my head.

"My gel here heard as you were pretty good at readin' fortunes. She's worried me till I had to bring her over. These are my gel's friends, mister."

I bowed. Lord! how pretty are some of my countrywomen: peeping brown faces, all too quickly sullied by the wicked shadows of men!

Fortune-telling outback requires brains. Each one must have something different, and there are some awful combinations in fifteen. In the majority of cases, you may kill husband the first with perfect safety, providing that the void created is filled. They are touchy anent the old dying relative, and the old, old pile.

I married the first one right away to six-feet of gum. "Would I describe him?" Certainly. He never wore a waistcoat, summer or winter; he could sit any horse south of the line. Didn't go in for shearing now, but when he did he was a "ringer". On Saturday nights it was his custom to fight about three men. Tight pants—and big feet.

There was a great clapping of hands, a lot of pushing and laughter. Everyone recognized him immediately; the name, "Jim Saunders", was whispered through the room. The girl fled to the veranda to hide her flaring, happy face. All the others made similar journeys when the dark, tall gentleman turned up. (It is always a safe card to keep out short men: they don't live up there. Every man is longer than Adam.)

Now there remained one who had sat quiet throughout, although she was frequently whispered to. She was partially hidden by a screen of heavy cloth, but I knew hers was the sweetest face in the room.

In the midst of the babble I caught her hand gently—small, white, baby fingers that did not shrink from mine as others had. Her face became filled with an intense eagerness. I muttered, racking my brains for sweet dreams. Into her future I wove those bright phantasms that crowd the minds of children. I built her a tiny castle near the sea. Gulls drowsed over the palm-lined beach, and flew out to cry above the white ships that swam to all the islands of the world.

A strange silence crept over all. For one brief minute I knelt at her feet. It was not for Quilp to touch that wondrous hand with his hideous, twisted lips: enough if the gabbling tongue had put one iota of pleasure into her fancy.

And yet I had made a mistake: it was in every face. I stood up, still holding her hand. She was crying softly, her head down in the cushions. I limped to the door, a fraud, a failure.

What I said to that blind child let me not recall.

A STRIPE FOR TROOPER CASEY

By RODERIC QUINN

THE magpies had said good-night to the setting sun, and already darkness was moving through the dead timber. The first notes of night-birds came from the ridges, and a curlew mourned in the reeds of a creek.

My brother Will shook his reins and rode away.

"Good-bye, Sis," he said; "I will be home pretty early."

I smiled, knowing that he reckoned without his host. Will was visiting Lizzie Lacy, and Lizzie had a sweet face. Love's pretty trickeries upset many promises, and I knew that my brother would not return till the small hours. But what was love to me—a simple country girl with a heart to lose and nobody to find it?

The cold chilled my fingers, and I shuddered. I was alone, with no one to talk to. Mother and father had gone to Bathurst that day, and evil men walked the roads, lured west by the gleam of gold. As Will disappeared in the distance, fear struck through me like a chill wave. There was a dance at Staunton's, and Mary had invited me. I was sorry now that I had refused her. Still, if Mary's heart had been as perfect as her face, she would not have said hard things of poor me. She should have schooled her tongue, although she might be a fine woman—which was Trooper Casey's estimate of her. The little successes that please a woman had spoilt her, gilding her pride till it dazzled one painfully. If I had grey eyes, it was God who had coloured them; and someone has since told me that it is the pleasantest colour of all. She had said, as well, that my cheeks were red—country complexion. I blessed God for that also, because it meant health and strength. They could be pale enough at times—but pale only when hers would have been ashen.

I remembered myself and laughed. All this bitterness because Will was visiting Lizzie Lacy, and no one was coming to kiss my hand! Silly Carrie, I said to myself, you must bide your time. You

are over-young yet to harbour these thoughts. Time will surely bring you the rose, and as surely the thorn that wounds.

I had turned to enter the house when Sally whinnied from a distance and came down the green lane between the cultivation-paddocks at a high trot, her silver tail lifted in excitement and streaming out behind her. She halted at the slip-rails and stretched her head over them, coyly inviting a caress. I gave her a cake, smoothed her velvet nose, and talked to her till the trees in the distance were very dim. Now, while I fondled, I noticed a curious inattentiveness in the mare's manner. She seemed to heed me with one ear only. The other continually flickered back and quivered as though distracted by a distant sound. Listen intently as I might, I could discover nothing. Peer as I would, I saw dead trees and naught else. But this listening and peering made me fretful and afraid; and with a final pull at Sally's forelock—a lingering pull that told how loath I was to leave her—I turned and entered the house.

The fire burned steadily. All the little sticks that splash and splutter and noise so much were in white heaps, and only two great logs of ironbark glowed sullenly. I lit a lamp, sat down, and gazed into the fire: sweet pastime for pensive moments. At a girl's age-of-dreams, questions come in troops, and a log's red side is often rich with fancy-food. My head pillowed on an arm, I looked sideways down. The fire drowsed my eyes, and in a little while sleep shut them wholly. . . .

I awoke with a start and looked towards the door. Two men stood in the room—a tall and a short man. They were dressed in sailor clothes, and the eyes of one squinted horribly.

"Who are you?" I said, rising to my feet and feeling strangely nervous.

"Weary men, lassie," said the tall man.

"All the way from Sydney," added the other.

"With not a bite for two blessed days," continued the first.

"And ne'er a sup," said the second.

"Indeed," I remarked, pretending sympathy with their lie; "that is hard. But I will give you full and plenty, and when you are satisfied you must go—for," I continued, thinking to soften the words, "we do not allow any strangers to sleep here."

"Yes," said the tall man; "feed us well, good lassie."

"And," added the other, "being satisfied, we'll leave you all alone."

Then they both chuckled, and moved to the table.

As I laid cold meat and cream and bush honey before them, a nervousness assailed me that made my hands dance.

"All alone, lassie?" said the tall man at last, throwing himself back in his chair.

"Yes," I replied, but—recognizing my mistake instantly—continued: "That is, for a little while. I expect my brother every instant—he is with Trooper Casey."

The short man lit his pipe, the tall one following suit. "Time to be gone, then," remarked the latter.

The other drew the stem from his lips and expelled a long white plume. "Which first?" he said.

"The gilt," said the tall man.

I heard the words, and suddenly sprang up and ran for the door. "Money first," I thought; "what second?"

"Ah, would you?" said the short man, leaping in front.

"Let me pass!" I cried; "someone is coming."

He did not move, but stood with folded arms, smiling coarsely.

"A sweetheart, perhaps, lassie?"

"My brother," I answered.

The tall man opened the door, put out his head, and listened. A moment after he drew in and shut the door.

"No one," he said; "the lassie's mistaken."

"Come!" said the short man, extending his arms.

I retreated as he advanced, till at length I stood by the fire. I was all flushed with rage, and cold with fear.

"My brother is a big man," I said; "he could kill you both with one blow."

They laughed brutally, and the short man said, "He has a pretty sister."

"If you are men you will not harm me. Tell me what you want, and I will give it you."

"Take her at her word," interrupted the tall man, coming forward.

"I will," replied the other. "What will you give us?"

"What do you want?" I asked, brightening.

"One thing and another, lassie," said he.

"Tobacco," suggested his companion, "tea and sugar and flour——"

"A word in your ear, lassie!" interrupted the short man, touching me with an outstretched hand.

But I drew away, and tried to look down from my little height.

"Go out of the door, sir!—this is my father's house!"

"Pert words from pretty lips," said the short man. "A kiss!—a kiss!"

With that he had me in his arms, and drew me in close. I struggled, at first in silence, but at the touch of his bearded face, threw back my head and filled the house with cries. He did not desist—only grew fiercer; nor did his fellow make any motion to release me. His grasp was like that of a vice, and blue marks remained long after. Once in the struggle I saw stars, and thought a wicked dream had passed. A gust of cold wind struck my cheeks, and I strove to free myself. Then the wind blew again, and again I saw stars—the door was open and someone stood in the doorway. It was a man—tall as a giant, I thought, and the curse he thundered seemed like a great song.

The sailor released me and drew apart, laughing to lighten his guilt.

“God bless you!” I said, moving to the door—both hands on my heart, for it was panting fiercely.

Before I reached him the stranger raised a hand to make me pause. He had a gun at his shoulder—a long, bright barrel that gleamed fitfully.

“In the nick of time,” he said calmly; “which first?”

I looked at the two sailors. They stood close together, distressed by fear. The tall man slanted sideways, like a sapling from the wind, and the short one cowered behind an upraised arm as if to ward a blow.

“Which first?” said the stranger again.

“Neither!” I replied, shuddering.

He sloped his rifle a little, looked at me cynically, and hinted something that filled me with shame.

“No, no,” I cried; “do not say that! I never saw them before, and I am a good girl.”

A smile crept across his lips, and his wide, dark eyes softened.

“I believe it,” he said shortly.

He stepped forward and halted in the centre of the room.

“You were hungry?” he said to the short man.

The man nodded.

“And she fed you on cream and honey—the best she had?”

The man did not answer.

The gun went to his shoulder again, and the dark eyes looked along the levelled barrel.

“And you wanted to pay her in your own foul coin. Now for this,” he continued, “I’ve a mind to put hot lead in your brain.”

I ran forward with a great dread lest he should do as he threatened.

"Go away!" I cried to the sailors; "go quickly, while you are safe!"

The men turned as if to slink off, but the stranger warned them to stand very still.

"You must be punished for this night's work," he said; "and then you may go—both of you—as far as Berrima."

The two men started and eyed him keenly.

"Just so, just so," he said, nodding from one to the other; "a guilty conscience, eh?"

They scowled and sank their eyes, and he turned to me.

"Get your whip!" he said.

I stood irresolute, and he continued:

"My arm is tired, holding this gun. They should have been dead long ago. Get your whip!"

I ran away, got my whip, and returned.

"Go forward and strike that man across the face."

"It would be cruel," I replied.

"Quick! or he will be dead before you reach him!"

Then I was in front of the sailor.

"Lift your arm," the stranger said.

Then he told me to strike with all my force—"As you would a wicked steer."

I obeyed with some hesitation, and struck lightly. But presently faintheartedness forsook me. At the second lifting of the whip a sudden spirit of mastery surged my arm with fierceness, so that I dealt some savage blows. The sailor sheltered his eyes with his hands and cried aloud for mercy. Then I suddenly remembered myself and drew away, shuddering and half in tears.

"Good!" said the stranger. "And now for the other—they are mates."

"He did not offer me any hurt," I replied.

The stranger looked at him. "You are lucky," he said.

The man's face lightened with pleasure.

"But less lucky than you think, my good man," he continued.

I noticed the white fear that came into the tall man's face, and the sudden upward look of his companion.

"Come here!" said the stranger, beckoning to the short man.

The sailor approached, trembling. After a few paces had been taken, "Halt!" the stranger cried.

The man stood still on the instant.

"Squint-eyed, and with the limp of the leg-iron—dressed like a sailor!" said the stranger, in loud clear tones. "Get some saddle-straps, my girl!"

"Why?"

"Get them!" he said, shortly.

I went away, and displeasure at his brusque manner made my cheeks burn. Did it paint them also—that he spoke so gently on my return?

"I am not used to ladies, and I mean no offence," he said.

I forgave him, and said that I had felt none. "Your action tonight shows that you are a good man."

"Perhaps," he replied; "but one star does not make a heaven."

He was silent, and I forebore to ask what he meant. He motioned for the straps, and I gave them.

Then he turned to the men, and his voice hardened.

"Down on your faces!" he thundered, "quick! quick! both of you, or——"

They were down on the instant, abject as worms.

"Now take this gun, my girl," he said, "and if that man so much as wriggles, shoot him. I will manage the other."

The man was fashioned to command. I took the gun, and if the prostrate figure had moved then, it would never have moved again. But the sailors were utterly cowed, and did not murmur while the stranger pinioned their hands behind them. This done, he rolled them over and looked down at them.

"What does this mean?" I said.

"A stripe for Trooper Casey," he replied and laughed.

"For Trooper Casey? I do not understand?"

"You will, in time," he replied.

With that I had to content myself. Who this man was, with the command on his lips, and the disobey-me-if-you-dare in his eyes, I did not know. I only know that he had reserves of gentleness, which spoke through his harsher moods like a bird's song in a storm.

"You, there!" he said to the short man; "do you know what they are doing at Weatherley's?"

The sailor turned his face aside, and was mute.

"Or you?" to the tall man.

"No," the man replied. "Where is Weatherley's?"

"Liars—both of you!" said the stranger. "Weatherley's, under the Range."

"What are they doing?" I interposed.

"Burying a dead woman," he replied looking from one to the other of the prostrate men, and nodding as he changed his gaze.

"How sad!" I cried. "Poor Mrs Weatherley! When did she die?"

"Yesterday."

"She was a strong woman."

"She met someone stronger."

"You mean Death!"

"Death and two devils!"—he ground his teeth.

I looked at him in wonder.

"Two devils—what do you mean?"

The short man lay on his side, looking up as a beaten dog looks at his master. The stranger spurned him with a foot.

"Answer!" he said; "which of you killed her?"

"Not me," groaned the sailor; "'twas the bushrangers."

"You liar!" cried the stranger in a rising, incredulous voice, as though he doubted his own ears. "We do not——" He paused and looked at me, and saw that he had revealed himself.

"Ah!" I whispered as he turned away. I understood now, and yet he did not seem as black as people painted him.

"I tried to hide it," he said; "but it slipped out. It is a bad thing even at its best."

Then he looked very downcast, and I pitied him. An angel impulse stirred me, and I stepped forward, raised my face, and kissed him.

"God!" he said, his fine eyes flashing, "'tis a long time since——"

He lowered his voice and continued, as if to himself: "But what does it matter? She is only a child."

"Tonight has made me a woman," I replied.

"No, no! you are a child. No woman would do a thing like that. But some day you will be a woman. Then you will kiss with the lips only, not with the heart—cheating the heart that loves you."

It was some minutes before he spoke again.

"I saw a horse in the stockyard," he said; "bring him round. I want you to go somewhere."

And when Sally was ready at the door and I in the saddle, he continued: "Ride to Staunton's—Casey is there. Tell him"—this with a low laugh—"that the man who borrowed his horse at Weatherboard waits here to give him a stripe in exchange. Come back with him yourself."

I turned Sally's head to be gone immediately.

"Wait—another word! Would you like to see me dead or Trooper Casey dead?"

"Oh, no; how can you ask?"

"I distrust women," he returned, "since I met Judas in petticoats."

"Try me," I replied; "I could not be false after what you have done."

"When you come to the bridge, cooe! I will be here watching these brutes, and when I hear your cry I will up and away."

As Sally moved off some words followed from the door, where he stood in the light.

"Good-bye, little girl!"

"Good-bye! and I will always remember you."

A curlew wailed, and the stranger laughed—to make the parting easy, it seemed. Yet something that Nature had put into the curlew's wail went through the man's voice and saddened me for many days. It seemed that both bird and man mourned something lost.

I galloped along the track that made a siding in the green hill and slanted to the creek. Sally's hoofs rattled on the turpentine planking of the bridge, and presently struck fire from the ironstone on the farther side. Where the track wound through wild hops I gave her free head; for there was open country. Where the scrub crept in she slackened of her own will, not liking the rebound of the bushes. In a little while we came to a second creek, where bullocks' heads in a white line made stepping-stones. She crossed it with a bound and a splash, and climbed the slope beyond in a few strides. Another mile brought me to Staunton's log-fence, and through the trees I saw bright windows. A little later there came to me a concertina's music and other sounds of merry-making.

I fastened Sally to the stockyard gate, and walked through the doorway. A number of couples were there, swinging round and round in a dance. As I walked into the room I felt strangely out of harmony with the surroundings, the music having put a spirit in my feet that made them seem to drag.

Mary Staunton had Trooper Casey for a partner. She looked very fine and pale, but as she went by she scarcely deigned to notice me. Trooper Casey was six feet high, and had curly hair—the hair that women fancy. Every time he wheeled, his metal buttons flashed. When the dance finished he was near me. I touched him on the arm.

"Mr Casey!"

"Hallo, Carrie!" said Mary Stunton, in affected welcome; "how late you are!"

"I didn't come to dance, Mary—only to see Mr Casey."

"Ah, I should have known," she answered, with a little mocking laugh, and with a glance at my dress where Sally had splashed it in crossing the creek.

I tossed my head and turned from her.

"Trooper Casey, can you spare a moment?"

"What do you want? Say what you want, here and now," said Mary Staunton. "That is, if you are not afraid of us hearing it."

"I intended this for you alone"—I addressed the trooper—"but

now"—with a sidelong look at his sweetheart—"everyone may hear it."

"What is it, Miss Anson?"

"Do you want a stripe?"

"Why, one'd think you were the Governor's lady," said Mary Staunton, laughing so that I blushed.

I took no notice of her, other than turning my back, and then I smiled quietly as I spoke.

"A gentleman waits at our house to pay you for a horse he borrowed at Weatherboard."

I watched him keenly to see how he took the news. On his cheeks two red spots stood out and burned. He gnawed his underlip, and there was a suppressed anger in his eyes, that glowed like covered fires. From those standing around there went up a great laugh, and Casey turned to a group who forced their merriment overlong.

"You are great laughers," said he; "but are you men enough to fight?"

None of them made a movement to accept the challenge; but, on the other hand, it was curious to see how speedily the laughter faded from their faces, giving place to something almost sad.

Then up spoke Mary Staunton.

"Carrie Anson," said she, with tremulous white lips, "if you come here to insult people, you'd better stay away."

"Don't mind her, Mary," said the trooper; "it's a trick some fool has made her play."

"Indeed it is not," I replied. "The man who gave me that message is waiting at our house with two sailors, and one of them"—I dropped my voice so that only he and Mary heard—"killed Mrs Weatherly."

The trooper started, as though shot through; looked me in the eyes, and drew a long breath. "By God!" he cried and moved towards the door.

"It is three to one, Mary," he said.

"Do not go!" she answered; "you may be killed."

"It is man to man, Trooper!" I interrupted; "two are bound and the third keeps watch."

"Stuff!" exclaimed Mary, viciously: "*he* keep watch! You will not go alone, Trooper."

"Alone! I must take the man. Where are my carbine and cap?"

"Take someone!" pleaded Mary.

"No," Casey replied, "I will do this myself. If I succeed you know what it means,"—and he looked earnestly into her eyes.

I laughed pleasantly.

"I shall be bridesmaid—eh, Mary?"

She did not smile, but went off with a set face, swaying her skirts behind her.

"With the help of God, Miss Anson," whispered Casey, confidentially, "I shall make three prisoners tonight."

"With the help of God, you shall not, Trooper Casey!" I whispered to myself.

As the trooper turned to leave the room, his carbine on his back, his sabre at his side, and his cap pressing a cushion of brown curls, I did not wonder Mary Staunton had lost her heart to him. He was a man to delight any eyes.

Some came forward and offered to assist him, but these he refused coldly. I passed out and was in the saddle before he had mounted.

Then he said, in surprise, "You must stay here, Miss Anson."

"I must go home, Trooper Casey."

"There may be bloodshed."

"There must be none."

"You are very brave," he said, suspiciously; "are you sure it is no hoax?"

"Follow me, if you are not a coward!" I replied.

As I passed her, Mary Staunton muttered something about "an interfering minx". The trooper she warned to be careful. In my heart I believe that she thought his chief peril lay in me, and I laughed to think that, after all, an outlaw may not be the greatest danger in a man's path.

As the trooper rode after, his bridle jingled in the silence.

"Miss Anson," said he, "these sailors that you spoke of—was one a tall man?"

"Yes."

"And the other short?"

"With a squint."

"Just so," and he relapsed into silence.

The track was narrow, with no room for two horses. This prevented us from riding abreast, and gave me an excuse to keep in front. Several times Casey urged his horse forward, but I patted Sally and she kept her place. At the creek he made a bold bid to front me, but the mare flashed forward and headed him at the farther side.

"Draw aside, and let me ride in front, Miss Anson."

I answered that I knew the way quite well.

"That may be, but I have a different reason."

I was dumb, having nothing to answer.

"There may be danger ahead," he continued; "and you are foolish."

I cast about for an answer, and remembered a last week's storm.

"There is danger," I replied; "a fallen tree, and you might flounder in the branches."

He muttered something under his breath, but I did not catch the word.

In a little while we reached the fallen tree and rode round it. Beyond he spoke again.

"You can have no objection now."

"None whatever," I said, "only that a little way along a swarm of bees have fastened to a limb. You might mistake them for a wart and brush them with your shoulder. That would not be pleasant, would it?"—and I laughed to gild the prevarication. But Casey, seeing no humour in the situation, remained dumb.

Presently I cried out to him to beware of the bees, and he listed in his saddle.

"Now?" he said.

"Not yet, Trooper; we are in the bush and I prefer to stay where I am, because if you rode in front the branches would come back and sting Sally's eyes."

"Rubbish!" muttered Casey.

When we were through the bush and among the hops, he suddenly bade me halt.

"You must play no tricks, Miss Anson!"

"La! who is playing them, Mr Casey?"

"The man at your house is a desperado."

"Is he, indeed?"—with all the innocence of the world in my voice.

"And you are an accomplice."

"Dear me, what does that mean, Trooper?"

"It means that you must stay where you are."

"But I must go home."

"Then I shall arrest you."

"Arrest me, and let three grown men go free!"

"But you make it necessary," he said.

"Trooper, the desperado is a brave man, and would be as likely to kill you as you would be to kill him."

"Have no fears for me, Miss Anson."

"I have none."

"Then they are for——"

"The man who saved me?"—and I went away like an arrow. It

was the first time I had come in conflict with the law, and the situation thrilled me. Casey with a great oath thundered close behind, calling on me in a low voice to hold up, and muttering dire consequences. I laughed, bent forward, and bade Sally do her best. It was necessary, since his horse had better pace and gained greatly at every stride. Now the animal's nose was at my saddle, now at Sally's shoulder, and now we raced level to the bridge.

I rose in the saddle, threw up my face, and sent a long, long "Coo-ee! Coo-ee!"

"Hush, you hoyden!"

I tugged at the reins, throwing Sally back on her haunches, and again I cooed.

Then I sat back and listened. The trooper was now a fading bulk in the dark. The speed of his horse on the siding was terrible, and his rein and sabre jingled fiercely.

Then, one—two—three, came the sounds of slip-rails falling. I sat back in the saddle with a sigh of deep content, and breathed as I had not for many minutes. Far and farther away I heard another horse, his hoof-thuds in the dead timber sounding like footfalls in an empty house.

"You have done good work tonight," said Trooper Casey, when I entered the room a little later; "fine work for a decent, self-respecting girl."

I picked up his sleeve where the silver braid circled it.

"This looks lonely, Trooper: it would be prettier if there were two of them, would it not?"

He smiled in a wintry way, and this gave me heart to say that the stranger was not so bad, after all.

Casey shook his head.

"Bad enough," he replied.

Will came in shortly after, and these words followed:

"Where did you meet him?"

"At the boundary gate," Will answered.

"What did he say?"

"Looked along his gun and ordered me to hoist my hands."

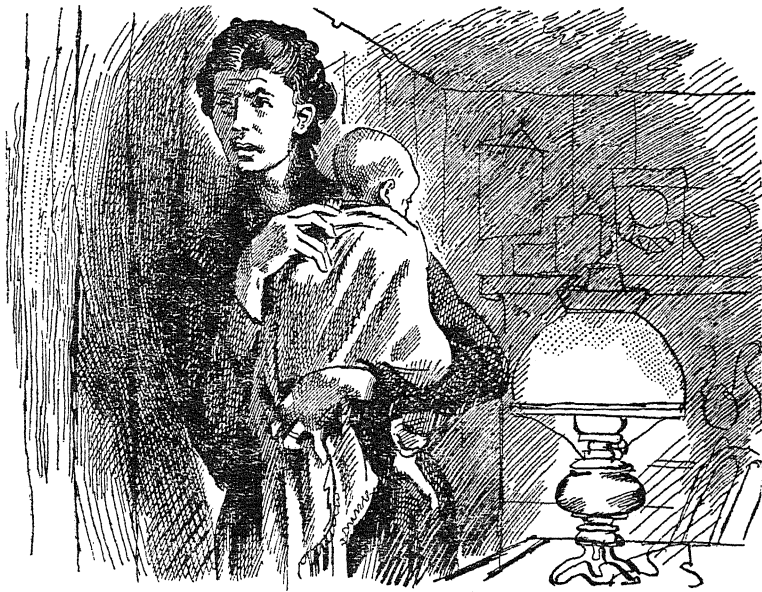
"And then?"

"Took my horse and watch—and left me this animal."

"Never mind," said the trooper quietly—"I have two prisoners. And he was not so bad, after all—eh, Miss Anson?"

"No, Trooper; especially if it should happen that the horse he left is the same that he borrowed."

Casey rose to look out at the dawn.



THE TRAMP

By BARBARA BAYNTON

SHE laid the stick and her baby on the grass while she untied the rope that tethered the calf. The length of the rope separated them. The cow was near the calf, and both were lying down. Every day she found a fresh place to tether it—since tether it she must, for there was no one to go after it but herself. She had plenty of time, but then there was baby; and if the cow turned on her out on the plains, and she with baby— She was afraid of the cow; she had been a town girl, only she did not want the cow to know it. She used to run at first when the cow bellowed its protest against the penning-up of its calf. This suited the cow, also the calf, but the woman's husband was wroth, and called her — the noun was cur. It was he who forced her to run and meet the advancing cow, brandishing a stick and uttering threatening words till the enemy turned tail and ran. "That's the way!" the man said, laughing at her white face. In many things he was worse than the cow, and

she wondered if the same rule would apply to the man, but she was not one to provoke skirmishes even with the cow.

It was early for the calf to go "to bed"—nearly an hour earlier than usual; but she felt so weirdly lonely. Partly because it was Monday, and her husband had been home for Saturday night and Sunday. He had gone off before daylight this morning; he was a shearer and fifteen miles as the crow flies separated them. She knew of no one nearer, unless the tramp— Ah! that was why she had penned the calf up so early. She feared more from the look of his eyes, and the gleam of his teeth, as he watched her newly-awakened baby beat its impatient fists upon her covered breasts, than from the knife that was sheathed in the belt at his waist.

Her husband, she had told him, was sick. She always said that when she was alone and a tramp came—and she had gone in from the kitchen to the bedroom and asked questions and replied to them in the best man's voice she could assume. But this tramp had walked round and round the house, and there were cracks in some places—and after the last time he had asked for tobacco. She had none to give, and he had grinned, because there was a broken clay pipe near the wood-heap where he stood, and if there were a man inside there ought to have been tobacco. Then he asked for money, but women in the bush never have money.

At last he was gone, and she, watching through the cracks inside, saw him when about a quarter of a mile away turn and look back at the house. Then he went further in the direction that she would have him go; but he paused again, turned and looked behind him, and apparently satisfied, moved to the left towards the creek. The creek made a bow round the house, and when he came to it she lost sight of him. Hours after, watching intently in that direction for signs of smoke, she saw the man's dog chasing some sheep that had gone to the creek for water, and saw it slink back suddenly, as if the man had called it.

More than once she thought of taking her baby and going to her husband, but as yet she had not set her will against his as with the cow, and so dared not. Long before nightfall she placed food in the kitchen, and a big brooch that had been her mother's she put upon the table, because, if the man did come back and robbery were his object, it was the only thing valuable that she had. And she left the kitchen door open—wide open; but this was not wise.

How she fastened the doors inside! Beside the bolt in the back one she drove in the steel and the scissors; against it she piled the stools and the table. Beside the lock on the front door she forced the handle of the spade, under the middle bar, and the blade

between the cracks in the flooring boards. Then the prop-stick, cut into lengths, held the top as the spade held the middle. The windows were little more than portholes; she had nothing to fear through them.

She ate a few mouthfuls of food and drank a cup of cold milk, for she lighted no fire, and, when night came, no candle, but crept with her baby to bed.

What woke her? The wonder was that she had slept: she had not meant to, but she was young, very young. Perhaps the shrinking of the galvanized roof—yet hardly, that was too usual. Something had set her heart beating wildly, and the very air she breathed seemed fraught with terrible danger, but she lay quite still—only she put her other arm over her baby. Then she had both round it, and she prayed: "Little baby—little baby—don't wake!"

She saw one of the open cracks, quite close to where she lay, darken with a shadow—for the moon's rays shone on that side. Then a protesting growl reached her; and she could fancy she heard the man turn hastily: she plainly heard the thud of something striking the dog's ribs, and the long, flying strides of the animal as it howled and ran. Still watching, she saw the shadow darken every crack along the wall: she knew by the sounds that the man was trying every position that might help him to see in; but how much he saw she could not tell. She thought of doing many things that might deceive him into the idea that she was not alone, but the sound of her voice would wake baby, and, as though that were the only danger that threatened her, she dreaded it. If baby cried she felt as if she, in turn, must betray her weakness, and instinctively cry to her protector, fifteen miles away. So she prayed: "Little baby, don't wake! don't cry!"

Very stealthily the man crept about. She knew he had his boots off, because of the vibration that his feet caused as he walked along the veranda, gauging the width of the little window in her room and the resistance of the front door. Then he went to the other end, and the uncertainty of what he might be doing was fearful: she had felt safer, far safer, while he was close, and she could watch and listen. But now! Oh, God! it was terrible. She felt she must watch, and again the great fear of wakening baby assailed her. And there was another thing: on that side of the house one of the slabs had shrunk in length as well as in width, and had once fallen out. It was held in position only by a wedge of wood underneath. What if he should discover that! The uncertainty increased her terror. She felt she must rise: and now, how she prayed as she

gently raised herself with her little one in her arms, held tightly to her breast!

The vital parts in her child's body she tried to shield with her hands and arms as she thought of the knife: even its little feet she covered with its white gown, and baby never murmured—it liked to be held so. Noiselessly she crossed to the other side, and stood where she could see and hear, but not be seen. He was trying every slab, and was very near to that with the wedge under it. Then, even while hoping, she saw him find it; and heard the sound of the knife as bit by bit he began to cut away the wooden barrier.

She waited still, with her baby pressed tightly to her; though she knew that in another few minutes this man with the cruel eyes, lascivious mouth and gleaming knife would be able to enter. One side of the slab tilted; there was nothing to do now but cut away the remaining little end, when the slab, unless he held it, would fall inside or out; and then——

She heard his jerked breathing as it kept time with the cuts of the knife, and heard the brush of his clothes as they rubbed the walls with his movements, for she was so still and quiet that she did not even tremble. And she knew when he ceased, and wondered why. She stood well concealed; she knew he could not see her and that he would not fear if he did; yet she heard him move cautiously away. Perhaps he expected the slab to fall. Still his motive puzzled her: his retreat was a pretence, she felt sure; and she moved even closer and bent her body the better to listen. Ah! what sound was that? "Listen! Listen!" she bade her heart—her heart that had kept so still hitherto, but now bounded with tumultuous throbs that dulled her ears. Nearer and nearer came the sounds, till the welcome thud of horse's hoofs rang out clearly.

"Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!" she cried: for they were very close before she could make sure, and then there was the door so locked and barred with many bars. The age it took to tear away its fastenings!

Out she darted at last, and, tearing madly along, saw the horseman far beyond her in the distance. She called to him in Christ's name, in her babe's name, still flying like the wind with the speed that deadly peril sends; but the distance grew greater and greater between them, and when she reached the creek her prayers turned to wild shrieks, for there crouched the man she feared, with outstretched hands that had caught her ere she saw him. She knew he was offering terms if she ceased to struggle and cry for help, though louder and louder did she cry for it; but it was only when

the man's hand gripped her throat that the cry of "Murder!" came from her lips; and when she fell the startled curlews took up the awful sound, and flew over the horseman's head shrieking "M-u-r-d-e-r! M-u-r-d-e-r! M-u-r-d-e-r!"

"By God!" said the boundary rider, "it's been a dingo right enough. Eight killed up here, and there's more down in the creek—a ewe and lamb, I'll bet; and the lamb's alive." And he shut out the sky with his hand and watched the crows that were circling round and round, nearing the earth one moment and the next shooting skyward. By that he knew the lamb must be alive. Even a dog will spare a lamb sometimes.

Yes, the lamb was alive, and after the manner of lambs of its age did not know its mother when the light came. It had sucked the still warm breasts and laid its little head on her bosom and slept till morn; then when the wee one looked at the swollen, disfigured face with the starting eyes and clenched teeth that had bitten through the tongue and stained the bodice crimson, it wept and would have crept away but for the hand that still clutched its little gown. Sleep was nodding its golden head and swaying its small body, and the crows were close, so close, to the other's wide-open eyes when the boundary rider galloped down. He reeled in his saddle when he saw the two, and, covering his eyes, cried, "Jesus Christ!" And he told afterwards how the little child held out its arms to him, and how he was forced to cut the portion of its gown that the dead hand held.

A few miles farther down the creek a man kept throwing an old cap into the water. The dog would bring it out and lay it on the opposite side from where the man stood, but would not allow the man to catch him, though it was only to wash the blood of the sheep from his mouth and throat, for the sight of blood made the man tremble.

But the dog also was guilty.

[From *The Bulletin Story Book*, 1901.]

MOTHER QUINLAN'S WEANER

By MRS CAMPBELL PRAED

MRS QUINLAN was the most respectable shanty-keeper on the Leura. She called her public-house an hotel—the Quinlan's Rest—and elevated her trade almost to the rank of a moral profession. For if she did not exactly encourage total abstinence, she preached moderation with a fervour highly meritorious in one who made her living mainly by the sale of alcoholic liquors. At her bar, customers were not poisoned with snake-juice—otherwise rum adulterated with paraffin and other noxious admixtures. She had also scruples of conscience about “lambing down” the shepherds or shearers who brought her their cheques and announced their intention of “going on the burst”. Mrs Quinlan would take the cheque, but when she considered that the burst had lasted long enough, she would return the balance of the cheque and send the delinquent away with a good deal of sound advice. If he were a bad case he would take the remainder of his money half a mile along the road to the Coffin-lid, where Fitch, the proprietor, was not troubled by scruples of any sort. Very shortly afterwards, the unfortunate drunkard would be driven thence, penniless and in a state of incipient *delirium tremens* to die in the bush or get better as it might come about. To the ones who didn't die, Dr Rowth generally played the good Samaritan. He had a knack of discovering boozers, in a condition of “rattiness”, when he made short cuts through the gum trees to visit outlying patients. Under Dr Rowth's wholesome treatment, which also at the end consisted of a certain amount of sound advice, such a rescued boozer would find the finish up of his burst more advantageous than its beginning. When the boozer happened to be a gentleman, the doctor usually put him in charge of Mrs Quinlan, who admitted him into what the roughs styled her “Weaners' Paddock”, and often accomplished his complete reformation. Mrs Quinlan was a small, determined and ambitious little woman, originally of the servant class, who had been excessively pretty in her youth and was still of pleasing appear-

ance. As her husband who was dead had been a handsome Irishman, it was not surprising that her daughters should be famed along the river for their good looks. Indeed, there was no doubt that the attractions of Mrs Quinlan's daughters caused a number of the Leura squatters—especially the single ones—to put up at Quinlan's Rest, and the hotel was a favourite resort with all the better class Leura residents whenever there were races or other festivities going on at Gundabine.

Mrs Quinlan was not absolutely dependent upon her hotel business, though its profits constituted by far the largest part of her income. Mr Quinlan had begun life on the Leura as a combined carrier and free-selector, and the old Selection homestead lay behind the Rest. When she had been left a widow with two pretty daughters to educate and advance in the world, Mrs Quinlan had started the shanty as a more paying means of livelihood. It was ill-naturedly said along the river that she had chosen this investment because it afforded opportunities for marrying her daughters into a sphere above that of their parents, and that her Weaners' Paddock had been started with the same ulterior object. It was certain that Mrs Quinlan, who perhaps remembered her days of service in "good families", had an immense desire that her daughters should become the wives of gentlemen. One of them had realized her mother's ambition; the other seemed to be in a fair way of doing so.

Gundabine, the bush township in which stood Quinlan's Rest, was also the terminus of a railway line from the coast that had some time been in process of construction. Thus, part of the township had been in a sense migratory, for, as the railway was laid, people belonging to it packed up their zinc houses and carried them along with them to the next stage. That is the way some townships get built in Australia. The original Gundabine had been a sheep-station, and, when the scab came into the district, a boiling-down place. From that it became a nest of small selectors. Houses gradually arose in the forest clearings, and all about were green patches of sorghum, sugar-cane and Indian corn. The railway terminus stopped short of the Selectors' Settlement, and the new town of Gundabine was one long zinc street of Noah's Ark-shaped tenements. Some of these were beginning to look homely now that native cucumber and passion vines had had time to grow over the bough shades which surrounded most of them. Five or six of the zinc houses were grog shanties but of a very different type from Quinlan's Rest, and were frequented by a more rowdy order of customer.

Out of the gum and gidia forest came a dusty track, and after

winding through the zinc township and the Selectors' Settlement, returned again into the forest, where it lost itself a great many miles away in the lower gullies of the Razorback Range. At certain seasons of the year many a carrier's bullock-dray would trail along the track, bearing a mountain of wool bales and with the carrier's family residing under a tilt on top of the wool bales. Twenty lean bullocks, more or less, would drag the combined load—a sorry spectacle with their heads bent under the yokes, their tongues lolling and dripping saliva into the dust. The carrier would draw up at one or other of the shanties, according to the measure of his own and their respectability, and finally would wheel off into a paddock where the family would bide for the night.

Twice a day a train would steam into the township, and twice a day it would go out again. One had stopped just now under the wayside shed which was politely called the terminus. The shed was built on a site of the old boiling-down place, in a deserted sheep-yard. Still a faint stench came from the great rusty pots lying on their sides in a patch of fat-hen plants, and in the air were the gritty feel and the odour of sun-dried sheep's droppings. Backwards and sideways stretched the endless bush—dreary vistas of gaunt eucalyptus trees. Some were iron-barks from which the red gum oozed in great blobs like thickened blood, and some were white gums, leprous-spotted and scaly, with bare limbs up to their crown of scant, grey-green foliage. Underneath the gums grew wiry grass tussocks, and here and there stood a slab hut with its walls bleached a corpse-like grey. Just round the railway station gleamed the zinc roofs of the new township. Beyond, on a slight rise, lay the Selectors' Settlement—a number of grey humpies—grey with the weather-beaten greyness of unpainted wood, standing each in its own cleared paddock, with weird-looking skeletons of "rung" trees and rows of bleached stumps sticking up, where the trees had been felled and carted away for firewood. On the outskirts of the Settlement were a new store—the latest advance mark of civilization—and the Coffin-lid Hotel—the rowdiest in the place. Further along the road stood a rather picturesque two-storied house, with verandas going all round it and a sign on the balcony which had "Quinlan's Rest" painted on it. Creepers grew up the side verandas. On the front one opened the bar, and here lounged bushmen and loafers of a more respectable type than the roughs who frequented the Coffin-lid—but perhaps that was not saying much. This afternoon a bullock dray was drawn up in front of it, and the language in the bar veranda sounded freer than usual. At least so Mrs Quinlan

seemed to think, for she came out and administered a sharp rebuke to the offenders.

"I'm not going to have my daughter's ears polluted with that sort of talk," said she. "There's some of you have had quite enough grog, and if they fancy they haven't, well then they'd better go over to the Coffin-lid and ask Fitch to supply them. He'll be very pleased to sell his snake-juice, I make no doubt."

There was rivalry between the Coffin-lid and the Rest—contemptuous on Mother Quinlan's part, malicious on that of Mr Fitch, who liked nothing better than to get hold of one of Mother Quinlan's weaners, and destroy the fruit of her benevolent attempts at breaking them off the bottle.

One or two "bushies" in the veranda took the landlady's hint, and unbuckling their horses' bridles from the hook on the veranda posts, lunched on to their saddles and galloped away in the direction of the township and the Coffin-lid. Others merely indulged in ribald laughter or tried to cheek the landlady. One called out, "You look after your pet weaner, Mother Quinlan, and leave us alone." But on the whole the landlady's remonstrances had a subduing effect upon the little crowd at the shanty.

Hither from the station, where he had stepped out of the train, came a gentleman, evidently a stranger in Gundabine. He had new-chum written on every line of him and especially in the make of his clothes. He was not, however, the ordinary young jackeroo on his way to do Colonial experience on one of the Leura stations. This man was by no means young. He had neatly-clipped, old-fashioned iron-grey whiskers and the smooth-shaven legal mouth. His type was that of the trusted family lawyer in a small provincial town. He did not look very strong and the dust made by the bullocks caused him to cough. Behind him walked old beary-eyed King Mongo carrying a Gladstone bag, on which might have been read the name "H. Blandy".

King Mongo called out—

"All right! Stop long-a this place. That one hotel belonging old Mother Quinlan. Now you gib-it King Mongo shilling! My word! this fella swag plenty heavy."

King Mongo, with much groaning, deposited the Gladstone bag on the edge of the veranda and held out his black hand for the shilling.

Mr Blandy surveyed the loafers on the veranda with a stiff and somewhat disapproving air. A bushman whose legs dangled over the edge of the veranda, and who was chewing a quid of tobacco, remarked, "Day, bloke!"

"Good-day—sir," returned Mr Blandy, formally. "Perhaps you will have the goodness to tell me if this is Mrs Quinlan's Hotel?"

"Right you are, mate," said another. "We mostly call it Quinlan's Shanty."

"And perhaps you can still further inform me," pursued Mr Blandy, politely, "whether a gentleman of the name of Mandan—Mr Robert Mandan—is now to be found in the hotel?"

The bushman looked puzzled. "Mr Robert Mandan!" he repeated. Then a light seemed to dawn upon him. "Oh! it's Soaking-Bob you're talking about, I expect—Mother Quinlan's pet weaner. I dunno if he's inside." The man shifted his quid and addressed a stockman from the Upper Leura, who was mounting his horse at the end of the veranda.

"Say, Boggo Bill, the Weaner was down at your camp last evening, wasn't he? D' ye know if he's inside now?"

Boggo Bill smiled a queer smile, but did not answer.

"What's up with the Weaner, then?" struck in a squat selector. "I was after my milkers this morning at daylight, when I came on him down by the creek dead asleep and pretty white about the gills, as if he'd been making a night of it. But I know for certain he hasn't touched a drop since he took the pledge five months ago."

"Garn!" cried another. "I saw him roarin' drunk at the Coffin-lid last night."

Mr Blandy shuddered visibly.

"Faix! if that's the way of it, it ud be bekase Nora Quinlan has chucked him for Misther Thompson," said an Irishman, expectorating into the dust at Mr Blandy's feet. "I saw the pair of them riding a while ago—she and Misther Thompson I mane—and a foine handsome pair they were."

"He's a well-set-up chap is young Thompson, and it would be a grand match for Miss Nora if she can bring him to scratch this time," said another man on the veranda.

The face of Mr Blandy, who with legal instinct had been listening attentively to the conversation, gave sign of relief. The first speaker, however, differed from the one who had last advanced an opinion.

"Thompson hasn't got the style of the Weaner," said he. "Stands to reason them chaps that have been all over the world and had an English eddication must get a sort of pull over us bushies—not but what Thompson has got advantages, and they always said that Nora Quinlan was in love with him before ever she set eyes on the Weaner."

The man lowered his voice and cast an apprehensive glance backward at the bar, where a brisk business appeared to be going on

under the supervision of Mrs Quinlan. These remarks had reached the widow's ears, however, and she pounced out on the group like an irritated bird.

"Who's daring to tell lies about my daughter? Shut up, Mick Rooney, and be careful the rest of you, how you make free with a lady's name. I'm not going to have that sort of talk in my veranda. Have any of you seen Mandan about? He hasn't turned up this morning."

The selector did not repeat his tale, nor did Boggo Bill deliver any information; but Mr Blandy pressed forward, having thrown King Mongo his shilling, and repeated to Mrs Quinlan the question he had asked previously.

"Mandan—yes, of course, Mr Robert Mandan is staying here. You'll step in and see him, sir, and perhaps you'd like some refreshment while you are waiting," replied the landlady.

Mr Blandy intimated that he did not imbibe spirituous liquors, but that he would like a cup of tea, and Mrs Quinlan convoyed him to a parlour along the further veranda, whither, at her request, one of the rouseabouts outside the bar carried the Gladstone bag. The landlady asked the rouseabout to look round and see if he could find Mandan.

"All right, Mother Quinlan, I'll go and yard up your Weaner," cheerfully responded the rouseabout as he departed, at which Mr Blandy, looking at his hostess with an expression of faint horror and mystification on his face inquired—

"But why—the Weaner?"

Mrs Quinlan laughed.

"It's only the doctor's chaff," she said. "And the men have picked it up. I've been getting Bobby Mandan off the bottle."

"Oh dear, oh, dear!" exclaimed Mr Blandy. "I'm afraid from what I've gleaned that he has fallen into the bad habit of intemperance."

"Like most of those I've had to deal with," frankly replied Mrs Quinlan—"though you see that's all in the way of business. But it doesn't follow, Mr——"

"Blandy," said the lawyer.

"It doesn't follow that I want all the young men who drink my grog to make beasts of themselves."

"I hope that my friend Mandan hasn't made a beast of himself?" said Mr Blandy, sipping his cup of strong tea.

"Not as bad as some. But you know how it is with these wild young English gentlemen who've been bad hats at home and were shipped off by their relations to become worse ones out here. They

can't stand the roughing it, and their stomachs rebel against the salt junk and damper. So they take to nipping to get an appetite and blunt themselves to their surroundings. That's how it begins—and it ends——” Mrs Quinlan made a dramatic gesture with her bird-like hands—“well, it ends where Bobby Mandan was when I took him up and weaned him. And I can tell you,” she added, “I'm proud of my work.”

“I am sure that you have been very kind to Mandan,” said Mr Blandy, affably, “and I should really be extremely glad of any information you can give me about his habits and circumstances. The fact is, I've come here to see him about a—a family matter—and it's as well to learn first what he's doing with himself.”

Mrs Quinlan eyed Mr Blandy circumspectly.

“Anybody in Gundabine will tell you what he's been doing,” said she, “so there's no use my hiding anything. But I'd like to know whether what you've come about is to his advantage.”

“Very much to his advantage,” said Mr Blandy. “But you will understand that I am not at liberty to talk about it until I have seen Mandan himself.”

“That's natural. It occurs to me that maybe it's his aunt who's sent you out.”

The old gentleman seemed a little puzzled. “His aunt, you said?”

“Bobby told me he'd got an aunt who'd promised to send him five thousand pounds if he'd give up his roving life and settle down and marry respectably.”

“Ah, so!” murmured the lawyer, in a noncommittal manner.

“I asked Bobby why he didn't claim the promise,” went on Mrs Quinlan, “and at first he laughed at the idea. ‘A pretty fellow I should be to get married,’ said he. That was just after he'd come to me. . . . But you know, Mr Blandy, a young man marrying in Australia can make a very fair beginning on five thousand pounds—especially if there's a little bit on the other side to put to it. Besides, there might be more where that came from.”

“Just so,” returned Mr Blandy.

“That was what I said to Bobby, and seeing you, I supposed he'd come round to my idea. I daresay he thought it more delicate to say nothing to me till he'd got his capital out here. But now that you've come out about it——”

“Oh, not exactly.” Mr Blandy looked grave. “There are other things as well. . . . Regarding our friend to whom you have been so kind?”

“Well, I don't mind saying that we've done a good bit for Bobby—my daughter Nora and myself,” pursued Mrs Quinlan. “You'll

see my Nora by-and-by, Mr Blandy. I've only got the two. Her sister's married and lives like a lady on the Mackay. Her husband's a planter—and comes of a very good English family. He's to take her a trip Home next year. You know I never let my daughters go into the bar. Nora's mostly at the Selection, and if she's here in the daytime—as she was this morning—she stops at the back and does her writing and sewing. She used to keep the books before I gave them over to my Weaner."

"Ah, Mr Mandan is in your employment then?" A peculiar smile curled Mr Blandy's thin lips.

"It was this way," related Mrs Quinlan. "I daresay you may hear bad stories outside about his former habits, but you can take it as truth what I tell you. Bobby—Soaking Bobby was his first nickname—and he did soak. I'm not denying it—well, he came down here in rather flash style with a good bit of money in his pocket that he'd made up country. It was a pity he went first to the Coffinlid, for he lost the whole lot of it, shouting all round and being taken advantage of by Fitch. He came down at last to cleaning the boots, and then when he got too 'ratty' for that he was turned out to the bush. Dr Rowth got hold of him and brought him to my weaning paddock. We nursed him through a bad bout of D.T. and got him round in time. Of course I could tell at once he was a gentleman—in fact, he let out some things when he was raving that he's denied since—but I keep my own opinion for all that. However he's knocked about the world, has Bobby Mandan, and knows bush work, besides a lot of other things. So I put him on to the Selection—breaking new milkers first, and after that I set him making up my books. For I'm not a hand at writing as my girls are. I hadn't the education I've given them——" Mrs Quinlan rambled on. Mr Blandy interrupted her.

"And how long has Mandan been here?"

"Close on eight months, I should say. That was all before Nora came home. She never saw him when he was bad, and he's been going on first rate for a good while now. I weaned him down to three nobblers a day, and after that I saw he'd be better for taking the pledge—he's one of those that can't stand the taste of grog without going too far in it. So now I've got him to swear off drink entirely."

"You appear to have acted in a most disinterested manner considering your line of business," remarked Mr Blandy.

Mrs Quinlan smiled and preened her small, bird-like head. She had a little aquiline nose and something of the air of a pertinacious magpie.

"That's what other people tell me, Mr Blandy," said she. "But I'm a mother, you know, and Bobby Mandan hasn't cared to hide from me that he's got a very strong reason for wanting to keep straight."

"I trust that his strong reason is not the desire to marry your daughter, Mrs Quinlan," said Mr Blandy deliberately.

"And why not, if you please?" said Mrs Quinlan, bridling indignantly. "You wouldn't want to hint, I suppose, that my daughter isn't good enough for the likes of him? Why, she might marry a deal better than that any day. I could name a squatter on the Leura—who's down in Gundabine at this very moment—just eating his heart for my Nora—a squatter with ten thousand head of cattle, a good position and a trip to England to offer her. . . . Besides," she added virtuously, "if it's true—which I can scarcely believe—that Bobby Mandan was at the Coffin-lid last night, broken out again—it isn't likely that I should want him for a son-in-law. I shouldn't be surprised if my girl was to come and tell me she'd changed her mind—"

Mrs Quinlan paused suddenly. A step had sounded on the veranda outside, and now a man's form blocked the doorway. The man stood there for an instant before coming into the room, and Mr Blandy, looking up, saw with a little shock of surprise the man whom he had come from England to find.

A man of about thirty, handsome and with the unmistakable stamp of good birth. A man with tragic brows, dark eyes that had a queer, thirsty gleam in them, an idealist's forehead, a refined face, on which hard living had made marks, and the beauty of which was otherwise marred by a rather underhung mouth and retreating chin. Nevertheless, Mr Blandy decided, a man with whom the landlady's daughter might very easily have fallen in love.

"One of the fellows told me I was wanted, Mrs Quinlan," said the newcomer, irritably, and not appearing to recognize Mr Blandy. "I was down at the Selection looking for Nora. Where is she?"

"She's gone for a ride with Mr Thompson," answered the landlady, and looked meaningly at the young man. Mandan's tone had been reckless and there was something blustering and ominous in his air. Mrs Quinlan felt sure from his appearance that she had been told the truth and that he had broken his pledge.

"What the devil does Nora—?" began Mandan, beside himself with jealous rage, but Mrs Quinlan stopped him in dignified anger.

"You'll please not to take liberties with my daughter's name before strangers, Mr Mandan," said she. "At least," she added, turning affably to Mr Blandy, "this gentleman was a stranger to me when he introduced himself, though he says he's acquainted with

you, and that he's over from England to see you on a matter of family business. Perhaps I can give a guess at that," pursued the landlady, "but I'd like you to understand that if my 'weaners' choose to go and disgrace themselves at the Coffin-lid they've got to take the consequences."

Mandan glared at her with savage dark eyes, too intent upon what was in his own mind to pay any attention to Mr Blandy.

"So that's what you meant when I heard you say just now that Nora might change her mind. But I'll not believe it—I'll never believe it," he cried passionately, "never until I hear it from her very own lips."

"I didn't say she had changed her mind. It all depends on how you behave yourself," returned Mother Quinlan, in a more conciliatory tone. "Now you'd better see what news Mr Blandy has brought you. Anyway, I'll leave you to talk it over together, for I can't trust that barman the instant me back is turned."

"Blandy!" exclaimed Mandan, in supreme astonishment. "Man, I didn't know you."

"I'm ten years older, my lord, than when we last met," said the lawyer, imperturbably.

"My lord! What in Heaven's name do you mean? And what has brought you here?"

"I have come to inform you, my lord, of your cousin, Lord Lassendale's death," replied the lawyer solemnly.

"My lord again! Blandy, I've got a beast of a head today. . . . Truth is, I made rather free with the liquor last night."

"I'm sorry to hear that, my lord."

"What I want to convey to you is that I'm not in a temper to stand being made the subject of a practical joke. What is my cousin's death to me? He had two boys."

"They were killed in the South African war. I wonder you did not see it in the papers. You are now the only representative in the world, so far as I know, of the old family."

"Is that true? Then I—I——"

"You are the Earl of Lassendale. . . . You must not be the last earl, if you will forgive me for saying so, my lord."

"Oh, my heavens!" Mandan leaned heavily against the table, making Mr Blandy's tray clatter.

"Give me a cup of tea, Blandy—it will steady my nerves. No, no, don't call for another cup. I don't want the old woman in again. Give me yours, and let me have it strong, please, and no milk. . . . You're a teetotaller, I suppose, Blandy."

"Both from principle and inclination," returned Mr Blandy. "I wish——"

"You wish I were too. Well, I haven't been—since last night. I'd been one before then for close on five months. Now the beast's broken loose again, Blandy. If I were to give way an inch I should be in the grip of the drink-fiend again. Do you know that I have the most hideous desire tearing at me this very moment—a most uncontrollable desire to get drunk—beastly drunk, do you hear?"

Mandan gulped off the cup of almost black liquid, put it on the table and glared at the lawyer with bloodshot eyes.

"I hear, and I'm sorry for it, my lord. But surely this great change in your prospects——"

"Look here, don't you 'my lord' me any more for the present, and don't say a word of this to anybody here. I suppose you didn't tell Mother Quinlan."

"No, I did not. I may perhaps remark, my lord, that I have in the course of my professional career acquired a small amount of discretion."

The young man burst into a peal of harsh laughter. "You've taken the old woman's measure, I see. She's not a bad sort, though. I suppose she told you I was one of her weaners. Her weaners are mostly gentlemen. She's got a craze for sons-in-law of birth. She married her other daughter to a rattling good fellow, with money, family, and just one weakness—like me. He was a weaner too. Somehow, Mrs Quinlan has found out that I can lay my hand on five thou. any time I choose to write a penitent letter to old Aunt Mary—a thing I'm never likely to do. But the old woman has guessed that I've a streak of blue blood in my veins and she honours the British aristocracy—was kitchen-maid once I believe in a lord's house. As you said of yourself, Blandy, she has acquired in the exercise of her profession a certain amount of shrewdness, and though I've denied for all I'm worth the imputation of being a decent catch—— By the way, Blandy, how much am I worth?"

Mr Blandy calculated mentally. "I should say, my lord, on a rough estimate, about twenty thousand a year."

"Twenty thousand a year! Enough to make a woman comfortable upon—eh! Mind you, Blandy, not a word! Though, as I said, I've declined to make any confidences about my prospects, old Mother Quinlan seems to think I might do for a son-in-law unless someone better turns up. But Nora is not like that. You haven't seen her yet. Wait till you do. I tell you she's a ripper. There's nobody in the world like her. Directly I saw her she put a spell on me. . . . I can't tell you why it is, and I don't imagine a withered old stick like

you could ever have the faintest notion of what it means to be in love with a woman as I'm in love with Nora. And a shanty-keeper's daughter! Think of that. The Countess of Lassendale a shanty-keeper's daughter! Great Scott! What a joke it will be! But then that's Australia, Blandy—a land of big, grim jokes, and this is the biggest and grimmest joke of all!"

"My lord, it seems to me that you are talking very wildly. Pray, pray calm your excitement—which is natural, of course. But really, my lord, the very best thing you can do is to come along in the train with me back to Townsville."

"The very best thing you can do, Blandy, is to start off by the next train yourself and leave me to mind my own business. I shall feel much more comfortable when you're out of the place. No offence, Blandy. The train ought to go in half an hour, but trains are a bit casual at Gundabine. You be off. You'll get a much better dinner at the Queen's Hotel in Townsville than you'll get here."

"I will, of course, relieve you of my presence if you insist upon my doing so," said Mr Blandy, with a perturbed rather than an offended air. "But excuse me, my lord. I cannot help feeling that you are hardly in a fit state of mind to be left. You might bind yourself in some way that you would hereafter bitterly regret."

"Look here," said Mandan, abruptly. "I'm my own master, I suppose?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr Blandy.

"Then no damned shepherding for me, do you understand?" He laughed again unpleasantly. "I'll settle my affairs here without your assistance—just at present. No doubt I shall be glad of your legal advice later. But now I've got business to do that's not in your line. I'd cut along to the station if I were you. There isn't too much time."

Mr Blandy rose. "As your lordship pleases." The lawyer took up some papers he had put on the table, but which his client had not even noticed. Mandan exclaimed—

"There's no gammon about all this, is there? If I've got all that money, I should like some at once."

Mr Blandy pulled forth a pocket-book from which he extracted a roll of bank-notes.

"I am, of course, empowered to supply your lordship with such cash as you may require for your immediate needs."

He began counting a roll of notes. Mandan laughed disagreeably.

"Ah, I was wondering if you happened to be carrying some incontrovertible proof of that kind that this news of yours isn't a Coffin-lid hallucination."

Mr Blandy hesitated as he stood fingering the notes. Again he protested that he did not like going—that it was his duty to see his lordship through.

“Bosh!” said Mandan, curtly. “Wait for me at Townsville. I’ll wire when I’m coming. How much have you there?” The younger man held out his hand.

“Four fifties, my lord.”

“All right. Now hurry up. I daresay you think this is a curmudgeonly way of treating a chap who has come fourteen thousand miles to give me a bit of good news. I’ll make up to you for it by-and-by if things go right with me. And if they don’t—well, I suppose you can send in a bill for expenses any way. Don’t bother about the score. Tea doesn’t cost much here. I’ll settle with Mother Quinlan. Where’s your bag?”

He took up the Gladstone, to Mr Blandy’s discomfiture.

“I really couldn’t think of allowing your lordship——”

“Oh preserve us! Didn’t I tell you not to lordship me here? My heaven! I’ve humped my own swag through the bush and chopped wood for my tucker. It isn’t so long since I was cleaning boots at the Coffin-lid.”

Mrs Quinlan stopped them as they went along the veranda.

“We’re not on the bolt,” said Mandan. “The tea can go on to my score. He’s going back to Townsville. I’m stopping here till I’ve seen Nora;” then he added in a lower tone, “Has she come in from her ride yet?”

“She’s coming now, don’t you see her?” returned Mother Quinlan, pointing down the road to a man and woman on horseback who were riding towards the shanty. “My word, that’s a fine thoroughbred Mr Thompson is on!” she added. “He’ll be after improving the Leura breed.”

Mr Thompson was a fair, good-looking bushman, got up in dandified fashion, and the way he greeted the manager of the Australian Consolidated Bank, who was passing in his buggy at the moment, suggested a good balance to his credit. Mandan scowled as he looked at his rival. He took off his hat to the girl and she gave him a swift glance from a pair of large, bright Irish eyes, then inclined her head in a rather distant manner.

“Now you see my daughter!” said Mrs Quinlan, proudly turning to Mr Blandy; “and I’ll ask you if there’s a prettier girl in the old country than herself?”

Mr Blandy admitted that it would be difficult to find in any part of the globe a more attractive young lady than Miss Quinlan, and remarked how well she rode.

"She can back anything that ever was foaled. There's not a seat on horseback as elegant as hers—not even Mrs Vallis's, whose father was a master of hounds in the shires and she almost bred in the saddle. But my Nora can best her anyhow."

Certainly Miss Nora Quinlan was a most striking-looking young woman, and reluctantly Mr Blandy had to acknowledge to himself that she would not disgrace the coronet of the Lassendales should Fate ordain that she was to wear it. She had a graceful, sinuous figure, a brilliant complexion, a quantity of wavy dark hair, and those blue Irish eyes, thickly fringed with up-curling black lashes. She rode quite slowly when she passed the veranda, as if to give Mr Blandy full opportunity to observe her charms. Her horse curveted under the curb, so displaying her figure to its fullest advantage. One most noticeable thing about her was the curious, snake-like fascination in the set of her head and the fixed look in her eyes. There are women who suggest the serpent, and she was one of them. Mr Blandy could hardly wonder, now that he beheld Nora Quinlan, at Mandan's infatuation. As for Mr Thompson, he was manifestly triumphant and adoring. When they got abreast of the veranda, Miss Quinlan backed her horse across the road almost on to its haunches, and waved her hand to Mr Thompson in a gesture calculated to exhilarate a favoured suitor and infuriate a disdained one.

"Who loves me, follows me!" she cried in novelette style, and spurring her horse to a bound, leaped the three-rail fence like a bird on the wing and went galloping down the paddock. Mr Thompson followed her gallantly.

Mandan was white and his eyes gave an ominous gleam. . . . He chucked Mr Blandy's bag over the veranda edge to King Mongo, who was still loafing round, while Mrs Quinlan endeavoured to extract some information from the lawyer.

"It's a shame to be going off so soon, but we'll see you again maybe," she said. "And I hope, Mr Blandy, that you brought some good news to my weaner."

Mr Blandy was silent and looked embarrassed. Mother Quinlan tapped Mandan sharply on the arm. "Well, and what news did he bring you? Nora will be wanting to know."

"I'll tell Nora myself," returned Mandan, in savage accents. "Good-bye, Blandy. You'll hear from me in a day or two."

Later on, Nora Quinlan stood by the creek in the Selection with Lord Lassendale—only she had not the faintest idea that he was Lord Lassendale—listening to his passionate explanation of his lapse from temperance the evening before. As she listened, she pulled off slowly

one by one some of the fluffy yellow balls from a branch of flowering wattle that hung down near her. She was in her riding habit still, but had taken off her hat. She had never looked handsomer, and what with drink and jealousy, the man's whole being was aflame. When he paused for a moment, she looked up at him from under her black, up-curling lashes with her curious, snake-like gaze, which seemed to draw the heart out of him.

"I could never marry anyone who drinks too much," she said.

"I was tricked," he cried. "It was a plant to destroy me."

"Tricked! I don't know what you mean."

"You ought to know. The blame of it is mostly on you. For the last two or three weeks—since that fellow Thompson came along—you've been cooling off me, Nora. I've felt it. It's driven me nearly mad. I didn't believe you were a flirt, though they told me so. I believed, that you cared for me. . . . Anyhow, you let me think it. And now, you don't seem to want me near you. You wouldn't speak to me yesterday. I was beside myself—ready to gamble, fight—anything. That's how I came to be among that rowdy lot at Boggo Bill's camp. And then— Upon my soul, I'd almost swear Boggo Bill was bribed to doctor my tea and put the hell-fire taste into my mouth again."

She drew back with a gesture of disdain.

"You don't know what you're saying. Who bribed Boggo Bill?"

"That scoundrel Thompson. He wanted to make me disgrace myself so that you should be set against me."

"Mr Thompson is a well-known squatter on the Leura," said she coldly. "He's a gentleman."

"And I—oh Lord! oh Lord! I'm not a gentleman! Look at me, Nora. Do you mean to tell me that I'm not a gentleman?"

She looked at him in a slow, compelling way.

"I thought you were when I first knew you, and mother has always declared that you come of a good family. But I think you must have forgotten it at the Coffin-lid yesterday," she said calmly.

"Yes, you're right. I did forget it. I got caught in a trap. . . . And who laid the trap for me? Didn't I say that Boggo Bill was bribed to do it? Boggo Bill put bad grog into my tea to begin with, and let the devil loose on me. Nora, you don't understand these things—and yet you ought, since your mother keeps a grog shanty. It's exactly as if a devil dogged one, waiting his chance to get possession of one. . . . Or as if the devil had been asleep and you thought he was dead—until something—something that hit one hard, waked the fiend up again. There are lots of men like me—born with a curse, or the disease or whatever you like to call it. Only one thing

will ever keep such men straight, and that is caring for a woman who cares enough for them to help them conquer that devil. You could do it. I knew from the first that you could make anything you chose of me. . . . It's the look in your eyes. . . . It's a sort of quiet power you've got. . . . Nora, don't you believe me?"

"No. And you don't seem to believe it yourself either, judging from your behaviour in the Coffin-lid last night," she answered with a little scornful laugh.

"Nora, forgive me, I was mad, I tell you—mad with jealousy and—and the other thing. Boggo Bill had been saying that Thompson was giving himself out as engaged to you. Bill said he'd seen him kissing you down here by the creek. I couldn't stand that. I flung the lie in the man's face. Nora, tell me that I was right."

She did not answer. Something in her eyes made him go close to her, and putting his hand on her shoulder, he said, in hoarse accents—

"Nora, you know how I love you. You've got a fascination for me that's stronger than myself. When you're out of my sight it's as if a chain was pulling me. When I can't speak to you or touch your hand, I'm like a thirsting beast with a fence between me and water. When you let me kiss you as you did, not so very long ago—and you said then you loved me back—oh, then you send me to heaven, Nora . . . and for days and days I can feel the touch of your lips on my mouth. . . . And when you're cold and cruel to me—like yesterday—well, then, I'm down in hell. . . . Lord! I'm a weak fool, I know, but I can't get away from it. Why should I have this crave for you—you—Nora Quinlan—a shanty-keeper's daughter?"

"You needn't insult me," she said.

"Is it insulting you to tell you that if you were a duke's daughter I couldn't respect you more or worship you more than I do? All the same, it's one of those queer infatuations no man can account for. One of those unholy jokes—as I was saying to Blandy a little while ago—that this grim old bush is continually playing on us who live in it. . . . But look here, Nora, you've been brutally frank with me and I'll be frank with you. You're not the type of woman I should once naturally have expected to marry—"

"Not good enough for you, perhaps," she sneered.

He laughed. "Maybe not in one sense. A thousand times too good for me in another. What I meant was that you're not one of the kind of women I was brought up amongst and modelled my idea of my wife upon. . . . That's the joke of it—a glorious joke! How you will laugh over it yourself by-and-by! Nora, the one essential thing

is, do you care for me? Will you marry me—now—straight away, and leave this place?"

"Leave this place!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, say good-bye to the bush and start a new life—with me?"

"What sort of life?" she asked with a faint show of interest.

"That doesn't matter just at present. Trust me for its being a jolly one. Trust me—trust me, Nora. I can tell you that you would be richly rewarded."

"Ah! should I? That's just the thing. But there! What's the use of talking nonsense?"

She drew her shoulder back, releasing herself from his touch. Her shrinking movement incensed him. He caught her two hands, which were still mechanically shredding the wattle blooms, and held them tight, pressing them against his chest.

"Let me go," she said. "I don't want to be held like that."

"You shall be held like that until you've given me my answer. . . . I'm throwing my last cast. I want to know how much you care for me, or whether you've been fooling me these months past. It's the end, now, Nora. I'm going—with or without you. But I must have the truth first."

"And when you've got the truth, where will you go with it?" she asked in a satirical tone.

"To the devil," he said with a reckless toss of his head—"if it's your choice for me to take that track."

"I certainly don't choose to take it with you," she answered contemptuously. "I can go on a pleasanter track."

"To Thompson's station up the Leura?" he cried with a bitter laugh.

"Yes, if you like to put it that way. Please leave go of my hands, Mr Mandan."

Her taunting tone stung him. He loosened his grasp of her hands and stepped back, clutching at a sapling. His face was ashen. For a minute he was speechless. Then he said chokingly—

"Do you mean that?"

She made no reply. He went on shakily—

"One of the things Boggo Bill said, was that it had been an old affair between you and Thompson, and that you went to Townsville because he jilted you. Was that why you took up with me—to pique him into coming back to you?"

Still she said nothing.

"Nora!" he pleaded. "Sweetest, tell me it isn't true . . . I won't believe it. How can I think you false when I remember back and have still the feel of your mouth on mine. It was the thought of

that which gave me strength to crawl out of the ~~Common~~ last night—away into the bush. I fought my devils down here by the creek. . . . I wrestled with them—it seemed to me that I was fighting for possession of you. . . . I wrestled, Nora, till break of day. . . . Well, then, I prevailed. . . . Yes, at last I prevailed. . . . And I took an oath that if you'd marry me I'd never in my life touch another drop of grog. Oh! my dear, so long as you'll be true to me I shan't be afraid of those devils attacking me again. . . . But if you fail me— My God! Nora, you won't do that? You can't have the heart to let me go. I tell you, it's my soul that's at stake. Will you save it from destruction or give it up to Satan? . . . Answer me—which?"

She stared at him, half frightened, half disgusted. Then, turning away, she said coldly—

"There's nothing I can do. You can't expect me to sacrifice my life in order to keep you sober—if it was likely that I should!" she added scornfully.

"Nothing you can do. . . . Sacrifice your life? Oh, Lord! How little you know about it! I tell you, Nora, you've got a chance now that bush girls don't often get. You always said that it was your dream to go to England and be a big swell there—like the people in Government House, you said. Lord! I can make you a bigger swell than most of those in the Government Houses out here. I can take you to a castle that has stood sieges and harboured kings—"

She interrupted him with a burst of incredulous laughter.

"You're just gammoning me—or else you're drunk still," she said.

He laughed back in a bitter irony.

"Oh! I'm drunk still, am I! . . . Well, I'm drunk—or sober enough to want to crunch you up in my arms and put you on my horse and carry you off whether you like it or not. That's how the old Border brigands who lived in that castle I was talking about used to do when they wanted wives—and the wives were generally happy enough afterwards, as you would be. Nora, will you trust me to take you along a better track than the one to Thompson's station? Will you take my word that I can and that I will make you happier than ever you could be as his wife? Will you come with me, sweetheart—will you come?"

With a passionate movement he threw his arms around her and pressed her to him so roughly that she cried out—

"Let me go. I don't want to have anything to do with a coarse brute like you. I'm going to marry Harry Thompson."

A hissing sound came from between Mandan's teeth, but he still held her so close that she could not free herself.

"It was true then—what Boggo Bill said?"

She answered defiantly, throwing back her head as a snake does when it is caught.

"Of course it's true. I always liked Harry Thompson. He didn't mean to behave badly, and now we've made it up. And he's going to take me on a trip to England. He's very well off. . . . So there! Now leave hold of me."

He flung her back against the tree without a word and went blindly across the paddock till he walked straight against the fence. He vaulted it and made for the Coffin-lid.

It was dusk and the proprietor had lighted the hanging kerosene lamps. A crowd of navvies and bush hands filled the bar, which reeked with the fumes of drink.

Mandan went to the counter and planked down two of Mr Blandy's fifty-pound notes.

"I'm shouting all round," he said. "We'll drink this out."

The bar proprietor bustled to bring drinks. The men in the bar crowded round. Mandan waved his glass. "Come, mates, a shout for all hands—and as many more as you please, so long as the money—and I—last."

"Good for you, mate!" they cried. Mandan drank the fiery spirit raw, yet for a long time he seemed to preserve a comparative sobriety.

By-and-by he raised his glass.

"Now, mates—here's a toast for you. Drink to—Euthanasia." He gave a horrible laugh.

"To how much, old man? She's got a darned long name—that gel of yours. Call her something shorter," said the selector, who had been on Mrs Quinlan's veranda.

"All right—you can call her—Death!" Mandan answered with another queer laugh.

He took a long pull at his tumbler. "Here's a quick end and a merry, one, mates," he cried—"to the last Earl of Lassendale!"

There was a burst of ribald ejaculations, and the men looked at him, thinking he was mad with drink. They saw a sudden change come over his face. An odd gurgling sound broke in his throat. He fell heavily forward across the bar.

And that was indeed the end of Mother Quinlan's weaner and of the last representative of an old English earldom, whose story, under another name, is told here. For the bush abounds in tragedies, and this is one of them.

[From *The Luck of the Leura*, 1907.]



THE CASE OF BLACK ECKERT

By E. S. SORENSON

IT was a hot, blistering day, and Trooper Eckert, having ridden twenty miles from town that morning, smacked his lips expectantly as he sighted the wayside pub at Tooloon. Ned Tracey kept good grog and was liberal with it, but where he got the bulk of it was what was engaging Eckert's attention. He had discovered quite accidentally that several scattered back-blocks hotels got their supplies from Tooloon, and as he knew that very little loading went out by the teams for Tracey he had a suspicion that there was a plant somewhere in the neighbourhood.

"There's a stripe to be won at Tooloon, or I'm not fit for me position," he muttered, as he led his horse into the bark-covered stable at the back. His keen eyes were ever alert for tracks, particularly in the direction of the rugged hills across the creek. There was a road leading to a waterhole two miles down the course, whence Tracey carted his water. Eckert had seen him arrive with a load

as he crossed the flat, and the cart, containing a big galvanized-iron tank, was standing between the stalls and the back of the hotel. The peculiar top attracted his attention: it fitted on like a lid of a billycan. Climbing on the wheel, he lifted it up and peeped in. Footsteps coming in his direction disturbed him, and he hastily climbed down. But he had seen enough to excite an older head than his. He was only thirty, with a dark, stern cast of countenance, and his eagerness for promotion made him as stern and relentless as he looked. They called him "cruel" and he was variously known about the locality as "Black Eckert", "Eckert the dog" and "the Black Snake". He was so well hated that there was hardly a man in the district he could rely upon for information or assistance if the exigencies of the case demanded it. The majority were "mum"—they didn't know anything; others purposely led him astray. So he never trusted anybody implicitly.

"There's only two classes in this part of the country," he said one day to Tracey—"them that's in gaol an' them that ought to be—an', God willin', I'll make the numbers a little more equal; there's too many outside."

Today, having made some valuable discoveries and seeing promotion looming ahead, he was less sinister than usual. He found Tracey doing something to the lock on his till. Tracey always managed to be busy at something in the bar when there was a sixpence about.

"You didn't happen to see a man go past here on a skewbald horse this morning, did you?" asked the trooper.

"I did, then," said Tracey.

"Had the horse a star an' a snip?"

"He had."

"Was the man a big burly sort of fellow?"

"He was. I remarked it as he passed widout so much as callin' for a nip."

"With a big, shaggy beard?" added Eckert.

"Tremenjus big an' shaggy, as you say," Tracey agreed.

"Well, that ain't the gentleman I'm looking for," Eckert returned.

"Isn't it?" said Tracey a little sharply.

"The man I want hasn't a hair below his eyebrows," Eckert continued. "Let's try a glass of that beer of yours, Tracey. I don't know how it is, but I can never get any beer like yours in town. Where do you get it?"

"That's Townsville beer, Trooper. But 'tain't so much where it comes from as the way I keep it. That's a secret I learned from th' old man."

"He learnt you a trick or two, I'll warrant. I've heard the sergeant say he was pretty smart in his day."

"He was," said Tracey, with a touch of pride, "as smart as any a one here or there."

"And sly, too, I'll wager," added Eckert.

"As to that," said Tracey, "it's purty evident that slyness an' smartness go hand-an'-feet."

"Not always," the trooper dissented. "Some people are too honest to be sly. But I must be moving, or the man without the shaggy beard will be giving me the slip. He's gone down the creek, I noticed by the tracks. I hope I'll overtake him at the waterhole."

"I hope you do," said Tracey, "An', by that token, you'll be back for tea?"

"I'll be back in any case. So long—for the present."

Black Eckert had malignantly described Ned Tracey as he had seen him a fortnight before, riding out of town. Though he often had a night's spree and a free-and-easy time generally when he visited Tooloon, he did not like Tracey. He would rather see someone there after his own heart—one who would "lay him on" occasionally. Tracey fooled him, and charged him for everything, so that his trips to Tooloon were expensive. His ideal publican was one who would treat the Force to everything free of cost, not to speak of extras, as he put it. He hated Ned Tracey and felt a glow of satisfaction as he rode away from his rough-and-ready caravan-serai. He was on the track of that which would place him prominently before the public eye, which would be flashed and published all over Australia and bring him reward—and the promotion he fretted for. Tracey had an illicit still, worked on a large scale, in the vicinity. In the pseudo-watertank on the cart he had seen several closed kegs, the smell of which was unmistakable. His approach to the hotel had been observed and the unloading of the spirits had been delayed in consequence. This was unfortunate for Tracey, thought Eckert, for he had now only to follow the track of the dray to find the still.

In this, however, Black Eckert was mistaken. At the waterhole was a pump, built on a strong and rather elaborately-made stand, with a bark roof over it; and here the wheel tracks ended. The cart had been backed to the pump, which was high enough to run water, by means of a spout, into the tank if desired. Knowing that water had not been brought from here that day, Eckert at once became deeply interested in this pump. It looked innocent enough, in all conscience, and yet there must be a secret about it somewhere. The suction pipe descended straight into the water between four

square uprights. These were not solid, but made of pine battens, a device often adopted for strength and cheapness where suitable timber is scarce. But any kind of rough bush uprights would have suited as well in this instance, and so, ever suspicious, he thought the batten squares must have some special service other than appeared to the casual observer.

Mounting the stage, he saw that these uprights formed the four corners of a box-like square in which the pump was set. A little examination revealed that the top pulled out in two sections, one from each side of the pump. Having removed these, he saw the whole secret at a glance, and, in spite of himself, he felt an admiration for the man who had so cunningly planned it. In each upright was a small pipe; one of them came to the top of the box, and appeared to be a speaking tube; the other three were four inches shorter, and were each fitted with a small brass tap. Standing in the box was a short piece of curved piping, which screwed on to any of the three, and was ostensibly used to connect the pipes with a keg or other receiving vessel. He screwed it on to one and turned the tap. The result was a flow of unmistakable brandy. The trooper's admiration increased, and there being a jam tin on the stage, he treated himself to a stiff nip. Then he tried No. 2; but that was dry. The pipe smelt strongly of beer, so he surmised that beer was only "laid on" when required, as the pipes might turn it. He tried the third pipe, and got a swig of what would pass in a labelled bottle for medium whisky—in fact it had the same taste as Tracey's "Glenlivet" and "Old Scotch". The trooper was now lost in admiration.

"By the hokey frost," he muttered, "but this caps all the smart dodges a man could find in a blue moon. Yer not too slow, Ned Tracey. Yer a genius—an' all the more credit to me for ferretin' out the secret. There's a stripe for me in this, or I'm much mistaken."

His next move was to find the direction of the still. The flow of liquor from the pipes told him that it was situated at a higher level than the stage, and so he must look for it among the rugged hills across the creek. Armed with a long stick, he searched the water carefully from the bottom of the uprights, and ascertained that they went straight across into the opposite bank. Taking a line by them, he sighted up the hill, and found that the course took him close by a shepherd's hut, the top of which was just discernible over the cap of the first ridge. The shepherd was employed by Tracey and the sheep-pens were close to the hut.

"I'll have another drop of that brandy before I start," he soliloquised, "an', by the hokey, I'll fill me waterbag, too!" He climbed

up again, and first filling the bag, ran out a good nobbler into the jam tin, which he drank leisurely, making appreciative comments thereon. "It's good grog Tracey makes. 'Tis a pity I have to spoil his little game. 'Twould be a handy place for a camp when I'm after thieves or other vagabonds. Gallons o' grog for the takin', spoutin' out like artesian water. But duty is duty—an' there's a stripe hangin' on to it, Tracey."

Tracey's grog was strong, and already Black Eckert was filled with a spirit of recklessness. Otherwise he was quite sober, though he rode up the hill with a clatter that was not discretionary. Leaving his horse at the sheep-pen, he walked across to the hut. Smoke was issuing from the chimney, but there was no response to his knock on the door. It was fastened with a padlock, and this he immediately unlocked with a skeleton key. The first thing he noticed on entering was that the few glowing coals in the fireplace gave out no smoke whatever. Yet a fair volume of smoke was issuing from the top of the chimney! He went out and back again three or four times before he discovered the ruse. There was a double wall at the back of the fireplace, and between these there was evidently a flue which carried the smoke from a fire underground. This hut was, then, but another blind, like the pump, and it suggested to him the locale of the still.

Just behind the hut was a deep, wooded gorge, with a sheer drop of fifty feet. The fall began from some jutting rocks, twenty yards to the right, and it was towards this spot that the tell-tale pipes were directed. The trooper returned to his horse, and took another pull from the bag, as a preliminary to further investigations. "'Tisn't everybody that has a brandy-bag—an' brimming at that—to carry with him when he rides about the bush," he commented with much satisfaction, as he pressed the stopper in.

The way along under the face of the cliff was rugged and strewn with loose stones, which the trooper, not too certain on his pins, set rolling as he went. When he got opposite the hut he could see nothing but a heavy festoon of vines, hanging over the rocks like a dense green curtain. A close search revealed a faint track—a crushed leaf, a scratch on a stone—ascending towards it. With difficulty he climbed up, and on parting the vines his hand clutched the hidden pipes, following the face of the cliff round to the level ground, whence, he opined, they ran straight to the creek. Not a little excited, he now picked his way along with more care, and presently he found himself at the entrance of an enormous cave. The place reeked with the fumes of malt, and Eckert felt his blood tingle at the magnitude of his accomplishment. He stood, a couple

of paces in, blinking in the unaccustomed gloom. Slowly objects before him began to take shape—casks, cases, bags—and far in there was a rough staircase, which he calculated, gave access to the hut, the top being hidden, presumably, under the cowhide mat he had noticed near the bunk.

“Stand!” The order came clear and sharp from both sides of him simultaneously, and brought him up with a jerk. Turning in the direction of the voices, he saw a masked man standing like a statue on each side of him, and each had him covered with a rifle.

“I am sorry to see you here, Black Eckert,” said the man on his right.

“I have no doubt of that,” said Eckert, calmly.

“No one but our look-out saw you come in, Eckert,” continued the man, “and you will be lucky if anybody sees you go out.”

“Twill be worse for you, me man, if you try any hanky-panky tricks with me. Put your arms down an’ surrender quietly now.”

The other man laughed harshly. “You’ve done a fine piece of work to-day, Black Eckert,” he said, “and you deserve credit for it.”

“I’ll get it, too!”

“What do you reckon you’ll get for it?” the other asked quickly.

“A hundred quid, I think—an’ perhaps a stripe,” said Eckert defiantly.

“It seems a pity to baulk you, Trooper; but it would be a greater pity to spoil our little plans here. What do you think of our grog? You sampled it pretty well at the pump.”

The wrinkles deepened under Eckert’s eyes. “I heard Ned Tracey make the remark today that slyness an’ smartness went hand-an’-foot. I believe him.” He turned to the man who had been speaking. “You’re an old man, I think, an’ I fancy I’ve heard your voice before.”

“I’m pretty old,” the man replied. “You knew me once, Black Eckert; but I’m dead now.”

“What’s that?”

“I’m dead now,” the man repeated.

“Rot! How can you be?”

“I mean I’m legally dead.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“You remember Duncan Coyle, I think?”

“He’s dead,” said Eckert.

“Legally,” the other corrected.

“I buried him—le’s’ ways, I helped to bury him—two years ago on the Ten-Mile Sandhill.”

“You buried him alive, you dog; and well you knew it,” the man

returned, savagely. "Duncan Coyle never harmed you, Eckert; but he knew something against you—something to do with a tracker who was killed, accidentally, when you were both drunk on duty. So when you were sent to find Duncan Coyle, who'd wandered off from Tracey's in the horrors, and you found him lying speechless on the Ten-Mile Sandhill, you saw your chance. You made Toby, the black tracker, dig a hole in the sand with a wooden spade of your own fashioning, and you flung him in and covered him up. You reported that he'd been dead two days and smelt badly. Your sable henchman, of course, corroborated. Luckily, the grave had been sunk across a wombat-hole, and Coyle happened to drop with his face against the burrow, and so got enough air to live until the cool sand livened him up a bit; then he fought his way out. You were no doubt drunk at Tracey's by that time."

Eckert, nibbling his moustache, had stood eyeing the speaker closely, his face now an ugly pallor. The man removed his mask and came nearer.

"Don't forget for an instant," he warned, "that my mate has you covered all the while. Do you know me now?"

"You are Duncan Coyle, sure enough," said Eckert hoarsely. "I thought you were dead at the time I found you——"

"You lie!" said Coyle. "But what's the use of argument? I can't harm you now—unless you force me. We are quits."

"I don't see the point," said Eckert surlily.

"Our illicit product has dulled your wits," sneered Coyle. "I am the responsible party for everything here, and even if you had not more to lose than you can possibly gain by reporting what you have discovered, you can't proceed against a man who is legally dead. You can only take the plant and claim the reward—if we don't blow the cave to smithereens with dynamite when the approach of a posse of police is telephoned to us. In any case, your present position is preferable to what awaits you if your ambition overrides your common sense. What say you, Black Eckert?"

"You have nothing to lose," said the trooper, reflectively. "If you hold your peace, then, I will give you the £100, and we'll cry quits!"

"You think more of the credit than the money, Black Eckert," Coyle answered; "but that isn't all. It's Ned Tracey's scalp you're after now—but you'll have to put me under another sandhill before you get it. . . . We're quits as it is, and I prefer to let it stand at that."

"You have the big end of the stick," said the trooper, sulkily. "What now?"

"You can go!" said Coyle. "But don't forget that you will be closely watched from here to the pub."

Black Eckert lost no time in getting out of the cave. He cursed his luck bitterly as he climbed down the cliff; the opportunity of a lifetime had come within his grasp, and had been snatched from him by the ghosts of the past. He might wait till Coyle passed out by the effluxion of time, seeing that Coyle was an old man, but there were others who had seen and heard all in the cave, and he did not know who they were. Chagrined and heavy at heart, he recognized at once that the plant was not for him to spring. Then he sought what little consolation he could from the fact that he owed his life on the present occasion to his misdeeds of two years ago. Reaching his horse, he took a deep draught from the bag to drown his disappointment, but instantly spat it out, with a wry face. The bag was filled with cold water. A muttered oath escaped him, as he looked vengefully towards the hut. There was nothing suspicious-looking about the structure; nevertheless, he had an idea that the look-out man was somewhere in the roof. He didn't bother looking however; he sprang into the saddle and rode hard back to the pub, as though the ghosts of a thousand crimes were at his heels.

"So yer didn't get that joker?" said Tracey, as he dismounted in front of the bar.

"No," the trooper answered. "When slyness and smartness go hand-an'-foot, Tracey, it takes some cleverness to do the catching."

"Well, it do, as you say," Tracey returned. "You'll be stoppin' for tea, I think you told me?"

"No," said Eckert, "I'll have a glass of your beer; then I'll be off. I have a report to go by tomorrow's mail. I had forgotten it."

He reached town late that night, and next morning he wrote his report. It was in the form of an application for removal to another district, as his health was failing in consequence of the trying climate.

[From *Quinton's Rouseabout and Other Stories*, 1908.]

TO PAY PAUL

By RANDOLPH BEDFORD

PAXTON, the manager of the Bank of Capricornia, had come to Townsville only a few months before the robbery of five hundred sovereigns from the Equatorial.

Beyond the interest in the robbery given him by the freemasonry of banking, the stolen money represented the trouble of another bank, and Paxton almost forgot the loss of the Equatorial in the difficult position he had succeeded to in the management of the Townsville branch of the Capricornia.

There was the firm of Battle and Flohm, ruinously overdrawn and notoriously insolvent. There was a firm which had come into existence solely for the purpose of selling iron and steel, and had illegitimately reached out after guano islands and trepang, and was now marked for commercial death as a consequence. These, and more, Paxton sent for, repeating to each one his regrets that headquarters had ordered him to wind up all hopeless overdrafts, and to call in all that were sufficiently solvent to be able to reply. The hopelessly tall poppies were cut down. The men with the slightest chance of recovery were given a chance, but under an inquisitorial supervision which amounted to a receivership.

There was one account small enough, and apparently safe enough, although the boom methods that had permitted Battle and Flohm's account, like many others, to get out of hand, were visible even in this. The account of Hosey Joy showed step-ladder increases on the credit side, extending over many years, that made it appear of the safest, but the last few months had seen the birth of an overdraft. It was but three hundred and ten pounds, and there were alleged to be securities against it, but when Paxton, on enquiring Joy's occupation, discovered that he was primarily a hawker of fish, and secondarily, the keeper of a coffee-stall, an overdraft to him seemed to be touched with burlesque.

An examination of the securities did not reassure the manager. They were all scrip in non-producing mines, and as their face value was but £3000, and their market value practically *nil*, Paxton

was justified in feeling uneasy and sending for Hosey Joy. Joy came instanter, rushing down the sweltering street at a pace that caused him to be pitied where he was not envied, for such energy was uncommon in Flinders Street at noon. He entered the manager's room, deposited his hat on the floor, seated himself, and leaned smilingly forward to Paxton, who sat at the other side of the table.

Paxton at first sight liked this little bustling man, whose energy was not disguised by his immaculate duck suit, with all its suggestions of reposeful loafing. His lean face was wrinkled like a dried apple; the brows corrugated always, but below them the small, humorous eyes smiled.

"I've sent for you to ask you to reduce that overdraft, Mr Joy."

"I thought that when I came, sir. An' I want you to give me time. You've got all my scrip, an'——"

"And I think so little of the value of it that I'll make you a present of it, Mr Joy."

The busy little man looked troubled.

"Surely it ain't as bad as that, sir?"

"It's quite as bad as that, Mr Joy. I've made enquiries, and I find that all the stuff is unquoted, and that all the little mines it represents are non-producers."

"I know they're only prospecting claims, sir, but I'm pretty sure they're goin' to strike something one of these days, and I don't owe much."

"That's just the trouble, Mr Joy. You don't owe us enough. I have my orders to wipe out all these little overdrafts. Even if they're safe, there's no business worth having in them. Can you pay us?—that's the question."

"I can't right away."

"You own a coffee-stall?"

"Yes, sir—two."

"What are they worth?"

"Plant's worth about two 'undred, but the goodwill's worth——"

"Never mind that item, Mr Joy; a goodwill is worth little or nothing. I don't like to see it in a balance-sheet. It's an intangible item, and its value depends on a lot of things no man can swear to."

"The goodwill of Joy's coffee stalls is worth somethin', anyway," said Joy, sturdily. "I'm makin' twenty pounds a week out o' the two o' 'em."

"And where do you bank that profit, Mr Joy? You haven't banked it here for two months. What do you do with it?"

"Well, y' see, I bought three milk-runs on terms, an' I'm payin' 'em off."

"And what do you do with the profits of the milk-run?"

"Well—I—y' see I bought a 'arf share in a pearlin' lugger, an' I'm payin' that off."

"And are there any profits on the operations of the lugger?"

Joy answered unwillingly. "Well, yes; there's a bit every month."

"And what do you do with the bit every month?"

"Well, y' see, I'm payin' into three copper shows o' me own to keep 'em goin'."

"Worse and worse—nothing more uncertain than copper."

"And nothin' bigger when you've struck it, sir."

"Not as quick as that, Mr Joy. Nothing as big as a good copper mine after an expenditure of a hundred thousand pounds in equipment and years of development. No, it won't do, Mr Joy. From the coffee-stall to the milk-run, from the milk-run to the lugger, and from the lugger to copper prospecting—and never anything for the bank. How much did you pay for all that waste paper we have here as alleged security?"

"Seven 'undred an' fifty pound. But it ain't waste paper, sir; or, at least, it won't be."

"I hope it will turn out all right for your sake, Mr Joy, but the bank can't carry your risks for you. We must find a means of wiping out that overdraft. Is there any way you can suggest?"

Joy looked gloomily at the floor. "No, sir; not at the moment."

"Well, you think over it until tomorrow morning, and come to see me then with a proposal."

"All right, sir," replied Joy, in a tone that said everything was all wrong. He took up his hat and slouched out ashamedly. All the fun had left his eyes. Ten minutes before he had bustled in smiling, a man who owned the whole world, and lived in happy content of the validity of his title thereto.

He was glad of the 24 hours' respite, although he attempted nothing, knowing he could do nothing towards the extinction of the overdraft; and he approached his creditor, who was also his judge, supported only by the cheerful optimism which was native to him, and which told him over and over again that nothing is ever as black as it looks.

"Well, Mr Joy," said Paxton, "have you brought the money?"

"Me, sir! No, sir. . . . Where am I to get the money?"

"You should have thought of that before you spent £450 of your own money and £300 of the bank's money in buying outside stocks. It's no use talking, Mr Joy; if you won't wipe out that overdraft the bank must do it for you."

"But how is the bank to do it, sir, if I can't?"

"Well, let us see. The bank could sell your interest in the lugger."

"It can't, sir. I bought it on time-payment, and it isn't mine till I've paid the last instalment."

"The milk-runs then."

"Same thing, sir—hire agreement till the last instalment's paid."

"The coffee-stalls are not encumbered?"

"N—no——, sir; but, if you sell 'em, sir—you say yourself the goodwill's not worth anything, and the plant wouldn't bring two 'undred if you rushed the sale."

"It would bring three hundred if we threw in the goodwill. You say you're making a thousand a year out of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then plenty of men would rush it at five hundred, and as the bank only want's £300 the sale would be easy."

Joy spoke as if he were dangerously near to choking.

"But if you do that, sir, I'm rooned. If the stalls go I can't keep payin' the milk-runs. If the milk-runs goes, I can't pay the lugger. If the lugger goes I can't pay in to keep the prospectin' goin'. An' there I am where I started."

"Where did you start, Mr Joy?"

"Three years ago I was cook on a schooner tradin' to the islands. We put in 'ere one day an' I asked for me wages, an' ther skipper—a big man he was, an' a fighter—he paid me with his boot."

"And what did you do?"

"I lays him out with the galley poker. An' then I cleared out, an' didn't go back for no wages."

"What did you do then?"

"I borrowed a basket an' found a' old fishin'-line on the break-water, an' I fished off the coal hulks, an' hawked all the fish I cot."

"And after that?"

"I saved every brown I could put my forks on an' got a saveloy-can, an' after six months o' that I bought the first stall. It wasn't one o' these two—it was a little 'un. I sold it afterwards to a bloke who's workin' it now at the Towers. It was a little stall—I pulled it with my own 'ands"—he added, with some pride and much sorrow. "These two I got now are 'eavy stalls, take a good 'orse to draw either on 'em, I promise yer."

"And if the bank takes the stalls, you'll have to start all over again?"

"That's a moral, sir. If you sell the stalls, I'm a goner."

"Only three years since you were booted for asking for your wages?"

"Yes, sir."

"You've been going ahead too quickly, Mr Joy. Do you know what they say happens to the man who tries to be rich in a year?"

Joy grinned. "I've heard tell that he gets hanged in six months, mister."

"That's right. Now, the bank doesn't want to hang you. You haven't misled me. You've told me the truth about everything. If you hadn't, I'd have been down on you like a falling house. But don't think that because it's only a matter of £300 you've not been greatly to blame."

"I dare say I 'ave, sir," said Joy, ready to take any amount of blame and advice, now that there appeared a hope of postponing the day of reckoning.

"Well, this is the fifth of the month. Supposing I hold my hand from selling you off right away—now, will you promise that before the first of the month you'll pay up?"

Joy hesitated. "I'd like to promise, sir, but I never promised a thing I didn't do, and I want to be sure."

"That's all right. Mind, if you promise, I'm staking my own reputation on your word. I've had orders to wind up a lot of accounts, yours among them, and my only excuse for not selling you up instanter will be when I write to the head office tomorrow to say that I know the overdraft will be extinguished by the first. If you don't pay then, I'll have to pay it myself, because I can't afford to break my word or make a mistake. I'm a poor man but I'll have to find the money if you don't. I can read men. I know you're a plucky man, and I believe you'd rather see the stalls go and make another start than let me in. Which is it to be? Can you promise, or shall I sell?"

Joy rose and extended his hand, his eyes shining with resolve and gratitude.

"Here's my hand on it, Mr Paxton. I'll keep the stalls and I'll pay the money before the first."

The long, nervous hand of the banker gripped the splay and disproportionately large hand of the debtor for a moment; then Joy took his hat from the floor, nodded in recognition of Paxton's parting reminder: "Till the first, or before it, Mr Joy," and marched out with his face set in resolution.

On the 28th Hosey Joy paid £315 10s. to his own credit, and then interviewed Paxton and thanked him for his forbearance. Paxton, in return, thanked Joy for not only removing an awkward obstruction from his path, but for rehabilitating a banker's frayed faith in the promises of man.

"He makes me think better of human nature," said Paxton to the accountant. "Told me he'd sold his interest in those copper shows at the Kangaroo Hills. Didn't tell me the figure. I suppose he did what he calls 'sacrificing' them, but that only makes his action the better."

"It's a good thing for him," said the accountant, "that he was forced to sell. Those rotten copper prospects would have had him body and soul in the long run."

"I'm glad he saved his coffee-stalls, anyway," replied Paxton. "Well—let us look into those bigger things. I'd like to get 'em all squared as easily as I got Joy's o.d."

Ten days later came the news of the robbery of a bag of sovereigns from the Equatorial Bank. It had been removed from the strong-room in some unaccountable way, and, being gold, was utterly impossible to trace. A martinet inspector, who suspected every official of the bank, came up—and detectives, who placed tellers and ledger-keepers, and accountant and messenger under visible surveillance, and so drove them almost to the point of suicide.

A fortnight later the accountant of the Capricornia sought his manager at the unusual hour of noon, and he had further news of the good luck of Hosey Joy.

"The coffee-stall man is on the road to money, Mr Paxton," he said. "We've got two thousand telegraphed for him from Sydney."

"You don't say so. He's getting on is little Joy. What's it for?"

"Ten per cent deposit on some mining transfer. We've got the numbers of the leases. He can lift the money as soon as he puts the blank transfers in. Deposit is forfeitable if another eighteen thousand isn't paid within six months."

"By Jove! he's going it. There'll be two coffee-stalls for sale soon, not to mention a few milk-runs. Although, I don't know; he's the sort of man to stick to the little certain things."

During the day Hosey Joy brought the blank transfers to the accountant, who pronounced them in order and passed the remittance to Joy's credit.

Just before the close of banking hours, Paxton was waited on by Isles, the manager of the Equatorial. The hunted expression that had never left his face since the robbery, and the consequent suspicious surveillance of every officer of his branch, was now replaced by the look of the hunter.

"What's up, old man?" questioned Paxton, kindly.

"This," said Isles, trying to speak calmly, and succeeding only indifferently well—"look at that sovereign."

fist as at an enemy, and burst out into violent imprecations at his bad luck, at drink, at her—that other woman. With a deep groan, as these swung him back to the truth, his head dropped: "It's me own fault! me own fault!" Then with the consciousness of the futility of his incipient regeneration before adverse circumstances: "And I meant to be good to 'd poor old woman. But a chap never has a chance. He might as well just chuck it, just chuck it!"

The girl's mind, strung to a keen pitch by his poignant display, snapped at an idea shooting through its chaotic impressions.

"Uncle Bob would put yer on't breakwater"—and to intercept his remonstrances, "he wouldn't know yer, father, and then——" She hesitated and chanced it, "I could tell mother."

She saw the idea had taken effect, and explained: men were wanted; none there knew him; he could work and wait till she had talked mother over; he could board with old mother Lawson, who had several boarders——

"But I ain't fit," he stopped her. He was a bundle of rags. If he had only a decent rig-out—a pair of working pants even—he might have a show. But no boss would look at him in that state. He might manage with his boots—for a week any way. And he kicked his feet from the blanket to scrutinize his boots, as though he hadn't cast an eye on them for some time, when every day, in fact, he had examined them with forebodings. "They ain't gone much on tops," he mused with self-congratulation. . . . "What's up, Jen?"

She was so overjoyed with what was in her mind, with a desire to put it into execution, that she wanted to be off. She was on her feet.

"I'll come at daybreak, dad. Y' ain't cold?"

He wanted to know what she purposed doing. Her sudden silence, the gleam of bright anticipation in her eyes, the aptness with which she had conceived hopeful possibilities affected him. His Jen suddenly appeared in the guise of some wonderful guide on his desert of misery—he might reach his oasis after all. He was now all eager curiosity; but she was too practical to commit herself.

"Go to sleep, dad. Yer warm, ain't yer?" She was on her knees near his head, and groping under the blanket.

"But thou's cold, my Jen——" her hand was cold, icy cold. His arms were around her thin figure, and he groaned under her kisses.

"Ay! thou'll stick to s'd old dad."

"All right, father!" as she arose.

"Right-oh, Jen!"

The lamp was blown out, the fog swallowed her—he cried, "Good night, lass." There was no response. She was stumbling along through the slippery vault.

"How's his account?"

"Not much operated on since he got the two thousand for the deposit on his Kangaroo Hill shows, beyond paying up for the milk-runs and the lugger. At least, I judge so, by the names of the payees of the cheques."

"Well, that will do."

Alone, Paxton worried out the tangle—pacing his room and talking to himself.

"Joy told me a lie. He said he'd sold out of his Kangaroo Hill claims to pay off the overdraft as he had promised. Yet the only two leases in his name he has not sold yet. It was on those leases the two thousand was paid him, and the transfers are in the bank now. And what did he sell to Battle and Flohm that they should give him a cheque? I'll send for Mr Joy."

The little coffee-stall keeper came tardily. As he entered he did not humbly deposit his hat on the floor. It was a new felt hat, and he placed it on Paxton's desk, covering some papers and the peculiar coin, which so far he had not observed.

"I have to congratulate you on the sale of the Kangaroo Hill claims at last," said Paxton.

Joy was pleased, but a little uneasy. He could not think that Paxton had sent for him only to offer congratulations.

"Yes, it's an all-right price, Mr Paxton . . . course, I ain't sold 'em yet, but I've got a thumping good deposit."

"But you told me a month or so ago that you had sold those claims to find the money for the overdraft."

"I kep' my promise, didn't I?" said Joy.

"Yes, you did—but how did you keep it? Where did you get the money? You didn't get it from the sale of the claims, because you haven't sold them even yet."

"I kep' my promise," repeated Joy. "And it's got nothing to do with anybody where I got the money, has it? I might 'ave pinched it."

"You might have," said Paxton. "You probably did. I want to know where it came from."

"Well, I ain't goin' t' tell yer."

"I'll tell you, then. What did you sell to Battle and Flohm? Ice-cream or pigs' trotters?"

Try as he might to appear at ease, Joy could not repress a slight confusion at the name of Battle and Flohm, and Paxton noted it, and went on:

"You paid in a cheque of theirs for £43. What did they buy from you? Milk or pearl shell?"

"I kep' my promise," reiterated joy.

"I know you did, and I want to help you."

"T' help me?"

"Yes, to help you. . . . Joy, you're doing well. You've sold those claims for big money. It's pretty certain the buyers won't forfeit the two thousand deposit. Your luck's in."

"I know it is. I ain't short o' money. That stock you said was waste paper I could sell for fifteen 'undred this blessed minit."

"Is that so? I'm glad of it. . . . But you're in a hole, Joy, and if you don't tell me everything I can't help you."

"I ain't done nothin', mister. I——"

"Don't lie any more, Joy. You've done a great deal. You gave Battle and Flohm cash for that cheque. Now, own up; tell the truth and shame the Devil. Didn't you?"

"Oh! damn it; if you must know—yes."

"I thought so. And that forty-three belonged to this bank, but Battle got good gold for it, and paid it into his private account at the Equatorial, and thought I would never know, and then he lied to Isles, and told him he got it over our counter. I'll put a black mark against him for that."

"Well, that's his funeral, sir—'t ain't mine. I asked him for the cheque because I—because I didn't want to carry a lot of gold."

"You asked him for the cheque to hide your tracks. You stole the bag of sovereigns from the Equatorial."

Joy took up his hat and started from his chair, but Paxton's voice restrained him.

"If you go outside that door, Joy, I'm done with you. I'll send for Mr Isles and tell him all I know. Sit down, man, and face it. You had the nerve to do it; find the nerve to talk about it. Sit down; don't put your hat on the table again. See that sovereign? Take it up—look at it. Do you see the chisel mark over the dragon? It's one of the coins you gave to Battle, and Battle paid it into the Equatorial, and Mr Isles and the tellers recognized it. Now then, Joy, tell me how you did it?"

All the fight had left Hosey Joy. He wiped his forehead and moistened his lips, and said: "Well, if you must know, it was this way: I made a promise to you. I'd have kept it even if I had to roon myself. An' I thought I'd have to sell the stalls, but I put it off as long as I could. Mind you, I gave me promise, and I made up me mind to keep it, square and all. One day I'm in the Equatorial changin' silver an' copper."

"The coffee-stall takings?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you change it here?"

"Because I was afraid y'd keep it if I put it over your counter, an' I had to keep enough to keep things goin'."

"I see. Cunning, Mr Joy. Well?"

"The tellers was countin' and weighin' gold. Fast as one feller weighed five 'underds an' bagged 'em, the other teller in front of the counter puts the bags on a truck to wheel 'em into the strong-room."

"Yes."

"There was a lady—nice lookin' piece she was, too—goin' out, an' the teller in front o' the counter was spreadin' his tail to her, an' by an' by she says 'Good-day,' in a tooty-frooty voice, an' he acts the toff to her, an' goes to the door to open it f'r 'er. While 'e's doing that, the teller be'ind the counter puts a bag o' gold on the counter, and dips down again to get another bag."

"And you took the bag that was on the counter?"

"Me? Not much! It would 'a' been missed in two twos. No! I lifts a bag off the truck, an' puts it in me takin's bag, and when the teller behind the counter stands up again, an' the other bloke comes away from the door, I'm standin' by the counter, quiet like, takin' no more notice o' the bag of gold at me elbow than a Jew takes notice of a church."

"What happened then?"

"The teller behind the counter weighs out another bag, an' gives it to the teller with the truck, an' he wheels the truck away into the strong-room. Then I got the deposit-receipt, and away I come."

"Nervy enough; but did you think of the damnable position you put those men in?"

"I was sorry f'r 'em, but s'posin' I'd gone under—an' I'd 'ave done it to keep me word to you—look what I'd have lost!"

"Did you change all the five hundred?"

"Not me; I only used three 'underd. An' as soon as I got the two thou' I drew every bean I 'ad outter the Equatorial, an' put it in on to the stalls takin's, an' made the five 'undred up again in gold."

"And where is it?"

"It's in the same bag I pinched—tied up the same way with the same tape—an'—buried."

"Buried! Where?"

"Where I buried it the night after I pinched it. I took the three 'underd out of it, an' buried the rest. An' the other day I dug it up again and put back the three 'underd, and buried it again."

"But where?"

Joy's voice sank to a whisper, and he doubled the secrecy by rising, and leaning half way across the table.

"D'y' know where me coffee-stall——"

"Yes—opposite the swimming baths."

"Well, I buried it in the garden behind the stall."

"W-h-a-t? W-h-a-t? The garden with the poincianas and the bamboos?"

"Yes. What yer laughin' at, Mr Paxton?"

"Laughing at? Laughing at? Why, you've buried it in the police superintendent's garden."

At that Joy laughed also. "I only wanted to keep me word, Mr Paxton, an' not to roon meself. Square an' all! I'll spit me death on that. And now there's the money there, and I don't know how to let Mr Isles know."

"Is that all? Write to him."

"But how could I say I know of it?"

"Disguise your hand-writing. Do anything, but fix it up today, I won't have those poor beggars suspected for another minute."

"I know—I'll write it in printin'."

"Anything will do, so long as the money is returned today. If by tomorrow morning it hasn't been returned I'll give you away. So don't try any sharp practice."

"Me?" said Hosey Joy, with an expression of acute injury. "I wouldn't go crook for no money when I ain't pushed."

"It's the ordinary brand of honesty," said Paxton. "At any rate, if you don't go straight this trip, you'll be pushed behind the spikes."

"Funniest thing I ever struck," said Isles to Paxton that evening at the club. "We dig it up in the Police Superintendent's garden, same bag, same fastening and apparently the same money—though that quid with the chisel-mark on the dragon isn't explained yet. Our inspector suspects every policeman now."

"How were you put on to it?"

"Well, just after banking hours, the messenger brought me this: found it in the letter-box."

Paxton took the rough paper and read Hosey Joy's message:

"THE MUNNY IS BERRIED IN THE POLICE SUPTENDANCE
GARDN BETWEEN THE PONSHANAS AND THE BAMBOGZE.
APOLOGIES FOR TROUBLE."

"I'm going to have it framed," said Isles.

[From *The Lone Hand*, 1908.]



JENNIE

By A. A. D. BAYLDON

WHAT an extraordinary event it was! The girl had often craved for such a contingency, and yet now that it had come she was at a loss how to grapple with it. Her most prominent thought was congratulatory that her mother had not noticed her excitement during the evening. To get to her room and throw herself without undressing on the bed was such a relief, for it enabled her mind to work unrestrained.

Feeling sure her mother was now asleep, she slipped from her bed and out of the bark humpy into the detached kitchen, whose door was always unlocked, since the dwellers of the "Caves" were above suspicion as regards each other's honesty. The banked-up fire's dull glow lighted up with dusky illumination the dresser, table, two chairs, the array of cooking utensils, and the big basket of miscellaneous garments: crimean shirts, pants, socks—the weekly washing of the labourers at the breakwater she would have to distribute among their humpies in the morning. Withdrawing the

teapot from the oven into which she had placed it at tea-time behind her mother's back, she poured the tea into a billy, foraged in the cupboard, heaping up thick slices of bread and cold meat; her black eyes like stars flashing hither and thither; her long hair wildly dishevelled on her shoulders; her tall sinewy figure in homespun dress and apron, with bare limbs from the knees and naked feet catching a goblin light and shadow as she moved silently about the kitchen. Several times she paused, listening intently, as though she heard something other than the roar of the breakers on the rocks. Her eyes falling on a half-filled flask of rum on the mantelpiece, she snatched at it eagerly, then hesitated with a frown on her brow and replaced it, her teeth gritting, instead of thrusting it into the linen bag with the victuals. Taking up a hurricane lamp (but without lighting its candle) the billy of tea, and bag of victuals, she drew open the door softly with her forefinger, shut it behind her, and crept away into the night.

In a moment she was swallowed up by a raw fog rolling in slow, sluggish banks from the sea, that bit her eyes till they watered and scathed her throat with salty crudeness. The sea boomed everywhere, so it seemed, and she knew by the peculiar cracking roar every now and again that it was up over the reef, and therefore the near cut by the sand spit was denied her. Though she could not see a foot ahead, she moved quickly forward along a narrow sand track, with numerous branches crossing each other among stunted bushes. Without a moment's pause or hesitation she sped on, curving around a bark humpy here, silent and lightless, and dripping in the fog; jutting off from another there, with gleams of a kitchen fire through its cracks stabbing the white wet sand; gliding past groups of humpies huddled together like sheep as though for protection from the harsh, clinging fog. Once a dog barked, straining on the chain, and she darted aside from a humpy she had nearly blundered against, and plunged into a wet undergrowth up to her shoulders, and listened anxiously. When the dog ceased, she crawled back to the track and pushed on with greater haste. She was now wet to the skin with the fog, and her hair hung in matted masses. Her breath came thick and heavy, and with a shiver she stopped to swallow a mouthful of hot tea; then almost ran, as though to make up for the wasted half-minute.

By-and-bye, she emerged upon the desolate blankness of fog and barriers of rock, with great thunders beyond, and a shrill hiss of flying spray from the concussion of heavy seas with the unfinished breakwater. She halted, and seemed to be calculating her bearings; hurriedly skirting the rampart of cliff, she paused a moment to

sling the bag around her neck and seize the billy handle with her teeth, and entering a narrow vault of huge boulders, felt her way cautiously over its slippery floor till she reached a sort of dell of Moreton Bay fig-trees sheltered by circumambient ridges. Creeping among the dark boughs she gave a long, low coo-ee, and listened with straining ears. With a sigh of relief, she crawled on in the direction of a coo-ee that answered her from the thicket. Amid the cracking of dead twigs, she urged her way till the ambush deepened—upon which she again coo-eed softly. A gruff voice almost at her feet, asking if she hadn't a lamp, gave her a start. She crawled forward with searching hands till they touched a recumbent figure. "Here's some hot tea, father."

There was a grunt of satisfaction as a big hand seized the billy and pushed against it. She now lighted the lamp, and placed it between them. The yellow gleam struggling through the thin skirts of upcrawling fog outlined a shaggy head and face nearly hidden by a mat of black whiskers withdrawing from the now empty billy, and a squat figure rolled up in a blanket and an old tent fly.

"Ah, that's right, lass." His black eyes were riveted on the bag she was dipping into. He seized the victuals hungrily, his eyes still on the bag: "Aught else?"

Her face darkened, and she glanced sullenly at him.

"I don't want lush. I ain't touched it fur years," he burst out vehemently, interpreting her expression.

Her face cleared, and a joyous light came into her eyes, and she watched him devouring the food with child-like emotion. For a few minutes there was only the muffled roar of the sea beyond the cliff, and then: "You ain't told mother I've turned up?"

She shook her head. He seemed half-disappointed, but resumed as he tossed away a piece of gristle: "I reck'n she's all right. Her brother Bob's stuck to her since I cleared. I heard in Lismore all about it. But yer glad, ain't yer, Jennie, to see your old dad, eh?"

His voice betrayed his craving for someone to be pleased to see him.

"Yes, father," she replied, simply, though her eyes dimmed.

"I've been a bad egg. But I've turned over a new leaf, Jennie. I've had me gruel. . . . Oh! them plains," and he shuddered under the blanket.

She tingled for information, yet forebore to ask, affected by his voice of misery, and murmured, "Poor dad."

"Yes," he went on, fired by his memory and her expression of sympathy, "I've been starved and blistered and freezed and sat on,

blast 'em. And she left me in t' lurch after blewing all I had. Ah! I've been a mutton-head, by God I have."

"Who did, father?"

His eyes falling on her, he became all at once aware his Jennie was no longer the little lassie he dangled on his knees, and ashamed of something, he felt confused:

"Nobody—it's only me gabble. . . . How old are you, Jennie?"

"Sixteen, father."

"And yer knowed me voice right away when I bailed yer up near'd breakwater. Wonderful! I was clean shaved when I cleared. Lord! how time flies."

He tugged at his mat of whiskers as though they helped him to realize the years he had been away.

"Mother ever talk of me, Jen?"

She shook her head.

"And she's scratched along all right since your uncle Bob fetched yer both from Lismore"—and in a self-pitying tone: "And don't want me."

The girl did not answer, but cast down her eyes.

"By gum! that's hard," he commented, ignoring the facts in his memory that condemned him. "And she wouldn't see me, I reck'n. . . . What yer think, Jen—if I just walked in and sez"—he had been gazing furtively at Jennie, but the picture he had conjured up suddenly awakened old feelings, and he broke off with a brush at his eye, "I'm off to Bourke tomorrow."

Jennie looked up alarmed. "Oh, dad! Yer mustn't go away again. I—I——"

She couldn't tell him how she had yearned for him all these years, how vivid he was in her memories, that every joy of her childhood she could recall was intimately connected with his presence—for she had been his pet who in his eyes never did anything amiss. She had grown to girlhood clinging to that radiant past, to her happy dream of her dada's return. And now he had come—though she had been chilled by his undemonstrative manner, her heart yearned to him, and a horror seized her that now he had come it was only to leave her again.

The cry in her appeal was as a whip on his arising emotion. He felt like one who had been toiling through a desert to an oasis in his memory, and when in sight of it sees it flicked away like a mirage. It seemed for the moment as though his soul, like the prodigal's, would rend itself, that his anguish would make him mere woman—he writhed and with a dart of escape from self-trampling, from an emotional breakdown, he struck at the fog with his

fist as at an enemy, and burst out into violent imprecations at his bad luck, at drink, at her—that other woman. With a deep groan, as these swung him back to the truth, his head dropped: "It's me own fault! me own fault!" Then with the consciousness of the futility of his incipient regeneration before adverse circumstances: "And I meant to be good to 'd poor old woman. But a chap never has a chance. He might as well just chuck it, just chuck it!"

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"Uncle Bob would put yer on't breakwater"—and to intercept his remonstrances, "he wouldn't know yer, father, and then——" She hesitated and chanced it, "I could tell mother."

She saw the idea had taken effect, and explained: men were wanted; none there knew him; he could work and wait till she had talked mother over; he could board with old mother Lawson, who had several boarders——

"But I ain't fit," he stopped her. He was a bundle of rags. If he had only a decent rig-out—a pair of working pants even—he might have a show. But no boss would look at him in that state. He might manage with his boots—for a week any way. And he kicked his feet from the blanket to scrutinize his boots, as though he hadn't cast an eye on them for some time, when every day, in fact, he had examined them with forebodings. "They ain't gone much on tops," he mused with self-congratulation. . . . "What's up, Jen?"

She was so overjoyed with what was in her mind, with a desire to put it into execution, that she wanted to be off. She was on her feet.

"I'll come at daybreak, dad. Y' ain't cold?"

He wanted to know what she purposed doing. Her sudden silence, the gleam of bright anticipation in her eyes, the aptness with which she had conceived hopeful possibilities affected him. His Jen suddenly appeared in the guise of some wonderful guide on his desert of misery—he might reach his oasis after all. He was now all eager curiosity; but she was too practical to commit herself.

"Go to sleep, dad. Yer warm, ain't yer?" She was on her knees near his head, and groping under the blanket.

"But thou's cold, my Jen——" her hand was cold, icy cold. His arms were around her thin figure, and he groaned under her kisses.

"Ay! thou'll stick to s'd old dad."

"All right, father!" as she arose.

"Right-oh, Jen!"

The lamp was blown out, the fog swallowed her—he cried, "Good night, lass." There was no response. She was stumbling along through the slippery vault.

She was pale and exhausted when she entered the kitchen; but her eyes glowed when her nimble fingers, whipping out the garments from the basket, stretched out a pair of khaki pants—just the size. She had no qualms. She might confide in Tom Carter her secret; he liked her. At the worst dad could pay him for the pants. She put them aside with a pair of scissors for her journey at daybreak.

For the first week everything turned out beautifully. Dad got a job on the breakwater. Uncle Bob never guessed the man with the trimmed black whiskers was that reprobate brother-in-law of his, Tim Hogan. And as though fate were striking on behalf of the little lass, Tom Carter had gone up the river, and never sent for his washing. Only her mother worried about his pants—where had they “got to”? They must have flown. Surely there ain’t thieves about. That kitchen door lock would have to be mended. Jennie kept a discreet silence, and tugged away at the mangle.

Meanwhile she had been at work on her mother’s memories. The unsophisticated life of the girl had made her as cute as a hawk; the innocence of her motives, the burning love for her dad increasing daily, gave her the docile subtlety of a cat. She sang praises of her dad in areas remote from her own personality. In numbers of little ways she plucked scenes from the past connected with him that displayed his best traits—unwittingly burnishing up some of the very incidents her mother secretly cherished to keep her heart from turning to stone. The woman would damp the girl’s chatter in revenge for the wince at some reminiscence vivid with her husband’s personality she invoked.

“He’s not the man yer think him, Jennie. He’s changed sadly, I doubt, sin’e yer saw him. Yer was only a kid.”

“No fear, mum. Dad was good as gold off the tank. He’ll come back.”

“He’ll get the door in his face, then. I want no boozers here. The way I stuck to that man”—and she would pour out her grievances, and Jen would let the subject rip; for a time at least. It cannot be said the girl gained much on the surface, the woman’s pride had been so deeply wounded by her husband; but she revived memories that broke down the wall between that which had been in her mother’s life and that which was, between love’s far off fruitful plot and her present monotonous sterility.

Every day the girl managed to meet her father, on the breakwater, among the humpies, in secluded places. They had interviews at night. Many and strange were the excuses her mother heard for her unexpected absences from home. But he grew restless; his desire to be at home, fed by the girl, clamoured. It taxed her inven-

tion to keep him away. She soothed, coaxed, chided. "Wait a bit longer, dad; mother's coming round." He would grumble, but always in the end acquiesce to his guide's advice.

Thus for weeks, and then Fate frowned. Their meetings began to be noticed, and wrongly construed. That huddle of humpies christened "The Caves", occupied by labourers at the breakwater, was outside the world's channel. The nearest pub was on the other side of the river's mouth. Drunkenness was only an occasional occurrence. Men on pay-day certainly went on the spree at the pub. And liquor did find its way to the "Caves". But generally speaking, the little community accommodated itself to exigent circumstances. Thrown in such close propinquity, the families developed a social instinct for that which was "of good report". Hogan had given his name as Simpson, and he was a stranger. He was reticent, kept aloof. Suspicious glances had been repeatedly thrown at him of late. Men shunned him; women slammed their doors when he passed. Mischief was brewing somewhere. One day his boss, his brother-in-law, Bob Sanders, expressed the popular feeling: he told Hogan the precise date he wouldn't be wanted on the breakwater. As the poor fellow jumped off the embankment, smarting with the knowledge "he had got the sack", a young man jumped after him. "Allow me, mate." He lifted the back lappet of Hogan's coat, and with "I thought so," stalked away with a pugilistic swing of his arms. Hogan screwed his head, and a triangular slip of darker cloth than the khaki let into the pants' central seam at the top met his glance. What did the fellow mean?

Hogan had a big wrestle with himself that night, and the regenerating side of his nature won, though the victory brought sweat to his brow. He would tramp back to the plains, to misery, rather than seek an interview with his wife. Without work, he would only be a loafer on her bit of earnings, even if they were reconciled. The community for some reason was against him—ah, well, such was his luck. He would say nothing to Jennie or anyone about his intentions, but just "clear out" when he got his few pounds that would suffice for his long journey. Simple enough was the decision, yet it fetched groans.

The day came when he was paid off. Climbing the cliff, he gazed towards his wife's humpy, just beyond the Caves, opposite a sand spit. The sun was setting behind it in a solemnity of lilac sky and purpling sea. Into the still air slid from its squat chimney a thin streak of blue smoke. Presently, columns of smoke began to arise from the Caves huddled in the basin, and straggling up the sandy slopes came the voices of men and women and children—the tea-

time humming of home life. He turned his eyes towards the river, and its gleaming curves among dairy farms and sugar plantations carried them to the distant mountains gathering the shadows about their waist, and he shuddered; beyond them was the track to the drought-stricken plains. A fierce hatred of their memory drove him from the cliff.

He had meant to steal away at daybreak, but his thoughts on the cliff had so unmanned him that through dread of his resolution breaking down he determined to leave as soon as the moon rose. Jennie would be waiting for him near the breakwater, and he miles away; his heart ached at the thought of it, but he dared not trust himself to wait and see her. As it was, his feelings were so assertive that no sooner had he swallowed his tea than he hastily rolled up his swag, and, watching his opportunity, stole out of the humpy in which he boarded, unobserved as he thought, and ensconced himself in one of the many nooks of the sand dunes. His heart was very heavy, and when the moon wandered up, the face he turned towards it was pale and the cheeks wet. Hoisting up his swag, he suddenly remembered his path skirted the sand spit. A yearning to carry away in his his memory his wife's face to comfort him when on those dreary, far-off plains, directed his feet towards her humpy. As he detached himself from the cliff shade and strode across the moonlit sand spit, a figure, that had been shadowing him, hastily clambered along the rocks and crouched, watching him.

Dropping his swag softly in the humpy shadow, Hogan with beating heart crept up to the little lighted window and peeped through. He nearly gave a cry—oh, how she had altered! Why, her hair was quite grey. His finger nails were driven into his palms under a rush of grief. He shut his eyes, breathing heavily, as his past life arose and smote him. He again looked, perusing with strained eyes line after line, every wrinkle of that once bonnie face. She was seated near the table knitting, her nimble fingers flashing the needles under the lamplight like a conjurer. Once they stopped as she sighed wearily, pressing her hand to her bosom, and her wedding ring glistened. Again she aroused herself, and her fingers made the needles flick and quiver—whatever her pain, her sorrow, she would not yield to it. Work, work! The home had to be kept together, her Jennie fed and clad. He read her expression like an open book. Read her mind—yes! and his head dropped on his bosom stricken before the vision of those dead, empty years she had struggled through. If he had suffered, had not she? My God! Now came the wormwood. He had made his bed, and must lie on

it. He must be no burden to her. The least he could do now was to take himself off. "God help me," he rattled in his throat, as, his eyes blinded with tears, he snatched a last look. And—it was done in a minute; pitched on his back, a man's knees on his chest; he felt the cold steel on his wrists as the handcuffs snapped before he knew what had happened.

"Get up!"

He obeyed, half-dazed. The man strode to the door, and knocked.

"For God's sake! Don't take me in there."

So hoarse was the whisper that the man, suspicious, stepped back, and laid his hand on Hogan's shoulder with a warning grip.

The door opened, and Mrs Hogan stood on the threshold with an expression of surprise that became one of alarm when the official coat and cap approached the light. Hogan suddenly stepped back, with his head bent. He was unceremoniously pushed forward into the light.

"What's wrong, sergeant?" her voice quavered.

"Only this man peeping about for another chance to steal something. Carter swears those pants he's got on are his—the ones you lost. Do you identify them?"

"They look like them. Who is he?"

"Just as well you don't keep your ears open, Mrs Hogan. Where's your daughter?"

"Jennie—heaven help me. My poor lass—what's she to do with it?"

"Now, don't get upset, Mrs Hogan. I only want to see her. Where is she?"

The woman threw up her arms despairingly—

"God help me to bear fresh trouble! She's out."

"Then I'll stay till she comes back—inside!"

Hogan lurched forward into the room, his head still bent. There was a loud hissing in his ears, everything danced in a whirl of mad lights. With teeth set he held on to one purpose—to hide his identity.

He felt his wife's eyes on him.

"Hold up your head!"

Hogan dared not remonstrate; his voice would betray him.

"He's a sulky dog."

"But my Jennie, sergeant—don't keep anything back, sir. What has she done?"

Her voice was broken with the emotion she tried to control. The sergeant was touched by her piteous look, and his blood boiled.

"A scoundrel like you ought to be kicked from here to Syd-

ney——” he glared at Hogan. “Where were you before you came here? Won’t speak! Record too bad, eh?”

Hogan’s heart jumped; he heard quick steps approaching.

“Please sergeant, tell me——”

Jennie’s cry of joy as she sprang across the room to her dad startled the other two. Her arms were around his neck—“O, mother! mother! Come and kiss him,” she sobbed.

“Do you know him?” suddenly inquired the sergeant, recovering from his astonishment. But the mother never replied. She hardly breathed; her eyes were fixed like a wild woman’s on Jennie and her father. Jennie unclasped her arms; she saw her father was weeping. No one moved. The hush frightened her. She glanced at her mother, at her father. Then, all at once, she seemed to realize the presence of the sergeant. She cried in a loud voice:

“Father, what is it?” and fell on his breast.

In a moment all was confusion. But, little by little, the sergeant unravelled the tangle. The man was innocent, and Mrs Hogan’s husband. That put a different complexion on the case. He unlocked and withdrew the handcuffs from Hogan’s wrists. Hogan immediately glanced at his wife, but her face was like stone. He strode to the door.

“Mother! Mother!” Jennie flew to her. But the mother’s face did not relax. She sprang to her father, gazing over his shoulder at his wife from the doorway.

“You mustn’t go, father!” She almost shrieked the words.

“Your mother don’t want me, Jen.” He clasped her in his arms, soothing her sobbing soul.

At his voice—it was the first time he had spoken—a tremor went through the mother, and the tears began to trickle down her cheeks.

The sergeant quietly left the house, and listened outside the door. Above a confusion of ejaculating voices and sobbing, he heard Jennie exclaiming, “Then I’ll go with him, mother; I’ll go with dad.”

“She’s a little brick,” he muttered. “She’ll bring them together, and I shouldn’t wonder if she don’t talk her uncle round, too.”

[From *The Tragedy Behind the Curtain, and Other Stories*, 1910.]

THE CURSE OF THE LOST SOUL MINE

By JAMES EDMOND

MANY years have passed since I struck Bildad's Creek, a little ruined mining town dropped down to dream and moulder among the peaks which line the Goulburn Valley, in Victoria. It lies away from all the main lines of traffic, but anyone who chances to take a certain back-track, leading to no place that any man could have a reasonable desire to arrive at, may chance to find it sprawling in a little valley, as if it had fallen heavily while on its way to some more desirable part of the earth and never got up again. The road consists mostly of a dizzy climb into space. Over many zig-zags it totters heavenwards, until at last the summit is reached, and then a tremendous rush downwards and a fall that seems to have no end brings the traveller or his remains into Bildad's Creek. Most strangers reach Bildad's in a sitting position and with the wreckage of a smile on their features. There is something of an amusing character at the top of the mountain—I forget the nature of the thing, but I know it is there—and the visitor is in the act of laughing at it when he reaches the end of the earth and descends in a dishevelled heap right into the abyss, and brings up opposite the door of the local hotel. When the first pilgrim thus shot himself down he probably created a little surprise among the inhabitants, but the township gradually got used to such visitations in the halcyon days when Bildad's Creek was a real goldfield, and diggers were crowding in at the rate of one or upwards frequently, and they take things philosophically now.

When the settlement was first built I never learned. For a number of years, however, it has gasped wearily along in a state of subdued helplessness, and has waited patiently for the muddy little torrent which gallops past its door to wash down good luck and deposit it in front of the post office, and thus promote a great industrial resurrection. But the river never seems to fulfil its mission. Now and then, however, it rises and overwhelms the hundred

square yards of ground on which Bildad's is built, and then the township hangs on to something in order to withstand the rush of the waters and remarks that the weather seems to be damp. A long course of experiences of this sort has filled the inhabitants with a general aspect of holding on to something; if they are addressed suddenly they generally moor themselves to a fixed object before replying, and this tendency, so far as I could learn, is hereditary and incurable. Now and then a stranger of great mental force and wide intelligence who has drifted in a lonely caravan of one across the Flour-Bag—the huge, obstinate-looking, dromedary-shaped peak which looms up between the petrified silence of Bildad's Creek and the more cultured woe of Johnsonville—arrives in the sudden manner already described, and brings with him an air of misplaced confidence, but in less than twenty-four hours the slumbrous influence of the settlement takes possession of him and he begins to lean up against things in unison with his exhausted surroundings. Nothing ever happens at Bildad's Creek, or if it does, nobody ever wakes in time to see it. Now and then, perhaps, a slate is blown off the roof of the little church—the only building in sight which seems to have been roofed at all except by accident—but, though the inhabitants as a whole are well-disposed towards the Christian faith, they invariably let it lie. Possibly they indulge a faint hope that it may one day be blown on again, but this seldom takes place. Apart from the church, Bildad's is built chiefly of boulders, jam-tins, firewood, and bits of rusted machinery removed by hand-power from one or other of the various claims that are caving in all round—or, rather, it would be more correct to say that it is repaired with these diverse materials, for what it was originally built of is not recorded even in legend. Connoisseurs who study the formation of the settlement can still trace in the different styles of its architecture the various stages in the material progress of Bildad's and can point out the tide marks which record the ebb and flow of its chequered fortunes. There are buildings propped up with gin-cases and the remains of brandy-kegs—these are the relics of an old-time burst of prosperity when Bildad's floated its intellect in strong drink and gave way to public rejoicings. Following this comes an era whose history is written in the wreckage of tea-chests and sugar-bags—an era when the township was sobering down and realizing by degrees that life is not all liquor and mirth; and a little farther along the solitary thoroughfare appear traces of another and more degenerate age, whose footsteps consist mainly of bricks and bark and the covers of ancient Bibles—melancholy relics of a period when Bildad's began to go back upon the faith of its ancestors, and

to regard religion mainly as an institution which requires no physical exertion and which is not heavy to lift. Lastly, a period of desolation shows a casual architecture of tents.

Despite the versatility which enables it to make use of so great a variety of material blessings, however, there are times when Bildad's is in low water, and then it generally settles down to wait until some portable article of value slides down from the adjacent mountains into its backyard. Sometimes this visitation takes the form of a fallen tree. Now and then a belated cow which has reached out too far into space comes tearing through the atmosphere. Whatever it is, Bildad's accepts it with the calm of a town which is accustomed to have its blessings shot down at it from the upper air, and after an interval of judicious contemplation, it fills the valley with an appeal to "Bill" to come and lend a hand. One of the most striking peculiarities of Bildad's Creek lies in the fact that the whole male population is more or less named Bill. This state of things has become so deeply fixed that anyone whose name is not Bill would find it necessary to tear up the old tradition by the roots before he could assert his status as a separate citizen. But perhaps, on the whole, it is better and more profitable to let the tradition slide. It establishes a bond of brotherhood in a dejected region where some such softening and refining influence is much wanted, and in addition to this valuable moral effect it furnishes a beacon for any casual stranger who may chance to be belated in the land, or lost among the long grass of the damp hillside. Twice, in the days when I had taken to roaming over the peaks with a pick-axe after the fashion which prevails in the Goulburn Valley, did I find myself, as night came on, a lost atom roosting on a dripping rock, with a fog all around, and nothing but an unspeakable sense of emptiness and disgust for a guide, companion, and friend. Each time I rent the listening air with splitting shrieks for "Bill", and each time a stentorian prospector heard me and answered back from the depths of the public-house on the Creek with a blood-curdling whoop which shook the adjacent ranges on their rocky throne. It was not a musical cry, for the frequent Bill of Bildad's Creek is not built to be a lightsome son of song, but it was more welcome at the moment than the notes of the heavenly choirs; and when I had located the voice and shinned down the track to the small creek, and crossed by means of the fallen tree which served for a bridge, I would fall violently into the place where refreshment was supplied for man and beast—particularly beast—and tell the loud-mouthed digger who had answered my appeal that he could regard me in future as a brother without any extra charge.

The Lost Soul claim is, in its way, one of the leading features of Bildad's Creek. It was a place with a curse upon it. It embraces the whole of a reasonably large mountain right opposite to the hotel and conveniently adjacent to the post-office, so that if, at any time, a Melbourne syndicate should chance to write to the owner offering him £750,000 in cash for the property, there is nothing to prevent his receiving the letter with all reasonable despatch. The Lost Soul claim dates back to the beginning of Bildad's, and it promises to hold out till the other institutions of the place have crumbled away, and the valley itself is filled with debris and grit and unsaleable mining scrip and other wreckage. Somewhere in the days before the public-house was built, one Bill Wetter fixed his eye upon the spot and resolved that there he would lay the foundations of his fortune. Accordingly he took up a lease and inserted six tunnels in the most hopeless portions of the property, and in the course of five years he successfully disencumbered himself of all his worldly assets without once striking even the semblance of wealth. Finally he mortgaged the property to a person named William Thompson, and instead of using the money thus obtained in a further search for the precious metal, as agreed upon by the parties to the transaction, he feloniously settled down on the lower parts of the claim and commenced to grow potatoes on the only spot where these vegetables could hold out without being individually tied to the earth with a string. His end was of a melancholy and tragic character. One summer afternoon, when he was considering the profits of his agricultural enterprise, Thompson arrived with a view to foreclosing on the property, and brought with him a large book and a pencil with which to take an inventory of the extensive machinery and plant, and to note down the various signs of mineral riches which he expected to fall over at every step. There was a brief and stormy interview, which Thompson, who was unused to mountain climbing, maintained on all fours; and it was afterwards attested by reliable and independent witnesses that in the course of the remarks Wetter was distinctly heard telling his partner to "keep his hair on". Then the pair started uphill towards the nearest tunnel, but just at the steepest part of the ascent the ancient prospector lost his footing and, falling backwards, overwhelmed his partner, and when they reached the bottom of the mountain they were so hopelessly entangled that it was practically impossible to sort them out.

Thompson's eldest son William shortly afterwards took possession of the property; but the curse attached to it was too much for him,

and when he came up to look at the reef the sight of it undermined his constitution and he took a series of fits on various parts of the lease, one of which ended fatally. His remains were interred without ostentation, and when the obsequies were over, the grandson (William) of the original Thompson inherited the Lost Soul claim; but he was bitten by a horse on the second day of his proprietorship, and his worldly goods reverted to an obscure uncle who was generally looked down upon by the family. In the case of this gentleman the anathema had evidently worked backwards, he having been partially paralysed for many years—a circumstance which was generally ascribed in well-informed circles to the fact that he was the destined owner of the Lost Soul mine; and this view of the case gained considerable support from the events which followed. Two months' possession of Wetter's enterprise ate away the props of Thompson's uncle's fortune, and gnawed the pillars of his house asunder, and after bearing up as well as he could for that brief period he went down to the bank in a go-cart and executed an assignment of his estate. The manager took possession in due form and registered himself as owner of the mine at Bildad's Creek, and the very next day he fell over a sleeping dog on his own doorstep, and, turning a hurried somersault, received such severe damage to his digestion that he was compelled to live on a slop diet for the rest of his life.

After this there was a temporary calm in the affairs of the Lost Soul property. A junior clerk, it is true, fell and broke his leg while going up to some Government department to attest a large document relating to the mine; and a wealthy speculator fell off a balcony and was killed two hours before the time at which he was to have met the bank manager who lived on a slop diet and purchased the claim for a satisfactory figure. Otherwise the moral atmosphere remained calm and untroubled. At the end of nine months the bank succeeded in effecting a sale to a gentleman named William Smith, who gave his bill for £500, payable at six months from date, and the directors congratulated themselves on being rid of an unsatisfactory transaction. The office-boy who went out to post the letter in which Mr Smith's offer was thankfully accepted disappeared mysteriously next day, and was never heard of again; but on the whole things went smoothly.

Mr Smith constructed a ten-head battery on the spot where the primeval Wetter's potato-patch had stood, and proceeded to contuse himself badly in his exploration through the crumbling tunnels, and down the sloppy winzes, and around the aggravating angles which were the principal features of his new venture. He is still remembered at and around Bildad's Creek as the only man who ever

went mining in these parts with an umbrella; but his principal claim on the gratitude of the inhabitants lies in the fact that he was the only white person on record who, by any chance, found anything in the unprofitable mazes of the Lost Soul property.

Walking rapidly with a lantern through the lowest tunnel on the first day of his proprietorship, he concussed heavily against something which he hadn't known was there, and a minute later he emerged in a pallid state, with his hair standing up and frightful clamours issuing from his head. He slid down the hill backwards, turning somersaults as he went, plunged wildly across the creek, and finally sat down and gibbered in the roadway opposite the hotel. This unlooked-for conduct on his part led to some explorations which were conducted by two able-bodied citizens and a dog, and their researches were presently rewarded by the discovery of a skeleton sitting in a corner of the tunnel, with a bottle in its pocket and its mouth filled with bread and cheese.

The funeral which ensued was charged to Mr Smith, and after this sad event he pined away visibly and became reckless in his habits. He hired more miners than could find standing-room on the property, and commenced to blast the hill away in every direction, and finally he blew most of his own hair out by the roots while firing a charge. This disaster left him completely bald, and a hair-restorer which he used shortly afterwards in the hope of alleviating the domestic calamity which had fallen upon him completed his ruin. How it came about no one knew, but a chemist who lived eighteen miles off in a north-easterly direction, and who started over the hills to prescribe for the patient but lost his way and wandered about in the rain without food for a night and two days, advanced a theory that the fluid must have soaked through one of the bruises on Mr William Smith's head and so reached his brain, to impair and undermine an otherwise valuable intellect. At all events, on the second Saturday after his disaster, Mr Smith declined to pay the men in his employ, and when they called on him in a body to make representations on the financial aspect of the question, he pointed out to them that the money market was crippled owing to the high premium then offering for gold in Paraguay, and explained that he never paid in notes on conscientious grounds, these means of exchange being frequently tainted with microbes and carrying with them the germs of infectious disease. For a few days subsequent to this collapse, Mr Smith travelled about the township uttering shrill whoops at intervals, and, finally, after an ineffectual endeavour to catch a kangaroo with his hands, he hired the baker's horse for ten shillings, and left for other parts. His bills were duly

dishonoured on presentation, and the Lost Soul claim was once more on the market.

Three weeks after the fiasco of Mr William Smith, an Irish gentleman named Bill Higgins came forward and put his mark at the foot of a bill for £750, and the ruinous mine had a new owner. It was, as he frankly admitted, the first time he had signed a document of this description, and it was only after a long consultation with his spiritual adviser, in the course of which he assured himself that he could not be hanged for non-payment, that he ventured his soul in pen and ink. Mr Higgins' outward aspect was not suggestive of wealth, but as the bank officials justly argued, if they kept on selling the mine to everybody who turned up, there was a fair chance that some day one of the many proprietors might strike enough gold to enable him to pay for it. So the transaction was concluded, and Mr Higgins arrived at the Creek on foot to take possession. He brought with him a long-handled shovel with which to dig out the great masses of pure gold which he understood were on the spot, and a gun to defend his treasure to the last gasp, also forty rounds of ammunition, and a complicated species of fog-signal with which to summon assistance in case he should be overpowered by a piratical horde bent upon wresting his millions from his grasp. But after a cursory glance at his new sphere of industry his mood changed, and the township was shocked to hear the worst-disgusted Celt in Victoria holding forth regardless of cost in the public thoroughfare. In the course of a long and complicated anathema he consigned to chaos the town and the whole surrounding district, the mine and all the machinery thereto attached, and everybody connected with the property, and everybody who had ever seen it or anything like it, and everybody who had heard of it, or who knew anybody who had heard of it. Then, gathering renewed vigour as he went on, he poured out the vials of his wrath afresh, and denounced the public-house for being opposite to such a hopeless proposition, and the post-office for being adjacent to it, and he heaped a great anathema on himself for being there, and on the place in general for being there to hold him, and he used the greater and lesser ex-communication upon the banking institution which had sold him the property, with sundry side allusions to a restaurant kept by a man named Finnigan because it was next door to the bank, and a few stray expressions of violence directed at everything, animal, vegetable, and mineral, which had not been covered and embraced by the previous execration. He also expressed his contempt for the past, the present, and the future. This public

function being completed, Mr Higgins deliberately fired off his forty rounds of ammunition at the crushing plant and threw stones and mud at the claim generally, after which he retired for the night in a wooden hut on the lee side of his property. His reign lasted eight days altogether, and it rained heavily all the time. It was under the Higgins' regime that Bildad's first learned the vast resources of the British language, and this was practically the only trace he left behind him. On the ninth day after his arrival his admiring fellow-citizens hired the baker's omni-present horse as a means by which the new owner of the Lost Soul might get as far as Johnsonville on his return to town, and a deputation broke the news to him, and informed him that he would have to tear himself away because he was creating insomnia. The Irish speculator, as it chanced, was unable to ride, but his innate delicacy forbade him to decline the mistaken kindness of his neighbours, and he alternately towed the horse behind him and chased it in front of him over the long-drawn miles of that weary journey. When at last he arrived at his destination he paid for a feed for the equine impediment which had harassed him on his way, and hired a boy who had never been in those parts before to return the animal to its owner. Then, discovering the youth's geographical infirmity, he accompanied him six miles on the return track, after which he bestowed a departing kick to the steed, and bade the youth to deliver along with it a certain hundred-jointed remark and awful entanglement of plain and fancy denunciation which he entrusted to his care, with strict injunctions that it was to be delivered while hot.

Excepting for the advent of a small, ordinary-looking man with a chastened expression and a watery eye, who took possession of the Lost Soul mine, and having murdered his wife, buried her on the ground, nothing of any importance happened for some months after Mr Higgins' departure. But at length—an evil spirit having entered into me, and being deceived and led away, or else being under the influence of chloroform, morphia, opium, ether, or other chemical preparations—I was induced to purchase the valuable property which had languished so long on the banks of Bildad's Creek. Having concluded the fatal bargain, I started along the rocky track which had been trodden hard by the multitude of my retreating predecessors. Most of them had left their traces at one point or another of the road, and once in every mile or thereabouts I roused ghostly recollection of a previous owner or fell over some aged local prophet who had a tale which he wanted to unfold.

Among those moral footprints the freshest were those of Mr Higgins. But in addition to this I found some faint indications of Wetter, the founder of the enterprise, and his partner, Thompson, who seemed to have passed through the district in a subdued caravan of one shortly before the fatal day when they fell off the property with Thompson underneath. Furthermore, an aged hotelkeeper, with a roadside licence, told me how he had, on one occasion, been wakened up in the middle of the night by shrieks and howls and sounds of eerie laughter, mingled with the rush of galloping hoofs, and how he was convinced that this was the deranged Smith and the baker's horse on their joint road to ruin. Also, he was filled with a dismal tradition of the time when twenty-five of Smith's unpaid miners rushed his premises and drank the establishment dry, and laughed a Hollow Laugh when he asked for payment, and told him that they were unable to settle the bill because the boss was away looking after the drain of gold in Paraguay. Then they smiled a Fiendish Smile—the whole twenty-five of them—and went on their riotous way towards civilization.

Under the influence of these and other cheerful reminiscences, I propped myself up outside the Bildad's Creek hotel at a late hour and in a pensive frame of mind. Opposite the building a great, wet, hulking shadow loomed up and stared at me. From its shape and the inherent emptiness of its aspect I recognized my new property. I cast just one look at it, and went indoors. The landlord regarded me with a pitying eye when I introduced myself, and showed me to an apartment which sloped so steeply away from the rest of the building that I was liable at any moment to lose my balance in it and bring up with a shock against the wall. Then he went silently away, and came back surreptitiously with a Bible, which volume he left on the table that I might look up comforting passages if, at any time, I chanced to find myself sinking. Inspecting the book, I found that it had been annotated and roughly illustrated by Mr Smith, evidently in the days when that gentleman was in a lank and melancholy mood, a sketch of fourteen devils chasing a skeleton down a steep hill being the most conspicuous of the series. The skeleton carried a coffin under one arm and a tombstone under the other. Another design apparently represented a mediaeval lover serenading his mistress as she leant out of the window of a baronial castle, while a fierce-looking person—presumably a rival with murder in his heart—approached on all-fours. They were a cheerless series, and when I inspected them I began to wonder if I would also, in course of time, become an artist at Bildad's Creek, when the solitude

and the ghosts of the Lost Soul mine had eaten into my consciousness and made me a wreck.

I spent nearly a week at Bildad's, and ran imminent risk of breaking my neck at least twice a day to no profitable purpose. Possibly I might have really broken it in course of time, but, as it chanced, the opportunity was denied me. About eight o'clock one cold morning my affairs came to a crisis. I had awakened to the gentle murmur of the creek, and had just ceased climbing the slippery rocks of the Lost Soul claim in my dreams, when my bedroom door opened, and a stranger burst in. He evidently expected that the floor would be level, which it was not; therefore he lost his balance and crossed the room with one tremendous leap, and then with an ejaculation he drove his head into the opposite wall and, rebounding, sat down on me. When he recovered, which was after some time, he regarded me with an arrogant expression in his eye, and evidently imagined that I had assaulted him. Smothering his indignation, however, he informed me that he had arrived to take possession of my mine under the authority of a certain blue document two feet long and eight inches across at the waist. This publication was connected in some way with a lawsuit commenced against someone that I had never heard of before, by some person with whom I was entirely unacquainted, but who professed to represent certain claims against the William Thompson who had suffered from fits on the property. It set forth that under the authority of the Supreme Court of the State of Victoria I was required to give an account of all precious metals extracted from the mine during the period of my occupation, and to surrender to the custody of the said honourable court all plant, machinery, implements, water-rights, easements, quartz mined but not yet crushed, timber, freehold and leasehold property, and all other matters whatsoever connected with the estate, pending a settlement of the suit aforementioned, and to proceed otherwise as the court might direct, and to act generally in the manner hereinafter provided. Having made these statements, he leaned up against the wash-basin in a state of gloomy grandeur and waited for a reply. I looked at him in silence for about a quarter of an hour, and then I rose with the blanket wrapped round me, and spoke:

"My friend," I said sternly, "if you will climb the hill opposite you will find twenty tons of iron ruins and one moth-eaten shed without a roof, which comprise the entire plant and utensils of the property which you seem to suspect me of having feloniously abducted. Also you will probably discover about six rare and valuable holes in the ground, which I assure you I have not shifted or other-

wise interfered with since they came into my possession. They lead nowhere, and if you follow them carefully, you will probably get there. Lastly, if you care to dive under this bed, you will bruise yourself against one lump of ballast calculated to yield twenty hundredweight of rock to the ton, which specimen comprises the whole of the mineral wealth which I have extracted from the property. And now, let go that wash-stand and get out for evermore."

I suspect there was a homicidal look in my eye, for he got out instantly.

I don't know who owns the Lost Soul mine now.

[From *A Journalist and Two Bears*, 1913.]



THE SAILOR SUIT

By HARLEY MATTHEWS

BILL had forgotten his age—the age he had enlisted under. Whenever he had to supply particulars of himself—and that necessity occurs twice a week in the army—he gave a different age. He always managed to remember his name, though, as he hinted one night when he had come back from the canteen, it wasn't really Bill Adams. He proceeded still more darkly to suggest that the police in Australia had reason to know his terrible right name; but it wasn't all his fault. No; he wasn't a bad beggar, only when his trust in man was imposed on—like tonight, when a man took his quart pot and his five piastres to fill it with, and never came back—somebody must feel his terrible revenge; if not the real delinquent, then the community. Bill's reminiscences and Bill's threats made everyone in the tent that night hope that he would find the man this time.

But his reminiscences were not all of that kind. The series that are part of this story began the night that somebody kicked the

light over just as Bluey was beginning the eighth page of his letter to Ruby. Bluey's remarks held the whole tent as he undressed. Everyone watched his right arm against the white sand outside the doorway as he removed his boots. "Never mind, Blue," said Bill Adams, placatingly. "Think of me. All I had after two hours' writing tonight was three lines."

A pause then, after which everybody breathed relievedly. Bluey was in bed safely—for the others.

"I was never any good at writing, though," Bill continued, as though there had been no critical moment. "Once the teacher told us to write about our holidays and where we had been—composition, he called it. I'd only been to my aunt's at Redfern one day, but I didn't want him to know that. He gave us an hour to do it. I had four lines done, that was all. So, as mine was the shortest, he read it out to the class. It just said that I'd been up-country visiting my cousin, and when I got home I wrote up and asked him to come down to our 'palace'. Of course, I meant 'place', but he read it out just as I had it. The kids all knew I had been nowhere, but that was nothing till he read out about our palace. You ought to have heard the roar! They all knew the crib we lived in—bags instead of glass in half the windows. As soon as school was over, I grabbed my hat and bolted for home. But there's one thing. If they couldn't teach me to write, they taught me to be careful. I always read a letter over now about four times before I send it."

"Eh, Bill?" asked Diablo. "When you got a sixer, did you take them on one hand or both?"

"Oh, one, Dab! What do you think? You only had one sore hand then."

"Say, Bill, did you use to——"

"Look here," broke in Bluey, still sore over that unfinished letter. "I wish you'd let a man go to sleep. Talking a lot of rot all night——"

"Yes," growled Goodie, whose early years had been spent on a training ship for bad boys, and gave him now no pleasant memories. "If you don't want any sleep, I do."

"Say, Bill, did your mother use to buy you a sailor suit?" Diablo asked.

"You didn't have a sailor suit, did you, Dab?" Bill said, his voice startled to an unusual respect.

"'Course I did, Bill. One every six months."

"One every six months! I was more patches than anything else then."

"Ah, you were poor, Bill," Diablo said in mock pity. "My sailor suits always had a whistle. I used to let the poor kids blow it sometimes when they'd come round."

"Starve the crows," howled Bluey, in that agonized screech of his. "Talking a lot of kids' dribble all night——"

But Bill was too interested in Diablo's reminiscences to trouble about Bluey's interruptions. "Did the whistle have a white cord, Dab, or——?"

"What! Would you, Bluey? Take that then!" Then the aiming of blind blows, the dodging of missiles, the shock of two contending bodies struggling about the tent, the awful remarks of the others—uproar.

"See here! Inside there! If you don't keep quiet, I'll file the guard down!" This uttered by the well-known voice of the Sergeant-Major. "This is the last night I warn you."

Instantly there was not a sound. Soon Shorty started his wonderful snore. Bluey was lying very quiet. "Eh, Dab," said Bill softly, "did you really use to have a sailor suit?"

"Yes, Bill," Diablo answered sleepily. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing," Bill said, "Good-night, Dab."

Nothing! Yes, but in that "Good-night" was a new note—old, too, perhaps—a note of reverence, adoration almost, hero-worship.

They were leaning over the after rail of the ship at Alexandria. They would have been round at the side watching their comrades working on the wharf, only the sergeant-major was there looking for them to help. From where they stood they could see railway trucks—two at a time as they slipped by—and a glimpse of the road and town beyond. "Look, Bill!" Diablo said. "They must have finished now. There go the trucks with our kit-bags."

"I wish it was our packs and equipments," Bill growled. "A man'd feel more like a real tourist then."

"There, Bill," Diablo pointed. "There's a Frenchy in a sailor suit."

Bill looked along the deck of the ship moored behind their own. "Where?" he asked.

"On guard there. With that long skewer of a bayonet."

"That!" Bill said scornfully. "That's not a sailor suit."

"'Course it is," Diablo told him. "That's a French sailor suit."

"Do the rich French kids wear a suit like that, Dab—red tassel on the cap and all?"

"I suppose so, Bill. Anyway, we'll soon see when we get there."

But the Army played them a trick again. They did not go to

France—not straight away, anyhow. Instead, one early morning they found themselves on a narrow strip of beach where no children, poor or rich, would play for many months. There were plenty of sailor suits for Bill, though, if that were all he wanted—more untidy and dishevelled than any mother would allow—dripping with sea-water, torn on rocks, blood-spattered. One went up the first hill with them. Its wearer carried a rifle and a bayonet he had picked up beside a soldier dead on the beach.

“Bill,” said Diablo, “aren’t you going to ask him for a blow of his whistle?”

They were sitting just under the first ridge then. A new sound in the air above took the grin out of both of them—shrapnel. They watched the bullets splashing in the sea below. The sailor seemed to know something about it. “Good job they’re bursting it high,” he said.

“Anyway,” said Diablo, “they can’t submarine us now.”

Four shells burst simultaneously above them next time. When Diablo looked next, Bill had a curious look of wondering uncertainty in his eyes. “What’s up, Bill?”

“Think I’m hit, Dab. There seems something warm running down my leg.”

They both made an examination. The pellet had had just enough force to break through the back of Bill’s trousers. The skin was a little bruised. The pellet itself was the something warm that Bill had felt.

“You’ll have to have a patch there again, Bill. But you always were poor.”

It was not till weeks after that he found time. The hole was far gone then; indeed there was very little trouser left. He cut a great square from a web knapsack and stitched it on by the four corners, and here and there where he could get a needle through. After that nobody could see the back of Bill—even a hundred yards away—without knowing his pants were patched. That patch was better than any identification disc. It was the only one of its kind on the whole Peninsula.

In the evenings that followed he would be sitting on that patch just at the entrance to the trenches. He was a member of a machine-gun crew now. Their post for the night was just in a traverse to the right. He would sit there a little apart from the others, watching the lights of the hospital ship out to sea. All the fun had gone from his eyes. The stretcher-bearers had taken Diablo away some time ago. Millsey and Shorty were just down the hill there, but

he always tried to keep his eyes from those two patches of new earth.

Every second night or so two sailors came to visit them—up from the beach they said. There was always a welcome for them, for they never failed to bring a supply of cigarettes, and they had all the sailor's breezy talk and ways that won Bill's mates completely. It was, "Come and see this little surprise for Abdul when he comes over, Jack." And, "Jack, this is where we mount our machine-gun for a night attack."

They must have thought Bill a very surly sort of fellow. He took no notice of them—just sat on his patch looking over the hills out to sea—no matter what fine joke they had to tell. He wouldn't smoke their cigarettes until they had gone. "Sailor clothes no longer the fashion, Bill?" someone who knew his predilection asked once.

"Not that sort," Bill replied.

The sailors had just gone one evening when a signaller came running up the sap. "Those men in sailor clothes still here?" he asked breathlessly. "Message from Divisional Headquarters to detain them."

"They've just gone round to the next battalion," he was told.

He rushed back down the sap. The field telephone was not far away—just round the first corner. Presently they heard the Adjutant's voice: "Hullo! Is that— Right! Two men in sailor clothes last heard of going towards your lines. Order from Division to detain them for enquiries."

Some time after the signaller passed that way again.

"Did you find those sailor chaps?" someone asked.

"No! and won't," he said. "They're spies."

"Oh, turn yourself inside out," they advised him.

"Honest," he said. "They're Germans all right. Easy enough for them to have got the clothes off a couple of dead sailors. And everybody here would show a sailor round. Good dodge, all right."

"Well, who'd 'a' thought that?" they said one after another. "Look at the slangy way they spoke and the cigarettes and all."

"I knew they weren't dinkum sailors, anyway," Bill said.

"You," they said scornfully. "How did you know, then?"

"Because they didn't have a whistle," Bill replied.

A year afterwards now. Bill has been in France some months. He is sitting at a table in a café drinking his wine—*vin blanc*. There is sand on the floor, and near the door at a larger table a group of French sailors talking noisily—to Bill, futilely. Across the street is the crowded basin of the port.

Bill is feeling lonely. In the convalescent camp overlooking the town he is the only Australian, at present. And he can't feel friendly to Tommies—not since that time when it was necessary to show six of them how justly terrible his revenge could be. It happened in England, whither he had gone after he was wounded while defending that machine-gun position on Gallipoli. He had no fault to find with the way of the people there till the night before his departure for battlefields again. But for that episode he would have been all kindness to English soldiers still.

It happened this way. Bill walked into a fish-and-chip shop. There were half-a-dozen Tommies standing, waiting for their pen'orth of fish and ha'porth of chips to cook.

Bill gave his order. "Four shillings' worth of fish and chips, please."

The proprietor looked round, amazed. "Make it another two bob and you can have the shop and the missus thrown in," he said.

"The four bob's worth will do this time," Bill replied.

It was near closing-up time and the provender cooking was the last in the shop. The fish-man debated in his mind. He looked at the Tommies and he looked at Bill. It was the same as if he had looked at ninepence in coppers and four shillings in silver and been asked to choose. The Tommies and Bill waited. At last the fish-man put the still sizzling dish on the counter. There was really only ninepence worth in it. But—"Four shillings' worth of fish and chips, sir," he said to Bill.

"Ere, what about us?" one of the Tommies howled.

The fish-man was ladling the chips out on to one sheet of paper.

"Going to give our order to a bleeding six-bob-a-day swanker," another Tommy roared.

"They're ours!" the nearest Tommy yelled, and gave Bill a push. The other five shouted confirmation and swayed towards him. But Bill had been watching and was quicker. He grabbed the dish from the counter. "All right! Take the whole lot," he said and threw the dish at them—fish, chips, fat and all. He didn't wait any longer—not even to see who would pay.

So he sat in the French café feeling very lonely. Mamselle's fat cheeks behind the bar shone on him, but he looked right past them—at the wall. He wished Diablo was there; but he was up in the line, or was when Bill left this time, wounded again. A couple of Tommies plodded in. Mamselle's smile swung round for them. Bill sank farther back into himself—moodier.

He was aroused to a partial interest in the world by a younger voice outside the door. The sailors were speaking to it now. He

stared over at them and there came into his view a diminutive figure in blue. There was a grotesque red tassel on the cap and the shirt at the throat was striped, the trousers were not very bell-bottomed, but it was a sailor suit nevertheless—no different as far as he could see to what the real French sailors wore. His face was old for such a child, but all the children hereabout and behind the line had old faces. Bill summed him up immediately. This was a rich French kid, and the sailors were pleased at seeing their uniform imitated. Imitation is sometimes a pleasing form of flattery.

Once he was inside, the sailors lost all further interest in him. However, he seemed known well enough, for he came past Bill, Mamselle cried, "*Ah, bonjour, Monsieur Victor.*"

"*Monsieur Victor!*" assuredly one of the rich kids round about. Mamselle and he seemed old friends, the way they laughed and talked together. Presently Mamselle poured out his drink—*Vin blanc!* Strange drink for a kid. Still they did many strange things in this country.

He came over and sat at the table next to Bill. "*Bonjour, Monsieur l'Australien,*" he said, in a delightful childish way.

"*Vous,*" essayed Bill. "*Vous un*"—he couldn't find the word—"un sailor?"

The boy understood. "*Mais oui, monsieur,*" he replied.

"*Et vous allez,*" Bill pointed over to the ships and then swept his hand seaward—"right away out there."

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

Bill was delighted. It was delicious to hear this kid pretending he was a real sailor—just what Bill would have done himself if he had ever had a sailor suit. He did not care for the amused derision of the Tommies now.

"*Non,*" said Bill, pointing to the boy's breast. "*Pas—whistle.*"

He didn't understand. Bill whistled softly on his fingers.

"*Mais oui,*" the boy exclaimed comprehendingly. "*Non, monsieur, pas de —*" And then he called over to the sailors at the doorway. They rattled off some reply at which they all laughed—evidently a fine joke.

"Have one with me!" Bill would not attempt that in French, so he picked up the boy's glass and carried it across to Mamselle with his own.

He put his own down first. "*Vin blanc,*" he said. Then the boy's. "*Limonade!*"

"*Limonade, monsieur?*" Mamselle queried.

"Yes," said Bill firmly.

The boy did not notice till his lips had touched it. "*Pas bon!*" he

said. "*Pas bon, Monsieur l'Australien, votre limonade. Vin blanc pour moi.*" And Bill actually passed his *vin blanc* over and drank lemonade!—Bill who—— Thus does the worship of riches affect some of us.

But very shortly he took the glasses back again. "*Deux vin blancs,*" he said this time.

At last the boy got up to go, "*Demain,*" Bill said, and pointed to the table. "*Vous ici?*"

"*Oui, monsieur! Adieu, monsieur.*"

"So long!" said Bill.

Bill was in the café earlier next afternoon. There was another glass of wine on the table beside his own. The boy came in with the sailors, all laughing and talking together. He seemed not to guess it was he to whom Bill was beckoning till he saw the other glass, when he came over. "*Merci, monsieur,*" he cried. "*Santé.*"

"Today," Bill ventured. "*Vous allez——*"

"*Mais oui, monsieur,*" the boy returned.

"*Cette,*" said Bill, playfully, pointing to the destroyer in the harbour "*Vôtre?*"

"*Non, monsieur,*" he answered. "*Mais violà,*" and he pointed to a mine-sweeper.

Bill was tickled. It was immense—this delicious make-believe—these French kids were good at it, all right.

Bill drew something out of his pocket. "*Pour vous!*" he said.

"*Oh, monsieur! Un souvenir!*" the boy shouted gleefully. "*Merci Monsieur l'Australien.*" Bill was overjoyed that the boy should be so pleased with it. He had to go to four shops before he could buy that whistle, either because he couldn't make the first three understand or they didn't have one. The white cord attached to it was only that morning a Tommy's shoulder lanyard. Anyway, what does a soldier—especially a Tommy—want with a useless adornment like a lanyard? When he took it, Bill had hoped there would have been a whistle on it; but to see the pleasure it gave the boy was worth the sacrifice of the price of four *vin blancs*.

Bill lifted his finger gravely. What he had to say was too much for his french. "Don't you let any of the poor kids round about blow it."

"*Monsieur?*" the boy said enquiringly.

There were a couple of untidy urchins playing out in the street. Bill pointed to them. "No blow," he insisted. "*Pas sonnez.*"

"*Mais non, monsieur,*" the boy affirmed. "*Un souvenir de vous pour moi.*"

Bill saw him every day after that. They became great friends, did

Monsieur Beel and Monsieur Victor. Bill's pay went happily in *vin blanc* for the two of them. Once the boy wanted to pay, but Bill wouldn't hear of it. It quite touched him, though, to think that a kid would go saving up so that he could shout for once.

Other Australians were now coming into the camp; but Bill felt no need for their company. Some of them used to see the boy with him in the café. "What, won't he introduce you to his sister yet, Bill?" they would ask.

He would take Bill for a stroll along the quays and delight him with further make-believe of a life on the ocean wave—in soldier's French, in gesture.

"There go Bill and his boy," Bill's countrymen would say. "Long time getting to know his sister, but he's a tryer, is Bill."

One afternoon Bill was late. But the boy wasn't there yet, either.

"Monsieur Victor?" Bill enquired of Mamselle. "He come yet?"

"He is on his ship today still, *Monsieur Beel l'Australien*," she replied.

Bill thought that there was no need for her to take part in their little play, "their make-believe", too, it sounded too like ridicule from her.

"Cut it out, Mamselle," he said, shortly. "Has he been here yet?"

"I tell you, Monsieur Beel, he is on his ship. He is at sea. He is on patrol all thees week."

It burst on his mind like a starshell. He remembered the boy's easy manner with the sailors, his familiarity with ships, his fondness for *vin blanc*, the time he wanted to shout—everything.

He gulped his *vin blanc* down and went out. He went down that street with a soreness in his heart like a disillusioned lover, who has made up his mind that all is over.

A party of four Australian soldiers called to him from the middle of the road.

"'Ullo Bill! Met his sister yet? Where's your boy in the sailor suit?"

"Him!" said Bill bitterly. "He didn't have a sailor suit."

[From *Saints and Soldiers*, 1918.]

TWILIGHT

By DOWELL O'REILLY

THE little blue bay, with its beach and caves, dense scrub and flower-spangled lantana, was very beautiful in the twilight. The Evening Star already shone pale above the black hill. The massed colours—blue and gold and green—glowed brighter than by day, and the shallow wavelets curled and crested as they do on the shores of Galilee, seen through the glamour of cathedral windows. All the lullaby sounds that silence loves were there—the plash of the quiet sea, the crooning of night insects, the flutter of a wing in the thicket.

Of the New Year's Day picnickers who had shouted and romped and seethed in the hot glare no trace remained—except the cruelly trampled sand; the flowing tide would soon wash that clean. It was good to loiter on the brink and see

The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round Earth's human shores,

and to know that dawn would break on a beach marked only by seagulls' feet and the myriad ripples of the night breeze.

Turning at last to go, I was astonished to see that a party of picnickers still lingered under some trees on a grassy level at the far head of the bay. My path home led that way, and as I drew near, the blur of grey took shape—a crowd of many men and women. They stood close round a little man on a table; he was showing them how to play "catscradle"—that mysterious game with the fingers and a loop of string that everyone has heard of and no one can play.

Twilight is always so full of wonders that I was hardly surprised. Unnoticed, I drew closer to watch the quick fingers and observe the strange gathering. Only when I could see the rapt, upturned faces did I fully realize my painful mistake—the little man was making a speech and his hearers were deaf and dumb. The twilight is indeed full of wonders.

Clearly they had spent the long holiday on the beach, for their faces were freshly sun-burnt, as pale faces burn, and packed hampers stood on the table. There were many children around: silent boys chased and dodged among the adults; some girls sitting on the grass seemed quite happy in their speechless chattering. Of the women a few were white-haired, some carried babies, the rest were young. Several were pretty but for their strange twilight eyes—eyes that seemed striving to hear rather than see; searching in vain for the sunlight of happy speech and sudden laughter. Yet perhaps that strained expression, so sad to us, seems normal and beautiful in their remote world where passionate love pleads in dumb alphabet, and rage grows calm while spelling out an oath, and no mother sings her baby asleep.

The men's faces were more tragic than the women's, whose sex-instinct, while it lives, fights every calamity and never admits defeat. These women, with their pretty summer frocks and tinkling bangles and great bunches of wild flowers in their arms, were like other women—except for their listening eyes. But the men with their shackled minds, looked and moved heavily, listlessly, hopelessly, like prisoners under a life-sentence.

The little man's speech was soon finished. He got off the table, and all the listening eyes turned toward a black-bearded giant with a belltopper on the back of his head for whom room was made in the centre of the group. A girl stepped forward, holding something wrapped in tissue-paper, and gave it to him bashfully, silent to her finger-tips. He unrolled the paper: it was a little plated butter-dish. His face was very gentle as he turned it about admiringly, and bowed and smiled, and looked at it again before putting it in his breast-pocket. I could see he had speech and hearing. His restful eyes showed that. The moving picture was telling its own story—he had organized this picnic for deaf-mutes, whose gratitude had just been expressed in their little present. He climbed on the table, set his tall hat at his feet and began to speak. He held his talking hands close to his lips as if whispering to them what they should say. The spiritual expression on his face deepened as his fingers continued moving—always slowly, so that even I could distinguish here and there a letter I knew.

In our glib world of speech much rubbish may be talked in five minutes. But in that twilight world where thought is spelt out letter by letter, words are much too precious to waste. I was, alas! deaf to his fingers, but I could hear the face that spoke so tenderly—as His surely spoke long ago to the wide-eyed little children, and if I read aright his speech was something like this:

"Thank you for your pretty present. It will always remind me of this happy day. Sunshine—blue sky—breeze—water—flowers: all so beautiful. Life is full of joy. We must all meet here again next year. God bless you."

Love, courage, faith—these I clearly read in his face. Whatever the message may have been, it deeply stirred every listening soul. As he got down there followed clapping that was merely the motion of clapping and almost soundless. But that was nothing. Another sound, utterly unexpected and dreadful, rose from the crowd and set my skin tingling. I cannot describe it—can only suggest it as a half-smothered cry of pain. It was indeed a dreadful, strangled sound—suffocated emotion straining up from throats struggling to speak. And yet it expressed joy; that was clear as they crowded round the big man to shake his hand, and then rapidly dispersed. Smiling women flickered fingers at one another as they kissed "good-bye"; men took up the hampers, and the main party straggled away with the big man into the shadowy bush-track that led to the ferry wharf. I watched the last disappear, then turned homeward up the path on the other side of the bay.

At the top of the path stands a solitary lamp—a municipal outpost at the junction of two roads which, with the surrounding vacant land, are still covered with low scrub. Usually it illuminates nothing but the energy of the alderman who owns the corner block. On that wonderful evening three white-frocked girls stood within its circle of light, and one of them was she who had presented the butter-dish. They were staring and pointing, evidently in doubt as to the way they should go. I went up to them. The butter-dish girl met me with flying fingers, naturally thinking I was one of their party. Realizing a stranger her hands fell to her side, and she stood watching. I thought of my notebook and pencil, but feared she might be unable to read. Her eyes never left mine. I pointed towards the distant ferry wharf with a facial note of interrogation. She shook her head. Then inspiration came to me. There were only two ways to Sydney, by ferry and by tram—it must be the tram they wanted. Anyone with two hands can make a T in the dumb alphabet. I made it—perhaps the largest capital she had ever seen. Her smile was delightful, maternal; I was her infant, taking my first step. She laid a little curved forefinger in the palm of her hand, and her eyes said with the prettiest accent, "You must know R when you see it, you funny old thing." I rose to the occasion. I stopped her hands before they could shape the next letter. Remembering the five vowels, I pressed my forefinger proudly on my thumb and looked round for applause. Six eyes applauded! But M, M,

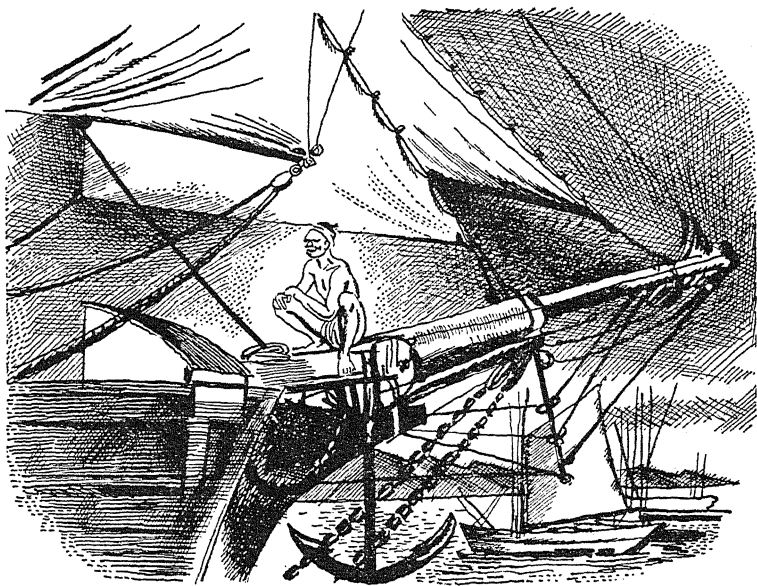
M, what the Devil was M? Little Butterdish saw my hesitation, and true woman that she was, instantly covered it with three fingers laid together.

How graciously they received and welcomed that foreigner, with his grotesque antics, who had wandered into their far realm! I caught myself flapping my hands to hearten them up, and violently nodding my head as evidence of good faith, so anxious was I to express in speaking gestures my desire to serve them. I pointed up the scrub-covered hill-side, to where the light-house rays swung slowly round the sky. They nodded and readily followed me in Indian file as I picked a way upward through the low scrub.

The soul also has its rare senses, that no physical defect can destroy. It is likely that those girls felt more keenly than I the wonder of the stars that came closer through the deepening blue, and the spicy sweetness of the scrub, and the straying night breeze that streaked with cool the balmy warmth of the lingering day. And it is quite certain that all the time our souls were calling and answering to one another, because the quietude of long friendship was upon us when at last we came out on the road, and blinked smiles at one another in the bright waiting-room. Butterdish produced a tablet and pencil from somewhere, wrote and showed it to me. "Thank you." The other girls peeped and nodded smiles. I wrote: "A Happy New Year!" She impulsively snatched the tablet from me. "Same to you."

Far off I heard the tram. We went out on the road. There little Butterdish touched my arm and pointed over the darkening valley at the last afterglow beyond the glimmering city, and the still waters of the winding harbour, and the splendid Evening Star. And even while she pointed she looked up at me and made the strangest little sound in her throat. Not at all a dreadful sound—it was a beautiful sound—a cry of joy from a soul that was never dumb.

[From *Fivecorners*, 1920.]



THE BLIND GOD

By H. E. RIEMANN

A MILE out from Peepingee jetty, on the sun-dazzled Northern Sea, a dirty black lugger made her way laboriously to the river's mouth under the strain of four heavy oars. The brown, patched sails had been untidily reefed in, and her decks were littered with heaps of pearl-shell, a great portion of which lay open.

The crew were all Malays; the four swarthy rowers perspiring in the tranquil morning; the boy playing with the cat; the frowning captain, and the naked, smiling, tooth-flashing diver, astraddle on the prow like a cynical, symbolic figurehead. The diver's position was an uncomfortable one, albeit he smiled so serenely. Hadjet, the captain, watched him from the corner of his eye, and the moment the diver essayed to move, Hadjet's hand took a firmer grip of the revolver at his belt. But the teeth only flashed whiter; and, by and by, as the shallow river mouth opened before them, the diver set up a low, crooning chant, which roused the captain to a storm of fury.

However, he controlled himself with an effort, and approached the object of his anger. He spoke in his native language, in an arbitrary tone of voice; then he appealed, and placed his revolver at a distance to demonstrate his good faith. The enigmatical grin broadened, and the diver spoke two words in reply. Instantly Hadjet regained his revolver and waved it threateningly. But nothing disturbed the tranquillity of the diver.

As the lugger neared the landing, two rowers ceased toiling; one took the tiller, and the other stood ready to jump ashore with a rope-end. The lugger felt the strain of ropes, and a slight jerk sent her into position.

Hadjet gave a sharp order to the crew, and motioned the diver, who rose to his feet, and stepped on to the landing. The captain followed, and in this order, they marched up the little rise and down the dusty road to Peepingee.

Constable Faulity, sitting on the veranda of the Evening Star Hotel, saw the strange pair halt at the lock-up. He yawned and turned to Publican Lanfred. "There's trouble over there," he remarked. "We'll have another wet and I'll slip along and see to it."

The diver was still smiling; Hadjet wore a fierce, bristling glare. Before Faulity could say a word, the smouldering captain poured out a torrent of foreign language.

Faulity interrupted with a violent oath. "You're wasting me time, you flat-nosed cow," he shouted. "Tell it in English."

Hadjet endeavoured to accommodate the policeman, but without effect, so Faulity ordered both over to the post office.

"Here, Powell," said Faulity, "come and do the interpreting act. Those two black breeders have had a row over a pearl or something. They are both thieves, I reckon—the only thing they haven't stole is the proper use of the English language. Heave it off your chest, Blackjet." The policeman lay back luxuriously on the postmaster's couch. "Wake me up when you get a good grip of the yarn, and I'll run both the cows in on suspicion," he added.

Hadjet jabbered and gesticulated the details of the mystery, giving such a vehement display that Faulity groaned. Then Powell called on the diver, whom Hadjet frequently referred to as Planda, to give his version. Planda said only a few words and—smiled.

"This is the position," began Powell, turning to Faulity. "This eminently highly disrespectful, undesirable alien lugger-owner Hadjet accuses Placid Planda there of misappropriating a pearl. The solemn, honest, untainted facts, he says, are these: The lugger was out pearling on the sunny side of North Coral Island for the last few days. Planda is the diver, and his efforts brought forth an

enormous quantity of black-edged shell, so much that at length he came to the surface and removed his diving-suit. He sat down on the deck as naked as the indecent dog is at the present moment. But for that you must excuse him, since he has been kept at the wrong end of Hadjet's gun ever since the trouble arose.

"Well, Planda being of an energetic turn of mind, began helping to open the shell. After some time at this, he suddenly stood up, with his hands behind his back. Now, Hadjet had been watching the diver pretty closely, and he observed that he had been concealing something. He walked over to Planda who calmly backed away with only that smile on—which Hadjet describes as devilish. Hadjet's suspicions, now thoroughly aroused, compelled him to advance rapidly. Was the wily Planda devoid of resource? No! With one terrific leap he cleared the lugger's side, and sped down into the green depths.

"Hadjet admitted he lost his head, fired as Planda's body flashed downward, and very nearly jumped overboard himself. You see a pearl is a pearl. Planda saved his captain a job. He bobbed up near the prow of the lugger; caught at a hanging rope, and pulled his shining, sable body up on the nose—or jib-boom, whatever you call it. And there he remained, with Hadjet threatening to pour lead into his body if he moved an inch. The crew searched him, opened his hands, looked into his mouth, ears, nose and hair; but nary a valuable pearl could they find.

"Hadjet came to the conclusion that Planda had let the pearl sink down to the bottom, where it would rest on the hard bed. The lugger carried no other diver, so Hadjet made a cork float, attached a line to it, and marked the exact spot. Now he demands justice.

"On the other hand, the defence has little to say. He relies on his supercilious smile. He stole no pearl, he says; he jumped into the water for the pure joy of being alive."

"Ran amok—just like a Malay would," observed Faulty. "Has the beggar got a god?"

"Tein," interpreted Powell, "August Emperor of Heaven."

"Good! Make him swear by his high Tinpot Joss, that he left no pearl at the bottom of the Indian Ocean."

"That, he says is impossible—there are pearls and pearls at the bottom of the sea."

"Out of their shells?"

"That he would not dare to divine. He has not the eyes of Tein, who could see all."

"Cunning! Did the Blackjet bloke see a pearl in Planda's hand?"

"No."

"No evidence," said Faulty, abruptly. "Clear to hell out of this—both of you!"

Hadjet protested. He talked swiftly to Powell, who said: "This heathen doesn't believe in Tein, as Monarch of Heaven. Therefore, he disbelieves Planda. He wants law—just law."

"He can't have law—there's none to meet the case."

"He has a proposal to make. It will take him some twelve or fourteen hours to dig up another diver, whereas Planda could hire Mablowe's lugger, lying idle, and retrieve the pearl. If you keep this Planda chap in custody until Hadjet returns, he would bless you, and give you a small share in whatever he finds."

"Damn his small share!" cried Faulty. "But I'll lock him up until he stops grinning."

The barometer at the post office began to fall at nine o'clock on the following morning. Gradually it sank until it quivered between 27·7 and 27·12.

Powell had already dispatched a horseman to the flagstaff at the point to run up the flag calling in all craft. He was very anxious. Almost immediately a spasmodic breeze stirred up the salt grass outside. Powell and the policeman walked towards the door. A black wall of cloud had arisen suddenly out of the sea. Already the wind had sprung up, bringing masses of whirling cloud with lightning speed. They caught up and obliterated the sun, and a shower of sand fell on the little township. Then the wind came with a roar, and the rain drove along in blinding sheets. It had fairly begun by now—one of those fierce "cock-eyed bobs" that are visitations in the Nor'-West.

The wind—it was no longer a wind but an invisible solid—caught up the salt spray of the sea, mixed it with driving rain, and bathed Peepingee in a freezing blast. Sandhills were flattened; the frail horse-tram to the jetty was torn up and twisted in many places. The jetty itself took the full force of the storm, quivered, and went to pieces. Sea-gulls and dead fish were thrown up on the beach, and Mablowe's lugger was lifted high and dry on the sand.

"This is awful!" shouted Powell in the policeman's ear, and pointed to the telegraph-receiver. "The wires have gone to blazes! This infernal travelling hell is going on the swing up the coast; I feel as sick as a dying dog—I can't warn Broome. God knows how the pearl-ers will get on. That poor devil Hadjet is up the spout by now."

The sun rose the next day on a scene of devastation. Peepingee set to work and unburied itself from drift-sand, and the inhabitants looked out on the twisted geography and scattered debris. Hawks from inland soared high up, attracted by the smell of battered fish and dead sea-fowl.

Faulity and Powell walked the four miles of sand to the wrecked jetty, which lay piled up along the beach. They examined it carefully; but no sign of lost vessel could they find.

"Hullo!" said Powell, "what's that up there by the river mouth?"

On approaching, they made out the figure of a black body lying full stretched on the sand. Faulity had a quick eye; he recognized the prostrate figure as Planda, the "prisoner" whom he had liberated after the storm subsided.

They came up in silence, wondering why the mysterious Malay should be in such a position. Suddenly the postmaster touched Faulity's arm.

"Listen," he whispered, "he's talking!"

Powell crept nearer, and leaned forward. . . . When he returned to his companion there was an expression of amazement on his features. "These religious Malays take a lot of beating," he said. "Can you guess what that fellow is doing? He's—he's praying that Hadjet will return safe and sound. I didn't know these aliens had anything like a conscience. Come away, it's uncanny, unnatural—I don't like it."

"Sh-h-h!" whispered Faulity. "Keep silent. Tell me what he's saying—we'll get down on the true facts of that pearl business."

But Powell would not be persuaded. "Would you like people listening to you praying?—if you ever do!"

They turned back, but had not gone many yards when a wild, joyous shout twisted them around again. Planda was standing up, both arms outstretched to the heavens, and gazing out to the smiling sea.

"He's amok again!" exclaimed Faulity.

"No fear," was the other's quiet answer, "there's Hadjet's dirty lugger coming around the Point."

They walked up to Planda, and there was the stamp of happiness in the smile he greeted them with. Once he spoke as the three hurried along the river-bank to the landing.

"Tein," translated Powell for the policeman's benefit, "has brought back Hadjet and his boat that I may sleep soundly at night."

"Just fancy," added Powell blandly, "that suspicious heathen captain accusing *him*."

The moment the lugger had reefed her sails and touched the

landing, Planda ran forth, jumped on the deck, and flung himself at Hadjet's feet.

"You have returned, O master," he cried. "I thought my foolishness—my love and impulse to play, had sent you to a death undeserved. I called that Tein should kill me for my thoughtlessness, and it seemed it was to be so, for sand came falling from the heavens to bury me in prison. But the policeman came and dragged me out. Then I called on Tein to bring you back safe, that I may not wake with bad dreams at night, and Tein, who sees all, shielded you from the wind and waves."

"I had forgotten fresh water," said Hadjet, dryly. "I ran up the oyster creek, and before we left the shelter of the hill the storm was upon us. I believe not in your god, Planda, but your words, I think are sincere. We will say no more of the pearl I accused you of stealing. You will sail and dive for me again."

When the situation was explained to Faulity, he said, "Without an interpreter, and with plenty of power, I'd have hanged 'em both."

The calm cool night was faintly lit with silver from the stars. Hadjet, lying between his blankets, snored thunderously. Planda breathed softly, listening.

Presently he got to his hands and knees, and crept to the side of the lugger, where he took hold of a hanging rope, pulled his sinuous body up, over, and gently slid into the water. Softly he swam round to the port side, and stopped at the prow. His hand went down low beneath the water-line, until his finger touched the little ridge that marked the beginning of the copper bottom. This he followed along a foot or two, when he came upon a place where the rivets had sprung. With great caution he drew back the copper sheeting, and took out a small object and held it up. In the water its reflection gleamed dully like a far-away star.

Planda closed his fist tightly on it, and swam ashore.

[From *Nor'-West o' West*, 1924.]

THE BACKSLIDER

By MARY SIMPSON

ONE Saturday afternoon a knot of people were drawing water from the stand-pipe in Settlement-road. They were the residents of the district, and it was from this fount that their needs were supplied. The settlement was an arid spot, once homestead paddocks, but now cut up into handkerchief lots, each half-built cottage or skillion depending (apart from the stand-pipe) entirely on Providence and the rainfall for the means of irrigation. This year there had been a drought, and the settlers, with the endurance of camels, had carried every drop of water they consumed—in buckets, barrows, trucks—by child and goat labour, by men “after work”, by women at all times.

Tanks were empty, dams dry. Not a blade of grass grew in the hungry ground, not a flower. Everywhere the small gardens were dead, with the exception of that surrounding Thomas Thomas's place. His was like “a rock in a weary land”, as Martha Polglase said. The Polglases were new arrivals from England. They were Salvationists, and Martha's speech was liberally bestrewn with Biblical phrases.

Thomas's place bore evidence of much “bucketing”. He had vegetables galore, and, hard as it was to believe, water-melons. Water-melons! In a waterless desert! His garden came in for much jealous comment among the jaded company at the stand-pipe.

“Well, it be this way,” explained Martha Polglase eagerly. “As thee knaws, Tummas be own brother to me as well as in th' Loard, an' 'e do tell that 'e watters the garden b'night when other sinners do be sleepin'—after night shift—at 3 in the marnin'. Tied up in rags 'is bucket 'andles do be, for 'e will distarb none. Not even Ann, 'is wife, do 'ear 'im—she do be tired, pore dear, takin' in washin' as she do. An' she do thraw all th' suds on th' vegetables, an' with Goard's blessin' the garden do flourish like a green bay-tree. No, no,” she added, countering jealous criticism, “'tidn' luck, 'tis industry. Industry, suds an' His blessin' do work miracles.”

It was so. The Thomas garden indeed was an oasis, and stood out boldly as an instance of what man and God might accomplish. Its owner, giving credit where it was due, often said piously, "My gardin do be a monneyment to the Power an' Glary; an' Goard elps them that 'elps themselves."

That day Martha Polglase was frying bread for tea and bringing her husband up-to-date with domestic news. "Do 'ee know that Tummas be giving me his biggest watter-melon?" she asked. "Well, 'tis so; sure 'nawf 'e did give that giant-big one graving back of 'is shed. 'Seein' you do be my sister,' 'e said, 'I won't see 'ee stuck fer Festival. Seein' Polglase bain't no 'and at raisin' a harvest,' 'e did say to me, 'I be giving 'ee the watter-melon—'tis a sacrifice unto the Loard. You take en an' offer en up at Festival on Sunday. Seein' as Almighty Goard did single me out fer blessin', 'tidn' fair I should be stingy,' 'e did say to me."

"Bain't there any meat?" interrupted Henry Polglase querulously. His wife threw up her hands in amazement. "Meat?" she cried. "Meat? On a Saturday night? What's come over 'ee, 'Enry? B'aint 'ee 'aving meat tomorrow? One would take 'ee for a wasteful Australian! Meat!"

Gloomily Henry helped himself to bread. He was in a pessimistic mood. Not so Martha. She took up her paean. "They do say my brother Tummas be a saintly man, an' so 'e be, sure 'nawf. So generous with that purty melon, though I do be sister to un. Head an' front of the offerings she will be—turmits bain't in same street."

"Did 'e pay 'ee the ninepence?" interrupted Henry again.

"Ninepence? What ninepence?" asked Martha in surprise.

"The ninepence 'e did borrow from 'ee laast three weeks."

"No, 'e didn't neither," she replied offendedly. "Ninepence! Aven't 'e give us pint after pint of goat's milk, an' you naggin' 'bout ninepence! What's ninepence?"

"Ninepence be ninepence," Henry answered severely. "Twice nine be eighteen. Count up—Fower times ninepence be three shil-lun'. An' you ask what be ninepence?"

"'Pears to me you do carry a ready-reckoner in your nuddle," his wife answered bitterly. "'Cordin' to that system, Tummas do be givin' fower watter-melons."

She spoke contemptuously, but Henry's skin was thick. "Ninepence Tummas do be owing me, an' ninepence 'e do be going to pay. 'An eye for an eye,' said Almighty Goard."

It was dark when Henry set out at Duty's call, fortified by an unwonted bottle of beer hidden in his woodshed. The land of plenty where grew the promised water-melon was his goal. Usually

a contented man, some demon of revolt was gnawing at his vitals. Here was his brother-in-law, strong as a donkey, working day and night, with a wife who took in washing! Making money! Growing vegetables a Chinaman might envy. While he, Henry Polglase, had all he could do to live! Top of that, a goat had once eaten his turnips, and the goat was Tummas's goat. And top of that the thriving man had borrowed ninepence and forgotten to repay it.

This seemed the limit. The hand of misfortune lay heavy upon him. If God remembered him at all it was in bulk with the common herd, not personally and with an eye to detail as He did in the case of Tummas.

As the neat home of the elect came to view, the doubter found himself in the mood of incendiarism. There it stood, fresh and prosperous, throwing off the delicious scent of growing things. The garden soil bore evidence of much "bucketing". "But then 'e do live within three hunnerd foot of watter supply, so 'tidn' much wonder 'e do work miracles, sure 'nawf."

No one was stirring. Tummas himself was on night-shift, and his womenfolk away delivering "the washing". Henry, looking at the garden lying there like a green jewel in the fading light, felt vaguely that Thrift and Industry were Pagan gods which ran the Almighty close for precedence in the breast of its owner.

There lay the melon. A perfect globe, striped in greens, and about the size of a drum, it dominated the scene. Even Henry was impressed by the munificence of the gift unto the Lord, as, wrestling mightily, he tried to insert it into his brother-in-law's hand-truck. It was a big struggle. The melon seemed to possess some mischievous spirit urging it to roll off time after time. It was so ripe, too, that at every bump it gave forth ghostly reverberations. The bottle of beer played tricks also with Henry's eyesight, showing him as by magic a picture of the melon's interior—a deep pink, festooned with fat brown-edged seeds. It was the unattainable melon of his boyhood. His mouth watered. Had it been a beer-melon its history would have ended there and then.

Time found it midway to the Barracks, negotiating rough country. The earth is surly hereabouts, hunching its shoulders and drawing apart into sections, leaving great cracks into which the wheels of a truck may fit snugly. Thickets of thistles, also, only awaiting the advent of human ankles, incensed Henry so much that he almost cursed. "'Tidn' fair"—jolt . . . jolt . . . bump—he cried to Heaven. "Somethin' wrong. Here be I workin' fer nothing but th' glowry o' Goard"—bump . . . jolt—"while Tummas be workin' fer double time—ninepence!" Here the melon again fell off.

Henry was now approaching "the street", as the hub of Greenville was called, and occasional lamp-posts were met with. As his track was downhill, the melon rolled until it fetched up against one. It cracked! Henry mopped his brow. Here was trouble indeed. The "offering" damaged. It was a bad fracture, and Henry's cup was full. That the one Festival offering to his household's credit should be thus mutilated. He examined the wound. Yes, the melon in its ripeness needed but a touch to fall asunder. "And two halves be a poor gift unto the Loard fer sartin," he thought.

"Why not sell one half?" a voice whispered in his ear. Henry started violently; sweat broke over his back. His nostrils, trained to strange odours by the goats of his district, now scented a foreign one—brimstone.

"Sell half," again whispered the voice. "He owes you ninepence."

Henry glanced aside and sensed a queer-looking man glimmering there, surrounded by an aura of blue flame and smoke through which brilliant, sinful eyes shone like beacons.

Sinful? Yes it was the Devil. Henry knew him instantly. "Get thee behind me, Satan," he whimpered, holding on to his hair. "Tempt me not."

"Only to what is your own, friend," said the Evil One from a rear position. "Water-melons at present are fetching high prices at Antonio's."

"But it isn't mine," whined Henry, temporising.

"Nonsense, man," said Satan curtly. "He owes you ninepence."

But his listener could not be wooed so easily from the narrow path.

"I am a Salvation soldier," he said feebly.

"But not a fool, I hope," said Satan, in a voice of silk. "Sell half—sell half. See—it wants but a touch to break. Take one piece to the Barracks and the other to Antonio's. He will give several ninepences for it. So long, friend."

"'E do owe me ninepence," murmured Henry, dully. "'An eye fer an eye,' said the Loard."

It was late when Henry returned the borrowed truck. Like a thief he skulked into the garden. He was a felon. He suffered as all must who forsake the narrow path. Yet he nursed a sense of justice done. In his vest pocket lay ninepence in silver, which he fingered from time to time; but bending to replace the truck, the sixpenny piece leapt out and was lost.

"Devil-earned and devil-lost," thought Henry in dismay. "'Tis wicked money fer sartin." Nevertheless he groped and foraged in the darkness, plunging his fingers in the water-soaked soil, clutching

at cabbage-roots, young onions, mint, mumbling as he dug, "'Tidn' 'onest—'tis wicked silver. I must 'ave trod un into th' ground."

Then success came, and he unearthed the coin from the soil—and something else. Something that shook him to the core. Something that sent him on all fours with nose to the ground and fingers busily tracking—what?

"By th' Loard," swore Henry Polglase softly, rising to his feet and looking hard at the home of Thomas, "be sure your sin will find 'ee out." He left the place a new man.

The Harvest Festival at Greenville Army Barracks was one long remembered. For, though theoretically in the hands of a beneficent Providence, a perfect maelstrom of evil influence was whirling through the atmosphere. Distrust, suspicion, accusation ran from the Thomas-Polglase faction, affecting all telepathically, and causing a sister with a long, pale face like a vegetable-marrow, who was singing, "Ha-a-arves' so bee-yu-ti-ful" to falter and break down, quite disconcerting those reclaimed ones whose testimonies, beginning "Dear frien's, I am so wappy today becus," appeared to have been made by machinery.

And the root of the trouble was the half of a gigantic watermelon that was king of all other growths on the platform.

Astonished by the sight of half where he had donated a whole, Tummas had, at first, given signs of apoplexy; but loosening his collar as a precaution, he had then passed a note to Henry, seated further forward. "Where be other half?" the script had said. Henry's reply was verbal and cryptic. "Ninepence," he sent back by medium of intervening tongues. "Ninepence." "Ninepence?" The word was whispered from lip to lip.

From her seat on the platform Martha Polglase's eyes interrogated her husband and brother in turn. She felt afraid. Her faith in One above was not sufficient for the situation.

"Ninepence." "Ninepence!" Distinctly the mysterious word reached her, percolating among the bonnets. A recent conversation concerning a ninepenny debt rushed back on a tide of recollection. What had Henry done?

Her brother's face was appalling. Rage had swelled it to cracking point. He was like a corked Vesuvius. She heard but little of the captain's discourse. Nor did Henry, furtively glancing backward at the man he had robbed. Now and then, however, a word found its mark. "The beyootiful offering of Brother Polglase." The captain tapped the half-melon lightly with his book and went on with his eulogy. "And while giving thanks to all who contributed to this

abundance"—he indicated the mass of bought vegetables round his feet—"I'm sure hall of us thank Brother Polglase the giver, and Brother Tummas the grower, of this—this mammoth of the soil. I am told, comrade, that Brother Tummas works wonders in 'is garden to the glowry o' th' Loard."

"Halley-looyah, a-men!" interjected the staff.

"Yes, comrades, an' frien's I 'ear on good authority that 'e grew this melon with great difficulty, water not bein' laid on 'is land, an' the Loard fer 'is own good reasons with'oldin' rain, Brother Tummas 'ad to carry water to it by 'and, from seedling—to—er—to matchoority. Then, through Brother Polglase, 'e donated this 'alf to the glowry of——"

"I donated the whole melon, Cap'n," interrupted Brother Thomas. "Tidn' my way to do things be halves!"

The effect of this was magical. Decorum fled and excitement took her place. A kind of religious uproar arose. "Hallelujahs" and "Amens" and "O Loards" mingled with groans. The band started to play softly. People stood on the seats. Martha Polglase was being fanned with a hymn-book, and all necks were craning.

Thomas faced his brother-in-law. "Where be other half o' this melon?" he demanded sternly.

"I sold un," answered Henry defiantly.

"Wha-a-at? Sold 'un? Fer what?" Thomas gasped.

"For ninepence."

"Ninepence!" cried the robbed, mystified.

"Ninepence!" cried many tongues.

"Yes, indeed!" repeated Henry, valiantly. "To Antonio. For ninepence."

"Gracious marcy," groaned Thomas. "You sold—that—half—o' my melon—for ninepence—is that all 'e did give 'ee? 'E be a usurer an' you be a thief."

"No! 'E be a Catholic," answered Henry, "an' I don't be no thief neither. You owe me ninepence an' I took it, that be all. But what did *you* take, Tummas Tummas?"

Henry, climbing to a seat for prominence, now took the part of an accusing judge. "You do be the thief. Tell un all how 'ee do get th' garden to graw. Tell un 'ow Lisbeth Ann do pitch 'er suds on to it! Tell un 'ow 'ee do bucket watter all night, when lazy men like me do be slapin'. *You an' your buckets!* You do watter garden with stolen watter *from a tap!*"

There was an awful sensation. Most of the congregation sat down, enfeebled with shock. Thomas Thomas, his purple face now pale, listened as though petrified.

"Yes, frien's, this 'ere pillar of the Army an' chosen o' the Loard do steal all watter from the main—'e do, sure 'nawf. I did see it with my own eyes. 'E did lay a 'alf-inch pipe under 'is garden an' then tap Government watter-supply. All 'e does at night is turn a little tap an' flood 'is melons with stolen watter."

"Oh, oh, oh!" It was Martha Polglase in hysterics, and as Thomas sank heavily to a seat, Henry, with the voice of a prophet, was heard declaiming, "Be sure yer sin will find 'ee out," while the band to cover mercifully the scarlet sin of one of its followers, broke into:

He took my sins away—away,
He took my sins away.

[From *Tell Tale Stories* from "The Bulletin", 1926.]

THE CITY OF ALL CITIES

By VERNON KNOWLES

THE boy lived with his mother in the loneliest part of the country thro' which passed the Great Road. Theirs was the only cottage among those silent hills, where, for many miles: so meagre seemed Nature! allowing only sparse woods here and there, and setting about them either width of stony barrenness, or sombre-lying bog. Where it was possible for any to grow: the grass grew thinly, and to but finger's length; and the few frail timid-seeming flowers that the love of Spring drew as response from the ground, seemed to weary quickly of their struggle for life, and to die after a brief shewing. There was a lake; but even it!—so small, it seemed grudged.

But as if a recompense for failure below: arched the generous sky: withholding nothing down the years: triumphant, magnificent! by day: spreading wide the quiet ecstasy of dawn: allowing from East to West, from North to South, the clouds to roll in a thousand differing shapes; filling the air with the gentle fall of rain: thin, endless, silver cords; giving the fierce turbulence of sunset. And by night: loosing the moon to drift like a lost bubble, giving the stars: a diamond-scattered plain. . . .

As far back as the boy could remember: first, there had been his mother. Thro' that motionless mist of gold which filled the days of infancy: there had always been her pale, sweet face: stooping down and over him, and meeting his with soft lips or cheeks; and there had always been her guiding and ministering hands. Then, when the mist paled, withdrew slowly into the distance, and ultimately passed—leaving life and the world very clear, hard and frightening: he had come to know Loneliness: who had no words; but who would listen to all that was told her; at times her eyes brightening with startled tears, or her lips opening tremblingly to free little sighs, that sounded more sad than the stirring of last year's dead leaves. She became his constant companion. When, at length—and, as it seemed to him, how miraculously!—he came to

know the Great Road intimately: he weekly, and then daily, saw less of Loneliness.

He had always delighted in the Road, and thought that he knew it well.—The fierce silver of it in the light of the sun; the calm silver in the night! Often he considered it, loving it for the sureness with which it conducted the travellers thro' difficulties: safely past the secret snares of bogs, the bewilderments of forests and woods and widths of unpopulated country. He had been told that, far away, it came to a Great City built on a wide plain that swept down to the sea. And often he thought on the Great City;—that, stronger with each year he aged, grew the desire to follow the Road to its goal.

He grew suddenly to hate Loneliness; and he hated her the more because she showed she knew she was no longer a wanted companion—the tears fell ever thickly from her eyes, and her lips trembled with her sighs continually. . . .

But he had come, at last, really to know the Great Road! And he thought he had known it before! The difference! . . . All else, but this wonder, was forgotten at once. It happened one still summer morning. Over the dewed grass, with the first long yellow beam of the sun, a shining figure approached him, and called his name in a gentle voice. He drew back:

“You know my name?”

“I have always known it.”

“But who are you?”

“The Spirit of this Road.”

Thickly now crowded the beams of the sun, and in them the grass shone with its myriad globes of dew.

“I am come with a song,” said the Spirit. “Others have heard it before.”

The boy rose trembling. He nodded dumbly.

“Listen,” said the Spirit;—then sang: softly, slowly—so sweetly! of the City to which it led. . . . When it had done—the boy wept, his heart leaping with a new urgent joy. This City—all that he had heard of it; ah, surely, now he knew!—“It must be the City Beautiful!” he cried.

And from then, the one purpose of his life became eventually to enter it.

He told his mother. He said: “I want to go now.”

But his mother sighed: “Not yet, my son. Wait till you are older.”

He asked her curiously: “You sigh?”

She turned away; but he confronted her: “Tell me, why do you sigh?”

She looked at him with tears: "Because I am old; and have seen many cities." She would say no more. . . .

"My dear, my dear," he whispered: "I shall take you with me. Don't think that I shall leave you and go alone! Together we'll enter the City Beautiful. . . ."

But he set out alone, despite his planning. When he was sixteen, his mother died. . . . "This is not how I thought to go," he sighed, alone in the silent cottage. "I meant only joy to lie in my heart, but sorrow is there as well."

Then he thought: Yet I go to the City Beautiful! And he heard again in memory—how ringingly!—the slow, sweet song of the Spirit. . . .

Presently, as he strode along his heavy heart lightened. Each evening, in a dream, the gentle Spirit appeared to him, and compassing him with tender arms, sang: so that he murmured over and over in his sleep: "It *must* be the City Beautiful!"

And by day: the thought that each hour he drew nearer to it, filled him with a fierce excitement.

He thought many times: Can it be that soon, soon these eyes will look on it; these feet walk its streets—bearing me up in the midst of all delight? Can it really be that no dream holds me now with sweet deceit? . . .

On the sixth day he paused to speak to a bright-plumaged bird settled on a leafless bough: "Have you come from the City? Tell me, what is it like? More beautiful than I have guessed? I go to it now."

The bird let ring a low, passionate song: so sweet and so glad, that the boy cried: "If it is as lovely as you sing—I shall dwell there always!" and hastened on. . . .

At noon, the following day, from a hill he saw the Great City spread on its wide plain: its marbles and metalled roofs sparkling gaily under the sun; the vast sea in the distance. He gazed in silence. . . . Presently he began to descend.

It was dusk when he neared the gates. A gentle wind had risen; and suddenly in the wind he heard a familiar voice. He paused.

"I go no further: here we part. I have brought you safely to my beloved city, have I not? Good-bye."

He answered it softly: "Good-bye, dear Road." Good-bye to a friend he had always known and loved. . . . He passed on then, and entered the Gates; and cried exultantly to himself: "I am here, I am here! In the midst of the City! The City Beautiful! After so long! After all the thoughts and dreams! . . ."

And he looked about wonderingly at the great painted buildings,

the statuary grouped here and there; the long narrow gardens rich with flowers set in the centre of the paved streets; the throng of chattering people.

At first he did not hear the slow bell approaching; but the throng around became silent; and then he heard voices chanting; and the bell's solemn note above the voices; and in a moment a procession appeared: priests with books and tapers going before a black-draped bier. Behind came mourners walking very slowly: their eyes looking steadfastly down.

The boy shrank back as they passed; at first not understanding. Death, here? Sorrow? Death and Sorrow in the City Beautiful: the city of all delight, happiness, peace? . . .

Then the sharp truth struck into his heart. He knew, he knew now, O he knew: he had been wrong, deceived. This city—it was just—a city, a great city—nothing more. . . . Overwhelming bitterness seized him, and he wept. . . .

O young, young heart, wherever you beat: strong, eager and brave: brave with the sweet fierceness of youth: know that the wounds you must receive will be many! The cruelty of life dotes on your inexperience, your glorious rashness. Wound upon wound will be dealt you, till you grow scarred and calloused, and can feel no more: come to the dim insensitiveness of age. But of all wounds destined to be yours and remembered: the first will ever remain chief; when you leapt out, freely exposed, to do fine battle: simple target for the unerring, ruthless marksman! . . .

He could not remain within the walls. He had no wish to see more of the City: disappointment and grief drove him out—away, far away. He walked blindly, until forced by exhaustion to rest, when he made a bed of fallen pine-needles, and slept. The moon, nearly at its full, came out from a pall of cloud, and silvered the two last tears that his long lashes had hardly yielded to his cheeks. . . .

How well that it is so ordained that youth remains only briefly in the dark valleys; and soon seeks out, and wins to, the hill-tops of sun and wind!

As he slept, there came to him in a dream a Spirit—beautiful as the Spirit of the Great Road that he had known since childhood—and called his name in a gentle voice.

And in his dream he answered: "But who are you?"

"The Spirit of the Road whereby you rest."

"What would you with me?"

"I am come with a song."

"Ah," sighed the boy; "I have heard such a song before."

"Listen," said the Spirit; then sang: softly, slowly—so sweetly! of the City to which it led. And in his dream the boy wept with a strange new joy; and felt his heart leap with a great eagerness; and he stirred, and woke, and murmured, staring at the sliding moon: "It must be the City Beautiful. . . ."

Soon he fell asleep again. . . .

At dawn he rose.

"Ah, this time!" he cried. "This time!" and so started out upon the new Road. . . .

But when, at length, he reached the City—was it not as a Challenger that he entered in, and strode its streets?—And how else should the answer come to him but as a driving thrust sinking deep into the heart? The swarm of beggars sickened him: pressing about him: gibbering, mumbling, whining:—perceiving him at once to be a stranger—beseeching alms in the names of all the gods; describing their foul diseases and manifold miseries. . . .

He had failed then, again. . . . The tears fell hotly down his cheeks, and he turned away slowly.

Ah, somewhere, surely, waited the City Beautiful? Or was he crazed: like a lost desert-traveller seeking the mirage always in the near-by distance? . . .

But how could he fail to believe the single burden of the songs of the two Roads? His mind, his heart—why, his soul, had instantly responded to it—for nothing, tho', nothing. . . .

Yet,—he felt, somewhere waited the City! If another Road called to him, and sang, and bid him on, he would obey as he had obeyed the first Road.

He was young; how could he expect to find, immediately, and with ease, the City of all Cities? He must be patient; was he not prepared to give all the days of his life, if need be, to the search? Eventually, he knew, eventually he would find it! How he longed, above all else, to reach it, become a citizen of it, to share its perfections! . . .

That night, in the quiet of a dream, another Spirit came, and sang to him; and the following day he set out, full of strong hope that this time his desire would be realized. . . .

But it was not to be. The Great City to which he came, after long journeying was even as the other two Cities he had entered. . . .

But his heart kept his courage serene, and urged him on. . . .

The slow pageant of the months brought in to the earth the four Seasons, and bore them away; and always a Road was leading him to the City of all Cities. Somewhere, somewhere it waited!

Disappointments crowded one on the other thickly: grown now into manhood—he went on with the years—still seeking. . . .

From vigorous manhood he passed to faltering age: worn with his long wandering. His was the young heart grown old with high service: the scarred heart gaping among its scars with new wounds: the great heart of the indomitable Challenger!

And he came, one evening, to rich meadow lands that held the bright seam of a slow-running river.

There he sank by the roadside, and dipped his hands in the water, making ripples in the inlet that trembled the delicate lily-buds.

And he sighed: "I can go no further." He fell back, closing his eyes. . . .

A lark, poised and hidden in the sky like some aërial fountain let down a tireless little cascade of song. Over the river—a flash of silver and iris, a dragon-fly hunted to and fro, threading the lilies and reeds. . . .

"I am tired," he murmured; "tired."

The lark dropped to earth, and there was stillness: the summer day was ebbing. . . . And in the stillness, he heard the first notes of a song sounding faintly,—and opening his eyes, gradually he was aware of a Spirit standing beside him: a Spirit beautiful as those that had come to him so often in the past. And it sang of a City to which it led—such a song that the wanderer's heart beat quickly with its old hope and desire.

He tried to rise, but fell back again weakly, sighing:

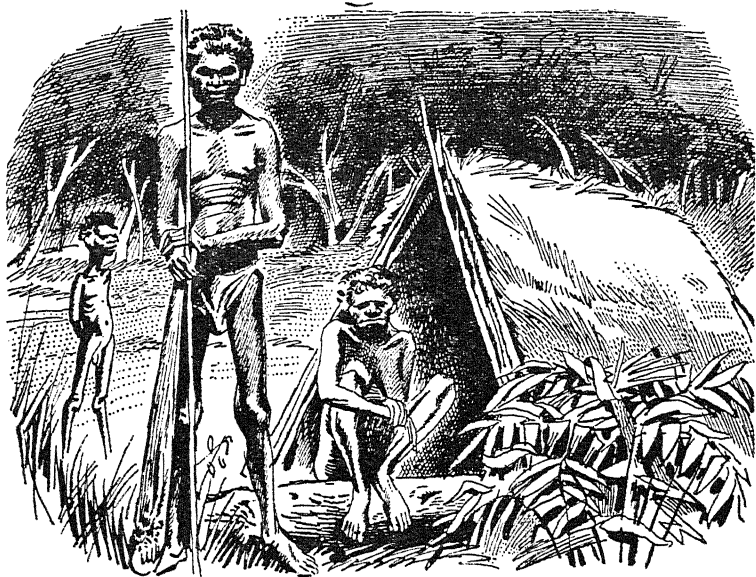
"My body is worn out; it will take me no further. And you sing so that I feel, could I but follow you: at last I would find the City I have always sought."

He began weeping: but the Spirit bent over him, and compassed him with tender arms, and murmured: "I am the Road of Death; and truly my way is smooth and easy for age. I lead you to a City, far away, to a Great City. . . ."

It sang again: softly, slowly—so sweetly! . . . "This time," he cried; "Ah, this time! It must be the City Beautiful!" . . .

He took the first step. Immediately darkness closed round him, but he felt the Road firm under foot, and the darkness rang faintly, sweetly with echoes of the Spirit's song.

[From *Silver Nutmegs*, 1927.]



HAPPINESS

By KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD

NARDADU, grandmother of Munga, was singing as she gazed before her over the red plains under blue sky. Singing in a low wandering undertone, like wind coming from far over the plains at night:

*Be-be coon-doo-loo
Multha-lala coorin-coorin . . .¹*

She was sitting beside the stockyard fence in the offal of a dead beast. There had been a kill the night before. A stench of blood and filth flowed through the air about her. On an old hide rotting in the sun, a little lizard lay quite still. Nardadu plucked over a length of entrail and set it aside. She reached for another, grey-green and dark with blood.

A small squat woman, with broad square features, wide jaw-

¹ "Cuddle your nose into my breast and know happiness."

bone, short hair in greasy strands packed with mud and bound by a dirty white rag, she sat there singing, and picking over all that was left of the dead bullock. A *gina-gina*,² blue for a length, almost black with dust and grease, showed her bony legs and feet. Her face all placid satisfaction, the black sticks of her arms and fingers swung backwards and forwards, disturbing flies. Flies clung at the sunken wells of her eyes; but she plucked on over the mess of blood and dung, singing:

Be-be coon-doo-loo, coon-doo-loo,
Be-be, be-be coon-doo-loo,
Multha-lala, la-la, lala, lala,
Coorin-coorin, coorin-coorin . . .

Across a stretch of ironstone pebbles the buildings of Nyedee homestead were clear in the high light of early morning. There were trees round the long white house with verandas where John Gray slept and ate with his women and children. Megga had planted the trees long ago, the tall dark ones, those bushes with curds of blossom, and the kurrajongs whose leaves were light green and fluttering just now.

Megga had ridden and worked with John when he first camped by Nyedee well. Tall and gaunt and hard, she had cooked in the mustering and droving camps, driven men and beasts through long dry seasons. *Eh-erm*,³ she drove John. He was still her little brother.

Half a mile away, Nardadu could see every plank and post of the veranda; white hens stalking across it; harsh green of cabbages, onions, turnips surging beside the big windmill; the mill, its wheel and long fine lines ruled against the sky; and the little mill on mulga posts with gauge stuck out like a tail of a bird. Kinerra and Minyi came out from the house for water. Slight, straight figures in dungaree *gina-ginas*, they moved slowly to the little mill. But it was out of order: would not give water except in a high wind.

White hens scattered and flew before Megga as she came along the veranda, Meetchie behind her, John after them both. A shrill screaming and flow of women's voices reached Nardadu; the throb and deeper reverberation of John's voice, as he came between the women, throwing a word or two before him. Small and stiff as chalk drawings her people had made on the rocks in the hills, John and the two women rocked and moved with sharp little gestures before the house.

² Dress.

³ Yes.

Nardadu knew what it was all about. She had heard that screaming and quarrelling of women and the anger of John's voice so often before. She smiled to herself and went on with her singing. Winding and rumbling through her, on and on it went, the eerie, remote melody. Nardadu remembered her mother singing that song. It did not belong to Nyedee people. Nardadu had brought it with her to Nyedee from beyond those wild tumbled hills which stood on the edge of the plain, north-east. Her mother had sung the little song to Nardadu when she was a *cooboo*.⁴ Nardadu had sung it to Beilba and Munga. Always it came fluttering out of her when she was pleased or afraid.

She was pleased this morning to have found something she could cook in the ashes of her fire to satisfy the hunger of Munga when he came in from the dogging. All the men of the *uloo*⁵ had been out trapping dingoes while John was away. But John was home again, and the men would be in soon. The old, high, four-wheeled, single-seated buggy in which John had come from Karara station, with Chitali and old Tommy, still stood red with dust, out before the shed. Horses which had drawn the buggy, rough hair streaked and matted with dust and sweat, were feeding beneath the acacias and mulga, beyond the stockyards.

The little windmill would be mended. There would be the good smell of meat roasted on ashes, in the evening air, down by the *uloo*. When the men had eaten, talk would be made of dingoes: of wild dogs caught, or too cunning for any trap. Wongana would make a song about a dingo, clicking *kylies*⁶ beside his camp-fire. There would be singing: singing and sleeping in the warm, starlit darkness.

On other stations Nardadu knew, men of the camp would not have gone dogging and left their women at the *uloo*. *Wiah!*⁷ A curse threaded the words of her song. But Nyedee was not like other places. John Gray left the *uloo* to the ways of the *uloo*. Megga? *Eh-erm*—Nardadu guessed Megga was responsible for that. By her will it was, John did not drink whisky until his legs would not carry him; or take a gin even when old men of the camp sent her to him.

Nardadu did not understand how a woman came to have such power with a man that her will should be stronger than his. But Megga—Nardadu understood something of her and her will, having

⁴ Baby.

⁵ Camp of native huts.

⁶ Boomerangs.

⁷ No!

lived so long with her. Had she not made men of the *uloo* even wear *wandy-warra*,⁸ and the women grass and leaves from a string round their waists, before there were *gina-ginas* or trousers and boots on Nyedee? But that John should come under her will so, John who was a man of men! Nardadu clucked and threw out her hands in the native gesture of surprise.

Master he might be of all the country which lay before her old brown eyes, from the wedge of red and yellow purple-riven hills along the west, to those wild and tumbled timbered ridges north and east, beyond which stretched the country of her people and the buck spinifex flats, away and away inland. Yet John he was to her: John the all-powerful, to be sure, giver of food and clothing, whose anger and boot you avoided; but who laughed and made fun with you, good-humouredly, when all went well with him.

She had come through the gorge of Nyedee hills with him, how long ago? Nardadu could not count beyond three. "Plenty years," she would say it was since John Gray had first brought cattle through the gorge of Nyedee hills, over there where the great *koodgeeda*'s⁹ eyes made a pool of fresh drinking-water. Trembling, she remembered the great silver lidless eye in the shadow of dark rocks. How it had flashed at her, glimmered from beneath the water when she went down with her *jindie*!¹⁰ They had camped quite near, and Wagola, her man, had sent her down to the pool for water because he said the *koodgeeda* would not hurt a gin. He had made her sleep on the side nearest the pool, too. How terrified she had been, plenty years ago, when she first came to Nyedee with John Gray!

Wagola, her man, had been speared over there on the range by one of her own people. Wagola's brother claimed her. She had grown Beilba then; and Munga was Beilba's son. Her eyes wavered to the creek gums and burying-ground of the *uloo*, railed places and mounds covered with bark and branches. Her voice had the shrill anguish of wailing for her daughter.

Now she was an old woman, had *bulyas*¹¹ on her hands, and led the women's singing in the corroborees. She had no husband to concern herself about, only Munga, her grandson, who shared her low humpy of boughs and hide. And the cows. Nardadu was cow-woman on Nyedee, drove the milkers from their night wandering on wide plains where the windgrass was yellow, and acacias, in

⁸ Loincloths.

⁹ Snake's.

¹⁰ Drinking cup.

¹¹ Round stones.

their young green, stood against hills blue, blue as the dungaree of a new *gina-gina*.

While a *coolwenda*¹² was putting his slow melodious notes across the vast spaces of hill and plain, and stars were still in the sky, she went scurrying after the cows, and brought them through the Two-mile gate to the yards, red heifers and calves, a huge white cow who charged whenever she got a chance, and the old red bull, lumbering and sulky. Nardadu ruled the cows. A drab gnomish figure in dirty *gina-gina* and the old felt hat which had been Wagola's, she shambled swiftly over the stones, banging two tins to make the cows hurry: proud of herself, of being on the strength of the station, old woman though she was, cow-tailer.

She had not been away since first she came to Nyedee. She had never been pink-eye; but then none of the Nyedee people went pink-eye. Other tribes came to pink-eye on Nyedee every year. There were corroborees, and youths for hundreds of miles about were made men in the wide-spreading scrub and mulga and *min-nerichi*¹³ which stretched to the foot of the dog-toothed range.

The hut of mud-bricks, baked in the sun, on the place where Nyedee homestead now stood—Nardadu had helped to build that. After its walls were up Megga had not ridden out with the men. She had stayed at the hut to watch the sinking of wells, raising of windmills and stockyards. Every plank was set under her eyes; the windmills, with their great wheels and wedge tails of blue-grey iron, stretched taut against the sky.

Then camels bringing stores and sheets of ribbed iron had come over the creek! Again and again they had come, the great beasts, so savage and evil-smelling, yet led by a little stick through the nose and rope reins, bringing more and more sheets of iron and painted wood, flour, sugar, tea, *gina-ginas*; trousers, boots and hats for the men who went riding with John, pipes, tobacco and boiled lollies. Such days, they were, great days of bustle and excitement, from the first fluting of the butcher-bird before stars paled in the eastern sky, until the sun went away behind the back of the hills.

The first room of mud-bricks was kept for a kitchen and the new house grew out from it, with verandas, doors, wire cages for rooms. Megga had sent old men, women and children from the *uloo* to gather white clay in a creek bed miles away, and had shown them how to paint the house. But to Nardadu, it still seemed, that the long white house among trees had reared itself by magic on the floor of the dead sea. Far out across the plains she had seen a

¹² Butcher-bird.

¹³ Snake wood.

mirage lying across it, reflections of a house in the sky, and had sung her song as a *movin*¹⁴ against evil, any evil magic could do an old woman by stealing her wits, when she was minding cows by herself, far away from her kin and the *uloo* of her people.

Megga herself had worn white clothes when the house was finished. The gins washed them, hung them out to dry and pressed them smooth with irons made hot in the fire. She had gathered about herself, too, china dishes and pots which broke when you dropped them, bringing down Megga's wrath as nothing had ever done.

Then the chickens came. Small fluffy creatures. Megga had loved and tended them until they were neat white hens, which if a dog killed—*Eh-erm*, there was hell to pay.

Nardadu remembered the killing of one of those hens by Midge-lerrie, her own dog, a brindle kangaroo hound, as dear to her almost as Munga. There was no better hunter on Nyedee; but he had pounced on and devoured one of those hens. Lowering, Megga, she remembered, had sent John out with his gun and he had shot the dog. John had told everybody in the *uloo* he would shoot any dog if it ate Megga's hens; but Nardadu had never forgiven Megga for the shooting. She did not blame John. He did as he was told.

Nothing had been the same on Nyedee since the children came. Nardadu believed that Megga's hens were the cause of all that went awry on Nyedee afterwards. Nardadu's was not the only dog John shot because he had eaten one of Megga's hens. The *uloo* bore Megga a grudge because of her hens, and the dogs John had shot for eating them.

It was beyond anything natural to men and women, Nardadu had decided, the way John and Megga lived in their new house among the trees, with an abundance of food and clothing, shade from the sun and shelter from the rain. They looked about them with pride and contentment. John strutted out from the house to the stockyards and blacksmith's shop, and stretched reading on the veranda when he was not away mustering, or on the road with bullocks for market. Megga cooked, sewed, watched over her china and sat on her chairs, teaching girls from the *uloo* to scrub, polish, make *gina-ginas* for themselves. Only two of the youngest gins were allowed into the house, after they had scrubbed their heads and bodies all over with soap and water, every morning, and put on fresh dresses. Other women from the *uloo* were permitted to sweep round the veranda, in turn, or to help with the washing; but that was all. And always there were new sheds going up, sheds for

¹⁴ Charm.

harness and tools, a butcher *miah*,¹⁵ shade *miah* for the hens even.

The station was growing and prospering. John and Megga were growing old with the station; but still, there were no children on Nyedee except children from the *uloo* who played about the stockyard and woodheap sometimes. Down at the *uloo* they were concerned about it. The old women suggested that both John and Megga should be advised to take a mate. But Megga, it was agreed, was beyond the age of childbearing.

The men asked John why he did not get a woman. They did not understand his not having a woman except his sister, who was not a wife, to live with him. John laughed and said he had been too busy making the station to think about a wife and family. Men of the *uloo* believed what he said. They had seen him so often, after a day's hard riding, eat, and sleep as soon as he rolled in a rug beside his camp-fire. They understood he had thought of nothing but his station and cattle for years.

But the seasons were good. It rained—how it rained that year! It had not rained since on Nyedee as it had rained then. Nardadu herself, and all the other old women in the camp, had gone down to the creek and beaten it back with green branches when the muddy water swirled over its banks towards the *uloo*. They had been busy patching their huts to keep the rain out. Grass was green on the plains in a day or so; thick and deep in no time. The cows grew fat. Nardadu clucked with pleasure over their milk and calves, thick-set and sturdy. Megga, busy and masterful, directed everybody and everything, looking stouter, more good-humoured every day. Since the hens and chickens had come, she seemed to have nothing left to wish for.

John went off mustering after the rain, taking all the boys, two or three gins and most of the horses with him. The grass and herbage everywhere made him gay and light-hearted. He talked now and then in easy familiar fashion with Chitali and the boys as he rode along; or when they camped for the night, he by his fire, they by theirs, at a little distance.

They were chasing breakaways in the back hills when the boys came on tracks of wild blacks from the other side of the range. Nyedee boys said these were cousins of theirs. John Gray visited the camp, talked to the old men, and in the evening when Nyedee boys were sitting singing round the camp-fire of the strangers, a young gin was sent to John Gray's camp by way of courtesy to an honoured guest.

¹⁵ Bough shelter.

Nyedee boys marvelled when she did not return, immediately, as others had always done from John Gray's fireside.

And in the morning, John had presented the old men of the camp with pipes, tobacco, and a couple of blankets.

Somehow Megga heard of it. The boys talked when they got back to the *uloo*. They told their women and the old men, who chuckled, laughing and smelling what was to follow.

Megga had been angry with Minyi for breaking a cup. Minyi, to make her angrier and to take her mind off the cup, had told Megga of a gin John kept by his camp-fire that night in the Nyedee hills. Megga was furious. The girls heard her talking to John about it. John had been angry, too, angry and sulky. He walked up and down the fence for hours afterwards. For many nights, he walked the fences, morose and restless. Out on the run it was just the same, the boys said. John did not sleep as he used to: threw wood on the fire half the night, and walked about.

The blacks watched him fight out his trouble. They knew well enough what was the matter with him. His mouth took a hard line. Nardadu had seen John striding backwards and forwards at night, sombre and angry as her old bull when he went moaning and bellowing along the fences, separated from the herd. John scowled at everybody who spoke to him during the day. He could not break the habits Megga had imposed on him; would not drink more whisky than he did usually, or have gins about him. But after he had been south with cattle that year he brought back the *kurrie*.¹⁶

She was with him in the old high buggy he had driven over from Karara in; and John looked as pleased with himself as Megga had looked when the new house sat, all built-up and whitewashed, on the plains. He had got what he wanted.

And Megga! Nardadu saw Megga's face, as though by lightning, so bleached and stiff it was. Megga had not known John would bring this other woman with him to Nyedee. He kissed Megga and said:

"I've got a surprise for you, Meg. This is my wife."

Megga did not speak, while the other laughed, saying in a high, singy voice:

"My name is Margie!"

John went on, as if he had done something as much for Megga's sake as his own.

"It was getting a bit lonely for you, Meg, with no white woman to talk to. You and Margie'll be company for each other."

¹⁶ A young and pretty woman.

Nardadu could see and hear them still as if they were corroborating before her. Megga, fat and dumb, in front of the girl on slight bare-looking legs; Meetchie—which was the *uloo's* way of saying "Mrs Margie"—in her light frock and hat, holding a red sunshade; John between them, proud and pleased with himself.

They were delighted with the *kurrie* at the *uloo*; delighted and excited by her light, brightly-coloured dresses patterned with flowers; her necklaces, high-heeled shoes, the songs she sang, and the *tookerdoo*¹⁷ she gave them, sweet stuff covered in brown, sticky loam. John himself stepped with a jaunty kick and swing as he walked; his eyes laughed out at you. Nardadu gurgled and chuckled after him, and men of the *uloo* were very satisfied. Nobody worked very much in those days; and John was easy to get on with. He went about whistling in a queer tuneless way. Nardadu had even heard him trying to whistle her own little song:

Be-be coon-doo-loo, coon-doo-loo. . . .

How the gins laughed, and he with them, though Nardadu black-guarded him furiously when he took her calves off their milk too soon, so that the *kurrie* should have plenty of cream and milk in her tea! Black tea was all the gins ever tasted. But the chatter and giggling round the woodheap where they drank their tea and ate their hunks of bread and meat and jam when it was suspected why John was concerned about milk for the *kurrie*!

He was angry if Nardadu did not drive the cows through the Two-mile gate. Useless to explain she was afraid of the *narlu*¹⁸ who haunted the mulga thickets beyond the gate: the *narlu* who had led Wagola from the tracks and hunting-ground of his people, along the dog-toothed range. John laughed and joked with her good-naturedly enough; but he would have the cows taken where the grass was good. To be sure, he had sent Munga to mind the cows with her, and such days they had been for Nardadu and her grandson, out there on the wide plains, yellow with wind-grass, or in the dove-grey mulga thickets, under blue skies, she teaching Munga how to pick up tracks, and the *movins* against evil spirits and bullets; to find water, snare *bungarra*¹⁹ and dig for *coolyahs*.²⁰

Good days! Only in Megga's face the satisfaction faded; and the *kurrie* became wan and sickly in the hot weather. Nobody saw her during the day; but in the evening, when the sun had gone down

¹⁷ Sweet stuff.

¹⁸ Evil spirit.

¹⁹ Iguanas.

²⁰ Wild potatoes.

behind the hills, she wandered about the veranda and garden. Wandered, wailing and complaining about the heat, the dust-storms, flies and mosquitoes. Up and down she walked; wept and lamented.

John was very tender with the *kurrie* in her weakness and sickness; as kind as he knew how to be, trying to soothe her when she cried: "Take me away from this dreadful place, John. I loathe it. Life here, it's so bare, and hard and ugly!" although it hurt him to hear her talk like that about Nyedee. Nyedee, with its wells and windmills, comfortable homestead, garden and bathrooms! What more did a woman want?

Against Megga, though, he would hear no word of complaint. She was mistress of her brother's house; had always been; would always be, he said. She cooked, was storekeeper, accountant, provisioned the parties of well-sinkers, fencers, musterers, rationed the blacks, and saw the gins kept the house clean and in order. There was nobody like her. Two men could not do what she did. She knew every well and windmill and what stock they carried. Megga must go on as she had always done. Meetchie could never do what she did; but she was his boogeriga, his little green parrot, his love-bird.

When Meetchie went away to have her baby the days flowed on at Nyedee as they had always done. Long, quiet days, filled by the riding out, or riding in, of John and the boys with cattle or horses; the arrival and departure of gangs to repair windmills, sink new wells, make fences, while Megga baked bread, prepared the meals, salted meat after the first day of the kill, figured in her account-books, sewed, worked in the garden, read and slept.

Meetchie came back with her baby, bringing cretonne dresses and sweets for the gins. There was a new, older, more obstinate look on her face. She did not wail so much or sing so often; but soon the end of the house was regarded as hers and the baby's.

Within a few years there were three children in those rooms at Meetchie's end of the house, one a girl with hair the colour of the tasselled mulga blossom, a little, fleet, wild creature, who watched the plains for dust of John's horse when he had been away and ran to meet him when the gins cried: "John comin'!" No horse on Nyedee would have let John take the child on his saddle, or have stood while she flew up by his stirrup; but always John dismounted to meet his daughter, gave his reins to one of the boys, and catching her up in his arms, carried her home on the back of his neck, his face as childishly joyous as hers.

But Megga and Meetchie barely spoke to each other. Years only

deepened the animosity between them, although Megga loved the children as though they were her own; and Meetchie knew she loved them.

As Nardadu looked at it, the house seemed to be cramped down over one of those dark, slimy, fungus growths which poison the air about them. At the *uloo*, when the women quarrelled and fought together, their shrieks drifted away; bad feeling was lost in a day and forgotten. But there, in the house, misery and bitterness crouched and clung. You knew they were about when you went near the place and saw the women. Megga's face set to her contempt and repressed indignation; the young wife's face moody and resentful.

For ten days' tramping there was no other building like this John had made in the bed of a dead sea; no other house under those wide blue skies; no other white women to talk to each other but those two.

John left the house to the women as much as possible. He was out on the plains and in the hills for weeks at a time. The shadow lifted from his face as soon as he was out of sight of the homestead, although he cried out in pain and anger sometimes as he slept under the stars.

The conflict which had been going on for years took a step forward when the *kurrie* seized Megga by the throat with her fierce white hands and would have crushed life out of her had not John come between them. Then Megga had gone to live in the old store-room near the creek.

Meetchie said she could do all Megga had done. She would cook, manage the housekeeping, order stores, provision the camps, feed the blacks. For months she worked to convince John she could do as well as Megga; but she could not. She had neither strength nor liking for what she had undertaken; she struggled on, overburdened, distraught, screaming at the hens and the gins, losing her soft young beauty, becoming almost insane in her weariness and discontent. John took as much as possible out of her hands. But bread would not rise, store-orders were forgotten, tucker-bags lost. He was cross and impatient. Why couldn't Meetchie have left Megga to run the place as she had always done? The station could not afford to have its work messed up in this way.

And Megga, living alone in her hut by the creek, sat gazing over the plain, day after day, strong capable hands idle before her; the light gone out of her eyes. Deprived of her work, what had she to live for? She had given everything she had to the station, helping it to grow. She had reared and trained it, as she had John. And the seasons were going from bad to worse. Would it ever rain

again? She could see, and John knew only too well, how he would need her to relieve him of all the little odd jobs he did now round the homestead, in the dry season ahead. He would have to be out on the run, moving cattle from well to well, wherever there was a picking, all through the blazing heat and dust storms.

Nardadu could hear them talking over at the house, Megga, Meetchie and John. Their voices came to her, clashing and clanging against each other.

"Your sister means more to you than I do!"

"What is it you want?" John's voice was surly and menacing. "Meg has left you the house. You want her to clear off Nyedee, is that it?"

Meetchie made a long wail of grievances. Megga was always interfering, setting the children against their mother, and the gins would only do as she said. Meetchie had told Kinerra to catch and kill a hen for the children's dinner, and Megga had said no more hens were to be killed. It was always the same. If Meetchie told the gins to do one thing and Megga told them to do another, they obeyed Megga. "Either she goes or I go!"

"Turn my sister out for you?" John shouted. "Not on your life! She went to the hut of her own accord. But further she shan't go."

John had left the house and was striding across the red earth and ironstone pebbles towards Nardadu.

Beside the little windmill Kinerra and Minyi, who had been listening to and watching the quarrel, turned to get water. There was no wind; the mill-fans hung motionless; Kinerra, climbing wooden stays of the mill, swung the wheel; Minyi pumped, and filled the fire-blackened kerosene buckets. Two slight, straight figures, buckets on their heads, the girls moved slowly back to the house.

John walked to the shed before which the buggy was still standing. Nardadu had her affections, superstitions. They stirred as she watched John coming from the house towards her. His back was straight; he swung along with as steady, direct steps as when she had first known him, although his body had thickened and swelled in the white moleskin pants and faded blue shirt. But the face under his wide hat-brim, fatter, redder, was sullen and heavy now; the blue of his eyes, burned deeper for the years out there on the plains working cattle under bare skies held only passion and defeat. The beat of his heels and spurs, as they clicked on the pebbles with a little silver tinkling, made Nardadu shiver. She remembered she should have been away beyond the gates with her cows; that John would shake his fist and yell angrily, if he saw her. Her song quavered into a queer, gurgling laughter.

But John did not see her. He was calling Chitali and old Tommy, who had driven over from Karara with him.

Nardadu listened. John told the boys to put horses in the buggy again.

When the buggy drew up before the house Meetchie hurried forward and climbed into it. John lifted the children in beside her. He took the reins and they drove away. Megga, standing on the veranda, watched them go. Nobody called to her. The buggy whirled off in dust.

"*Wiah!*" Nardadu muttered, getting to her feet. Her instinct, sure and sensitive, told her Megga had won, and lost, in the fight which had been going on so long in John's house. Megga had got back the place and work which were hers and driven the *kurrie* off.

But John had brought the *kurrie* to Nyedee because he wanted a *kurrie*. And there were the children. Had not he loved and played with his children as men of the *uloo* loved and played with their children?

More than ever now, he would wander along the fences at night, like that sulky old bull from the herd; his face turn to Megga as it did this morning; misery and bitterness crouch under the long, white house, with its back to the blue, wild hills.

Against the sky-film, thin, clear, blue, soft as the ashes of mulga and minnerichi, dust moved.

A cry rose in Nardadu's throat. She watched that dust grow against the sky and the edge of mulga scratching the sky. The tagged tail of horsemen swept out from it. Men of the *uloo* were returning from the dogging.

They swerved in a wide curve towards the stockyards, young horses before them. Nardadu could see Munga in charge of the packhorses: Munga on his white horse, ginger with dust, packhorses before him. The bay mare, a bucket lashed to her back, made for the troughs and Munga, after her. The swing-in of dark, slender legs and flying tails through red mist of dust; bodies of men and horses joined, free-flying, galloping; all wildness and grace! Nardadu exulted. The horseman her Munga would be! And how pleased with the meat she had to feed him from her fire that night, as though he were a man!

The song of her gladness trembled, ranged its high minor notes and went wandering out to Munga:

*Be-be coon-doo-loo, coon-doo-loo,
Multha-lala coorin-coorin.*

[From *Kiss on the Lips*, 1932.]



THE OPIUM EATERS

By ERNEST O'FERRALL—"KODAK"

ONE by one the twelve filthy Chinese who had travelled down from Hong Kong on the boilers of the s.s. *Mongol* crept across the darkened deck and slipped overside into the waiting oil launch, which was decked out with flags like a picnic boat and had a concertina-player stationed in the bow purely for stage effect. When the passengers were all stowed comfortably, it cast off and went spluttering up the harbour in the dusk to the wheezy strains of the instrument. Just as night fell it coughed its way to a secluded boat jetty and tied up. The dozen prohibited immigrants were hunted ashore by two English-speaking countrymen and a hoarse-voiced European guide. "Come on, this way!" he whispered, and led the way up the quiet water-side street. The crowd followed meekly, like sheep, and the launch churned into the centre of the stream and smacked away in the gloom as if glad to be rid of its dangerous cargo.

The suspicious-looking file, led by the guide, tracked along for miles without trouble by back streets until it reached a region of faded houses and dried-up gardens. There something alarmed the man in front; he waved excitedly to the two Chinese who constituted the rearguard, and the whole grimy flock was driven into the first lane.

"Whaffor, Bill?" shouted one of the whippers-in.

"Come on!" shouted Bill, and started to run.

The band immediately broke into a shamble and pursued him. Round an elbow of the lane, Bill ran into two young men who were smoking and yarning at the back gate of a large house. There was a rapid colloquy between him and the strangers, who seemed inclined to resist until he thrust some coins into the hand of each. Then their opposition melted, and Bill turned and shoved all his charges into the yard and closed the gate.

"Now get us inside," he commanded.

"I'll have to see if the coast is clear," demurred one of the pair.

"All right, mate. Hurry up though!" It was the time of day when the dwellers in back streets strew themselves round the verandas; so the scout tiptoed into the darkened house, feeling fairly confident that all hands would be in front out of the way. In a minute or so he returned and whispered to his fellow-lodger, "Yes, we can get them inside now. But where are we to put them? It's no use trying to stick them in *our* room, because Smith is bound to be lying there on his bed. If he isn't there now he is bound to come in soon."

Bill edged forward eagerly. "I only want the place for an hour or so, yer know. You must stick 'em somewhere, mates! I'll make it worth your while—don't you fret about *that*!"

"I know!" said the second boarder triumphantly. "Put 'em in Bodger's room! He won't be home till late tonight; he's gone to that Masonic dinner. Wait a jiff while I make certain there's no one about." He looked inside the back hall, found all safe, and signalled the little crowd in. Quietly as shadows they flitted into the drowsy, fly-haunted house and crept upstairs to a room, which the second boarder then locked.

From the keyhole floated some last directions by Bill. "Watch the gate, mind! And if any of them D's come pokin' round, you know nothing! See?"

"Right-o!" replied the boarders, and returned to the back gate, where they waited patiently for a whole hour for a few hawk-eyed detectives to tell lies to. At intervals one of them would sneak upstairs and whisper to Bill that no police had appeared, and that

the road seemed clear; but Bill was a pessimist; also he appeared to be under the impression he had leased the room for a long term, for he stayed doggedly on. The two lessees were conferring gloomily at the back gate at about 9.30, when a loud, angry voice inside the Chow-stricken dwelling was heard to shout, "Where's the key of this room? I can't get into my room!"

"Gosh! Bodger's back!"

"Wonder what brought him home so early? He couldn't have got the ticket!" The two boarders looked at each other helplessly. "What can we do?" they chanted together dolefully.

"Mrs Tribbens!" bellowed the desperate Bodger within doors. "Mrs Tribbens, ma'am! Where's the key of this room?"

(Great commotion and sounds of people running in slippers. Mr Bodger always had to be attended to at the double.)

"We'll have to try and keep him out of that room, Lempson."

"Oh, Lord, yes!" muttered Lempson, and nervously fingered the key in his pocket. "Come on, let's go in and see if we can't put him off."

Side by side, they hurried in the back door and found a middle-aged man with a flowing beard bullying and brow-beating a worried little landlady, while a few inquisitive boarders hovered in the background.

"Good-evening, Mr Bodger," said Lempson cheerily. "You're home early, aren't you?"

"Good-evening, Lempson. I don't suppose you have seen the key of my room, have you?"

"No," replied Lempson, lying with facility and despatch.

"Confound it," snorted Bodger. "I can't even put a key down in this house for an hour but it's lost!" He glanced angrily about and started to light matches.

"I really don't know *where* it can have got to!" whimpered Mrs Tribbens wretchedly.

Miss Gummer, of the Post Office, paused on her way upstairs to make a suggestion. "Perhaps Mr Bodger put it in his pocket and lost it while he was out!"

Bodger—he had just burnt his finger rather badly—looked up and retorted violently, "I didn't do anything of the kind!" Then, in a lower but perfectly audible undertone, he said as he lit another match, "Damned humbugging woman!"

Miss Gummer recoiled like a lady. "Mr Bodger! I'm *surprised* at you!" She swept upstairs like a queen and slammed the door so hard that it sounded like the first gun of a royal salute.

Lempson, her faithful admirer, swallowed his resentment for the

time being, for Bodger had to be got away somehow. "Never mind about the key now, Mr Bodger. It's bound to turn up in a little while. Come out for a stroll down to the Arms."

"Yes, later on," mumbled Bodger, hunting about and striking match after match. The landlady hurried away for a candle to assist him, and the Chow-harbourers conferred again in whispers. The place was very quiet and dark for a moment. Then Bodger emitted a perfect howl of excitement. "There are men in my room! I'm being robbed!"

The house boiled over. Boarders came hurrying from all sorts of dark corners—dazed, excited boarders who blinked sleepily in the light of the landlady's candle, and pleaded passionately for news.

"What's the matter, Mr Bodger?"

"When was he robbed?"

"Did he say there were burglars in the house?"

"*Burglars!* Good Lord! Where *are* they?"

"What's the *matter*, Mr Bodger?"

Bodger waved his hands for silence. "Burglars! I tell you! I heard them just now in my room! They wanted to know if the coast was clear! Get me a policeman, someone!"

A fiery little man from Wales, who had just arrived that day, danced with impatience. "Open your door, sir! Don't be *afraid* of them! Open your door!"

Bodger, always extremely sensitive when his courage was impugned, bellowed defiantly, "I'm *not* afraid of them! Someone's taken the key of my room! I can't get in!"

"The burglars have taken it, *of course!* How could they lock the door if they hadn't the key with them? Why don't you *think?*"

The boarders vigorously applauded this speech. "Of course they have! Why didn't you think of that before, Mr. Bodger?" They chorused.

"Get me a constable!" persisted Bodger angrily.

Mrs Tribbens advanced tremulously. "Now Mr Bodger, I don't want to have my house filled up with constables just because the door happens to be locked. This is a respectable house, Mr Bodger, and I don't want to have the neighbours saying my house is filled with policemen from morning till night, because that gives the place a bad name, Mr Bodger, and people won't come to it. How do you know there is anyone in there, Mr Bodger?"

"Because I distinctly heard someone, ma'am."

"But are you *sure*, Mr Bodger, that you heard someone?"

"Why, of course, I am!"

"What the devil are you thrashing about for? You've knocked the match out! Light another, quick!"

"What's the matter, Bodger? What is it?"

"Why, damn it, man, you saw those Chinamen didn't you?"

"What Chinamen? I don't know what you are talking about!"

(The back door slammed hard on the retreating rabble.)

"They've gone out of the back door!" yelled Bodger. "I tell you they've gone out the back door! Surely to God you saw them?"

"I tell you I didn't see *anything*!"

"You must be blind! Light a match, can't you!"

"I haven't *got* a match!"

"Matches!" shouted Bodger, stamping with both feet. "Lights! Bring some lights! The house is full of Chinese thieves!" With the despairful Lempson at his heels, he stumbled to the back door, seized the handle and pulled. But the door wouldn't open; it was locked on the outside.

"Open the door, someone! Get the key and open the back door!"

The house started to boil over again like a prodded ants' nest. Mrs Tribbens, lighting the jets as she advanced, led the massed boarders to the scene of trouble. "What's the matter *now*, Mr Bodger?" she chanted.

"There are Chinamen in the yard—filthy Chinese thieves! I saw about twenty of them run downstairs. Lempson here saw them."

"I didn't!" blurted Lempson.

Bodger shook the door-handle again and breathed hard. "I don't know so much about that! Where's the key of this *door*?"

"Chinamen!" entoned the landlady, stopping dead in her tracks. "Chinamen! In *my* house!"

"Where's the **KEY**?"

"I can't believe it," shrilled Miss Gummer, hysterically, "It's too *awful*!"

"I didn't see any Chinamen," proclaimed Lempson above the rising storm of excitement. "Mr Bodger is mistaken."

Bodger, rattling an accompaniment with the door, panted, "I'm convinced—some hanky-panky—going on—here!" Then once again he roared at his unsympathetic audience, "What's this door locked for? Get me the key of this door instantly!"

To the landlady a mere lost key or two was of no importance whatever. With her shocked boarders clustered round her, she kept on repeating, "Chinamen, in *my* house! The *idea*! I never had a Chinaman in the place!"

"You had tonight, ma'am!" boomed Bodger over his shoulder. "If

I saw one, I saw at least twenty filthy Chinese running down the stairs!"

"But," cried Miss Gummer angrily, "Mr Lempson didn't see them!"

"Lempson didn't see them!" chanted the boarders.

"Bah!" snarled the door-wrestler. "I tell you all, they ran out of this door before my very eyes."

"Well, why didn't you run after them?" snapped Miss Gummer.

"Why? Because I had no light!"

"How could you *see* them running, then?"

"Oh, I lit a match! *Haven't you—any of you—got this confounded key?*"

"The match went out," added Lempson in a loud voice. "I didn't see anything *at all!*"

Miss Gummer sniffed; all the lodgers sniffed after her.

"It sounds to *me,*" announced the landlady, "like a cock-and-bull story!"

"Do you mean to insult me, ma'am?" boomed Bodger, turning round.

"I don't want to insult *anyone*, Mr Bodger! But when a person is told by another person that a lot of dirty Chinamen have just run out of the house, and no other persons have seen them, though present on the identical spot, the person so insulted has a perfect right to say that it sounds like whatever she thinks it is—which happens to be a cock-and-bull story, Mr Bodger, and I think that everyone here will say the same."

The boarders murmured applause to this long and dignified speech, and Bodger was on the point of replying when the key turned in the lock and the door opened cautiously, admitting the head and shoulders of Parman, the young ironmonger.

"Mr Parman!" shouted the grand chorus.

Parman, who seemed shaken by this fine reception, recoiled nervously.

"Where have *you* been?" inquired Bodger, seizing him by the coat.

"Me? Oh, I've been smoking by the back gate this last half-hour, Mr Bodger."

Bodger prodded him excitedly in the chest with his fore-finger. "Then *you* saw a mob of filthy Chinamen, *didn't* you?"

Parman flashed one guilty glance at the cluster of eager faces, and, swallowing in his throat, replied huskily, "No, I didn't see any Chinamen."

Bodger staggered. "What!" he roared. "D'ye mean to say you didn't!"

Suddenly giving way to his rage, he flung the liar from him and turned to his audience. "It's no good!" he roared. "I tell you all there's some hanky-panky business going on here—some damned ugly hanky-panky!"

"Hanky-panky! In *my* house!"

"Yes, ma'am, in your house! and right underneath your nose, too! But *I* won't stand any humbug! *I* won't be humbugged about and hoodwinked! I'll get to the bottom of this hole-and-corner, pig-in-a-poke nonsense and give some scoundrel a flogging before I've done with it!" This heroic fury left the listening boarders in the dark; but it was tremendously stimulating, and they waited for more. They would most certainly have got it, had not the prehistoric maid at the stage put her head over the banisters, and shrieked joyously, "Hey, Mr Bodgers! Yer room is open now, an' there's pounds and pounds o' lovely beef sosiges on yer bed!" She trailed off into shrieks of insane merriment, in which the boarders gladly joined. Bodger, by this time keyed up to a fine pitch of frenzy, waded roughly through the laughter and tramped upstairs to find that the maid had merely shrieked the ridiculous truth. The sausages—there was an enormous pile of them—were stacked on his clean white quilt. For a moment he looked at them in amazement. Then, with a cry of rage, he gathered up the cables of meat and dropped them on the landing, where the maid stood shrieking. "Here, you! Take the cursed things away, and pitch them out or cook them, whichever you like! Do *anything*, so long as you get rid of them." His door crashed to, and the maid, with a glad cry, caught up the ropes and ran downstairs with them to her mistress, who was standing at the foot of the staircase, saying over and over again with great dignity, "A nice thing to happen in a person's house! Such a cock-and-bull story! The *idea*!"

Some time before the dinner-gong went, a queer, hot, musty smell stole through the house and started all hands sniffing and guessing. As the feeding-hour grew on, the smell grew stronger, and the windows squeaked as the boarders pushed them up to the limit.

"What on earth is it?" asked Miss Gummer, fanning herself meanwhile with a copy of Marie Corelli's latest work—or job.

The prehistoric maid, a trifle more dazed than usual, galloped up from the kitchen.

"Mrs Tribbens," she screamed, "there's something wrong with these 'ere sossiges! They're smelling somethin' 'orrible!"

The landlady was promptly on deck. "Have you tasted them, Alice?"

"No, I ain't! Won't you please come an' 'ave a look at them, Mrs Tribbens?"

The landlady went, saw and indignantly pronounced them fit for boarder consumption. The gong went almost immediately, and the boarders gathered round the table that had never groaned in its life.

"What's that queer smell, ma'am?" asked Bodger, as he shook out his napkin.

"It's your sausages, Mr Bodger!" returned the landlady very stiffly.

"They're not *my* sausages, ma'am. I merely found them in my room."

"Well, Mr Bodger, I hope we will all enjoy them, at any rate. I suppose they're some new sort of seasoned sausage that one of you gentlemen has brought, and thought he would have a joke with."

Bodger groaned dangerously, and at the same instant the sausages were carried in, smoking hot, on an immense dish. They were served round with practised haste; but the boarders did not start to eat with their usual polite ferocity. They just sat with their loaded plates before them, and either turned the strange-smelling things over with their forks or else looked at them doubtfully from a safe distance.

At last Miss Gummer cut one in half, and gasped in the fumes that arose from the severed ends. "Why, it's just like a chemical! Oh, I wouldn't eat a bit of it for worlds!" She pushed her plate from her, and pulled her handkerchief out of her belt.

"It looks like treacle and sawdust inside," said Lempson, looking closely at the mystery.

The stout man next him, Mr Dadclip, of the Customs, and always late for tea, made a sudden dive at the plate. "Excuse me, Mr Lempson! I have an idea what it may be!" One good look and two sniffs seemed to satisfy him completely, for he turned excitedly to the landlady, saying, "Why, this is opium, Mrs Tribbens! Where did you get these sausages from? The Chinese opium smugglers put the drug up like this."

The tea things danced from the blow Bodger dealt the table. "Didn't I tell you there were Chinamen in the house? *There* you are! I knew I saw Chinamen!"

"No one but yourself saw them!" interjected Lempson.

After some screaming, Mrs Tribbens managed to tell Mr Dad-

clip that Mr Bodger had found the sausages—or opiumosages—on the bed in his room.

“How many people saw these Chinamen?” demanded the Customs officer. A great silence descended.

“I did!” boomed Bodger aggressively, for Dadclip was no friend of his.

“But didn’t anyone else see them?” Slowly and painfully he extracted the facts of the case. When everyone had finished, he said “It is my duty to report this at once to the detectives. I must ring up right away.” The landlady protested weakly; but Bodger glared fiercely at Lempson, and remarked darkly, “Now perhaps we’ll see if there’s any hanky-panky going on in this house!” With that he rose and retreated to his room until such time as the second meal should be ready.

Within half-an-hour, and long before the gong went again, four detectives crawled to the house on the bent knees of a cab-horse, and without delay penned Bodger in his room and started to interrogate him harshly in the usual professional manner behind the closed door.

The other boarders have no more than a muffled idea of what transpired at that dreadful interview. There were never less than eight of them eavesdropping on the stairs, but the only voice that they could hear distinctly was that of one of the detectives. Quite early in the ordeal the boarders heard him emphatically declare, “Well, personally, I am convinced that this man knows nothing!” He kept on repeating it for two hours, until it seemed to be not only a declaration of faith, but a passionate asseveration regarding Bodger’s blank and baffling ignorance of everything useful. Bodger, for his part, just bellowed like a bull all the time. Now and then the sounds heard without suggested that they had cornered and overawed him; but always the angry bellow broke out again. Muffled by the thick door, it sounded merely like a bestial cry of rage; but he was probably calling them “scoundrels” and “blackguards” and threatening floggings all round. About 11.15, when the exhausted listeners were sitting on the stairs in attitudes of dejection, the turmoil at last slackened and died. Then the door opened and the four big saturnine men came out like mourners and waited sullenly on the landing. A second later Bodger emerged. His eyes were dilated, his beard bristled, and his belltopper was jammed hard on as if he expected a gale of wind outside. Two of the detectives respectfully preceded him down the stairs; the others reverently brought up the rear. It looked more like a triumphal procession than an arrest. Arrived at the kerb, the decayed

cab swallowed them all with a painful effort, and crawled heavily away like an overfed reptile. The overawed boarders watched its dim, red light blink slowly round the corner; then they adjourned to the dining-room to squander the rest of the night in wild surmises as to what had happened, and the probable outcome of it.

Just before the breakfast-gong went next morning, Bodger, unaccompanied and in an unshackled state, tramped in the front door, and, without a sound of greeting to the few boarders standing about reading their papers, hung up his belltopper and proceeded heavily to his usual place at table. So terrible was his aspect that not even the most idiotic ventured to ask him how he was, much less who had bailed him out. Even the boarders who ran downstairs whistling and humming stepped lightly over the threshold, and spoke in whispers when they observed him sitting like a spectre in his chair. The old landlady emitted a sort of sub-shriek and tiptoed to the head of the board. Finally the gong droned, and the crowd, taking courage, rustled forward and silently surrounded it. The serviettes were opened like prayer-books. A demented scuffle in the hall, and the prehistoric maid entered tremblingly with the outsize dish, and shoved it desperately at her mistress, who was dabbing at her face with her handkerchief, though the morning was by no means warm. Still the agonizing silence remained unbroken by human speech.

Suddenly: "Well, ma'am, and what have we for breakfast this morning?"

The simple inquiry, fiercely spoken, seemed completely to demoralize the landlady. She stopped in the act of lifting the great dish-cover, and looked wildly about her. Then she dabbed at her lips, sniffed and said quaveringly, "For breakfast, sir, did you say? Why Mr Bodger, I—I didn't know you were coming home, sir, or I'm sure I would have got something else. . . . It's—well, its *sausages*, Mr Bodger—that is, *if you have no objection*, sir!"

[From *Stories* by "Kodak", 1933.]

THE HAUNTED DRAWING-BOARD

By LES ROBINSON

OLD Mr Blundell would have taken a prize anywhere for clumsiness and making a noise. He was employed as a draughtsman by Hydrolites Ltd. Hydrolites was an old, wealthy and unprogressive firm that manufactured rails for trams and trains, bridge-girders and similar heavy ironmongery. It was pervaded from roof to basement by placidity and slumberousness. The reason it was unprogressive was that it had made so much money that it didn't need to bother to be otherwise.

When you stepped out of the lift into the drawing-office, on the top floor, you expected to encounter festoons of cob-webs. And, but for the vigilance of the cleaners, you would undoubtedly have done so. Down both sides of the long and spacious room, a few feet apart, were the draughtsmen's tables, and propped at a slant on them, by means of books, paste-pots, inkwells, bricks, blocks of wood, lumps of coral, or anything else that came handy, were their drawing-boards.

The draughtsmen, with the exception of two apprentices, were slow-moving, slow-thinking, lethargic and extremely dull, elderly men. It seemed to require an enormous effort on their part to move or do anything, and, whenever they had to make that effort, their stiff old joints creaked, sometimes audibly. They climbed on to their stools in the morning with sighs of relief and only vacated them, with great reluctance, when it was absolutely unavoidable. Most of them had occupied those stools nearly all their lives. Even the two apprentices were grave and tremendously serious and what little youth they may still have had in them was evaporating rapidly in the arid atmosphere, into which, after leaving school, they had been thrust by their parents.

They were a chronically tired, lazy and sleepy lot, those old fossils of the drawing-office, and tiredest, laziest, sleepest, noisiest

and most fossilized of them all was Mr Blundell. He was a miserable man. A lonely and penurious bachelor, completely disinterested in life, apparently, yet clinging to it tenaciously for all that. He was always shabbily dressed and half-starved looking. He neither smoked, drank, nor spent a penny in any other way if he could help it. He had no hobbies and no friends. He was too cranky, too pessimistic, too mean. Even his relatives wouldn't be bothered with him. Though entitled to annual leave, he never took it, because for one thing, he would have had to take it at his own expense, and, for another, he wouldn't have known what to do with himself. If he had ever enjoyed life, and that is doubtful, he had long forgotten how to make it pleasurable. He had no home ties. He lived in lodgings somewhere—cheap and dingy lodgings.

On public holidays, or when, for some other reason, the office was closed, time hung heavily on old Blundell's hands. He wandered about the street, disconsolately, and, with a sigh of relief, was first to return to work, when the doors were open again. The office was his only home. His ideas, habits and methods were antiquated; but, as he had been a faithful servant of Hydrolites all his life, the firm, instead of compelling him to retire when he reached the age of sixty, let him stay on doing contract work.

He had all kinds of ailments which took turns at harassing him. One week it would be rheumatism, the next colitis, the week after that catarrh, or dry pleurisy. At all times a noisy man, his catarrhal weeks, in particular, were a source of irritation to everybody. Throughout them he would be gripped by fits of sneezing, each of which would last about an hour.

His incurable pessimism weighed heavily on the rest of the office staff too. He was for ever groaning and complaining. Even when he smiled, which was at rare intervals only, it was in a wry and melancholy fashion. Needless to say, he was anything but popular; was regarded, even by his fellow-fossils, in fact, as a confounded nuisance.

The only other disturber in the office of its peace and harmony was Edgar Pease, a young and perky clerk, who typed specifications and did other clerical work in connection with the department. He was exceedingly fond of work and went about it energetically and gaily. He was a quick worker too, and the pleasure, it was obvious, he derived from his celerity annoyed the fossilized old draughtsmen terribly. Whenever they referred to him among themselves, it was as "that young ass, Pease," "that damned idiot," or "that infernal young fool over there." They didn't like him. They

didn't like him at all. What the devil was he always running and bustling about for? Did he think the firm would be favourably impressed by that incessant haste of his and give him a good salary some day? He would learn sense sooner or later, they told one another. Wait until he had been as long with the firm as they had! They wondered whether he would bustle about then. The real cause of their dislike may have been a half-suspicion that Pease was trying to shame them by his persistent industry.

Yes, only for old Blundell and Pease, the peace and slumberousness of the drawing-office would have been positively heavenly. Confound both of them! The amount of noise old Blundell made varied with his moods. On days when he was feeling particularly discontented with life his clumsiness was maddening. He dropped pens, pencils, rulers, paper-weights, sample pieces of steel railway-line, tobacco tins and other odds and ends that were strewn about his table, with nerve-racking frequency. He wore large blucher boots too, which squeaked frightfully; but, besides the many minor noises he was in the habit of making, there was one crowning effort of his that, occurring as it did very often, two or three times a week, eclipsed all others.

Somehow or other—he was always filled with wonder that the mishap had occurred—with dramatic suddenness he would upset his drawing-board. It was on unusually tranquil afternoons, as a rule, that he contrived to reach this pinnacle of noise-making.

Quietude would be reigning supreme. If the draughtsmen were not actually asleep, they would be giving no indication, at all events, of being even partially wakeful. Pigeons would be crooning soothingly on the ledges above and below the windows outside. Perhaps there would be the muffled sound of a horse and cart in a nearby street, or the distant droning of a tram. Even Edgar Pease would, for the time being, be engrossed in some task that kept him seated in silence at his table.

Then, all of a sudden—CRASH!!—frightening the senses out of everybody. Over old Blundell's drawing-board would go. Hundreds of pigeons would fly away panic-stricken. Ink would be splashed about the floor. Drawing materials and other paraphernalia would be scattered in all directions. The other draughtsmen at the tables nearest Blundell's would help him pick up his belongings and readjust his drawing-board, while the boss glared down disapprovingly from his lofty perch in the far and raised end of the room.

What made these sudden crashes all the more startling was that old Blundell's table was in an alcove out of sight of the other

draughtsmen. No one had the slightest inkling when they were likely to occur. Perhaps he fell asleep and leant too heavily on one end of his board. But he could never explain, to the satisfaction of anybody else, how he came to upset it, and was always flurried and mystified when down on his hands and knees, picking up his scattered belongings.

One day, in the middle of a sneezing fit, old Blundell burst a blood-vessel and died. His table in the alcove was vacant for a while until one of the apprentices occupied it. But the apprentice didn't occupy it long. There was something uncanny about it, he said. Though not by any means clumsy (in fact he was an extremely deft, tidy, quiet and careful young man), things would seem to slip off the table deliberately, when he wasn't looking. He could have sworn they were not near the edge of it, and that there was no possibility of upsetting them when he noticed them last, yet off the table they would fall, with, for small objects, quite a remarkable amount of clatter. He was asked repeatedly by the other draughtsmen not to make so much noise, and was reprimanded several times by the boss.

The table itself seemed to creak outrageously without having been subjected to any undue pressure. And there was something else, something that gave him a queer feeling, a decidedly creepy sensation whenever it occurred. Though his own methods were up to date, he found himself unconsciously, every now and then, adopting antediluvian ones instead of them. It was almost as though, whenever for a moment or two his thoughts strayed elsewhere, some invisible hand altered the course of his drawing pen and led it into constructing diagrams that were cumbrous and oddly different from what he had intended they should be.

"You must stop using these peculiar methods, Baxter," the chief would say, when checking his work. "They were all right for Mr Blundell. He was too old to alter them, but you are a young man and we expect you to be up to date."

Tired of these constant rebukes and the uncanny something which hung over that table, compelling him, in spite of himself, to draw as he did not want to draw, and tired also of the way in which, no matter how he tried to prevent them, his drawing-materials would insist on slipping off and making a most offensive uproar, Baxter asked and obtained permission to sit elsewhere.

Quietude returned to the drawing-office then. Baxter's diagrammatic style left off straying and his drawing-materials seemed no longer attracted by the floor.

Old Blundell's table and drawing-board in the alcove remained thenceforward unoccupied. On one excuse or another the various draughtsmen who were asked to work there got out of doing so. The boss of the room was irritated by what he called their silly objections and did his best to overcome them. But it was no use.

"I can't understand it at all," he used to say, peevishly. "You're like a lot of silly children. I suppose I'll have to work here myself."

It was noticeable, however, that he continued to put up with his own table in the raised and far end of the room and that old Blundell's table and drawing-board continued to collect the dust of the alcove undisturbed.

The drowsy weeks in the drawing-office dragged by as monotonously as ever. Apart from their numerous ailments, domestic troubles, and the miserly way that, in their estimation, the firm administered the salary-list, the draughtsmen had only one cause of complaint now and then and that was the hustling and bustling of the ambitious and indefatigable Edgar Pease.

"Only for him," they often murmured to themselves, "the restfulness of the office would be what it was in the old days." The late Mr Blundell had faded from their minds. Perhaps he knew and resented it, wherever he was. At all events, one exceptionally drowsy afternoon, a hot, still, oppressive, midsummer afternoon when they found it unusually difficult, if indeed any of them were trying seriously, to keep their eyes open, the stillness, which seemed supercharged with expectancy, was broken by a resounding—CRASH!!—the old familiar thorough kind of crash that, on all such afternoons, could confidently be expected, while he was alive, from Mr Blundell.

A cold chill, despite the heat, ran down everybody's spine, and it was some moments before the draughtsmen nearest the alcove climbed slowly down off their stools, with tired sighs, to pick up the offending drawing-board and the usual odds and ends.

Not long after that old Blundell's table was taken away and bookshelves built into the alcove.

[From *The Giraffe's Uncle*, 1933.]

HOME

By VANCE PALMER

ELSIE had one dream from which she always woke shivering, sick in the pit of her stomach. She was in the camp across the creek, with the dogs crowding in on her for warmth, and ghostly figures stretched all round. Cold and greyness were the background of that dream. The cold penetrated her bones, and when it was time for the sun to get up there was no sun, only a smoky moon with dirty edges that gave neither heat nor light. She had a sense of being lost, of having drifted away beyond time. She must get back to the station-homestead again, back to her little bedroom by the kitchen, with its washstand of varnished pine, its neat bunk, its kalsomined walls on which hung a picture of a wounded deer turning on the dogs; but when she struggled across the creek to where the white pisé building had shone through the pepperinas, the homestead had gone, and there was only a wilderness of straggling mulga. On and on she wandered through the tangled scrub, under a sky grey as a blanket, till excited, gibbering figures found her and carried her back to their fires. . . .

Elsie invariably awoke, sobbing, to find that the bedclothes had slithered to the floor and a bleak wind was blowing through the open door. She could never sleep after that, but lay watching the light spread till it was time to slip into her clothes, splash water into her eyes from the tap at the tank, and hurry off to kindle the fire in the big kitchen-range. How pleasant, after the dream, to hear the sounds of awakening life in the homestead: the housekeeper's bed creaking, the men stirring in their quarters, the jingle of the horse-boy's bridle as he went to catch the pony and bring in the milkers! Young Jerry was always the first to be about. He came stumbling sleepily from the camp across the creek in his tattered trousers and bare feet, looking peaked and shrivelled till the sun had put warmth into him. Or perhaps as she was filling the kettle at the tank the boss himself would lumber across the landing to the bathroom, a towel over his shoulder and his grey hair rumped.

"Well, Elsie, made up your mind to be the early bird this morning? Hadn't enough nap on your bunk to keep warm, eh? . . . Take Mrs Drummond's morning tea in as soon as you like."

The sun streamed across the cropped paddock; the fire crackled in the big range; there was a far thunder as the horses were brought racing to the yards through the young sandalwood. From the bedroom along the veranda came the drowsy responses of Don, as his mother called to ask him was he up. Drummond sang and spluttered in the bathroom, coming out with his face buried in the towel and wandering over to look at what was happening at the yards. Elsie was happy as she carried the piles of plates across the landing to set the breakfast-table, and rummaged in the drawer of the sideboard for the cutlery. Soon the meal would be over, and she would be racing down the track with Don to the slab school by the saddle-room, stopping to greet the men as they sorted out their gear and started off for the day's work.

How different this world from the other grey one of her dreams!

Yet it was only on winter nights, when she had lain awake listening to the sounds from the camp across the creek, that the dream came strongly. They didn't hold corroborees over there often now, for there weren't enough men, but during the cold months in the middle of the year all those who belonged to the tribe usually made back to that old camping-ground that had been scarred by the fires of countless generations. Men like Joker, Pedro, and Turramorra Jack, and even skinhunters like Combo Dark, who had horses and plants of his own. They crawled in from all points of the compass, bringing their women and dogs, and putting a few fresh sheets of bark on the gunyahs they had used the year before. Then what sport and feasting! Old spindle-shanked Jimmy, the songmaker, who was toothless and nearly blind, took charge of the camp again, and the young bucks who would sooner sit playing cards were forced to turn out and paint themselves for the nightly corroboree. They joined in with gusto after the first day or two.

As soon as darkness fell a cry would go up, followed by the barking of dogs, the beating of hide-drums; and at once a different atmosphere gathered about the homestead. The tinkling of Mrs Drummond's piano, the casual horse-talk of the men on the veranda, would be swamped by sounds that seemed as old as the gnarled mulga and the bony earth in which it was rooted. Elsie, lying in her bunk, felt her nerves thrum to those sounds like violin-strings to a bow, and she buried her head deep in the brown blanket.

They recalled smells, tastes, shadowy fears she didn't want to

remember. They churned up something that usually lay asleep, deep down. Then, afterwards, would come the dream.

She had drifted into the camp half-a-dozen years before with a promiscuous horde of blacks from down the river; and Drummond, riding home one evening in the dusk, had been attracted by her looks and her colour. Her skin was not murky like that of the other half-castes, but clear as honey, and there was a wistfulness about her as she stood in her bit of a shift by the door of a gunyah watching the other youngsters play. Dark eyes and drooping lashes! Drummond was in a sentimental mood, for his favourite dog had been killed by a horse's kick at the yards a day or two before, and the child reminded him of his bereavement. Hadn't Spider just that pathetic look when he came squirming towards him after playing up among the cattle, dragging his hind legs and looking up with liquid, appealing eyes?

"There's a kid over at the camp who don't seem to belong there," he told his wife. "About five or six she must be, and with not more than a streak of black blood in her. Left there, most likely, by some brindle who's cleared out. You ought to go over and have a look."

His wife raised her eyebrows.

"Me? But why?"

"Oh, I don't know!" Drummond said sheepishly. "It won't do any harm to have a look. She seems as lonely among that crowd as a broken-backed snake on an anthill. If she don't belong to anyone in particular, we might bring her over here. Give her decent clothes and tucker and train her to make herself handy in the house."

That appealed to Mrs Drummond, who believed that perfect service could only be obtained from those who were caught young. How often had she been driven to despair by girls who came and went, moping because there was no entertainment in the evenings, getting into trouble with the men, as like as not, and, anyhow, thinking more of their own prospects than of the running of the house. She found that Elsie had plenty of blood-relations in the camp, but no parents. Her mother had died at a station down the river, and no one had any idea who her father was: it was best not to poke too far into that question in a world where all men were neighbours. Judy, the old crone who looked after the youngster, was unwilling to part with her at first; but Drummond's wife had a firm way or dealing with such people, and the gin was assured of a plentiful supply of flour and tobacco at the store, with a bonus of cast-off clothing when she went back down the river. Squatting moodily by the fire, her cold pipe between her teeth, she gave a brow-beaten assent.

At first Elsie regarded the transfer with a sort of dumb terror. She whimpered shamelessly for a week or two in her little room by the kitchen, and refused all food, so that Mrs Rainey, the overseer's wife, said openly it was murder and that she ought to be taken back to where she belonged. Drummond himself, looking at the dark rumpled head by the light of a candle, was uneasy in his mind. He had seen too many young bears and wild things Don had brought in from the bush pine away and die behind the wires. You could go too far in tampering with nature! Live animals as well as trees seemed to have roots and suckers! But his wife assured him that the youngster would soon get over it.

"Don't be a fool, Bob: she's not going to die of a broken heart. In a little while you won't be able to move without her hanging on to the leg of your trousers. They're all like that—hard to tame at first, and just as hard to get rid of in the end."

She was right—about Elsie, anyhow. When the youngster had recovered from the first shock of being transplanted, she clung to the homestead like a joey to its mother's pouch. Everything fascinated her; the clock on the kitchen mantelpiece, the rows of plates overlapping on the dresser like the scales of a fish, the sand that ran from one end of the glass to the other as the eggs boiled. When Mrs Rainey was asleep in the afternoons she could stand for hours looking at these things or pawing them with her fingers, and at such times her eyes had the bright concentration of a bird's. There was a tedium about washing-up or sweeping, of course, but she liked laying the table and handling the polished silver. Nothing that had been shown her once was lost on her. She took a pleasure in putting a gloss on the linen, in scrubbing the silver till it shone, in folding the white sheets when they came in from the line.

When visitors came to the house, she waited at table, standing behind Drummond as he carved, and moving round with the filled plates as noiselessly as a shadow. A perfect little slavey, the women-guests thought her, keeping her eyes open and her mouth shut.

She had an instinct for copying things, and soon could do the light work of the house as well as Mrs Drummond herself, though sometimes crockery and vases came apart in her hand when she was just looking at them, and had to be hidden behind the passion-vines near the kitchen tank. The necessity for finding new reasons for the disappearance of one thing or another sharpened a brain that would have been slow in unfolding.

So did the school lessons that Drummond was determined she should share with his own boy, as long as they didn't interfere with more important work. She would be dreaming with her hands

in the tin washing-up dish when the voice of young Don would come from outside where he was playing marbles in the dust:

"Hurry up, Else! Aincher never going to get that done?"

"Right: I won't be a minute. Jus' got to give the floor a lick with the broom."

And together they would race down to the slab schoolhouse that held a smell of stale chaff and mousey paper. Lessons were interesting enough to Elsie when once she had learned to read, though half of what old Purdie said to her went by on the wind. She sat listening to him with preoccupied eyes, waiting for the hour of release.

"Race you down to the creek, Else!"

"All right, Don; gimme a start."

"To that little bush, then. . . One, two, three—off!"

A year older than Elsie, Don was not so fleet of foot, yet she never beat him down to the rocks. They always arrived at the same time, panting and breathless, Elsie's stockings dragging round her shins and her hair falling in rats' tails over her eyes. It was the same when they were pelting stones at a rock or floating tin; a subtle instinct kept the girl from exerting her full powers. What was the good of beating Don in things like that? She would only rouse his temper and make him sulky. He was the boss of the hunting-ground that was bounded by the garden fence on the one hand, and the creek and yards on the other; and she could get more out of him by playing up to him than by lowering his pride.

"Now then, Don, wake up! You don't want Elsie to be overhauling you, do you, boy?"

That was the whip old Purdie was always using, and she knew how it braced Don up, bringing a thundercloud to his forehead, darkness to his eyes. To be beaten by her, a girl who had just begun to drop the pidgin of the camp! He couldn't stand that, even at lessons. And so, with the cunning of a young animal, Elsie ran lame, threw wide, and pretended to be frightened to dive off the high bank near the crossing.

Her feminine duplicity brought its reward. When the Fallon boys rode over for a game on Saturday mornings and would have chivvied her back to the kitchen, it was Don who defended her right to share their sport, even in the matter of jumping with a pole or taking turns with the small Winchester.

"Let her alone, you blokes: she's all right. Good at most things as a boy. . . I can't give her more'n five in a hundred."

She went with them in the end, trailing off to look for parrots' nests in rotten limbs, to pot at black duck in quiet reaches, to

watch the men cutting out cattle on the scalded plain. The boys poked fun at her in their own way. Stevie Fallon talked pidgin, and pretended to think she was fond of the fat witchetty-grubs they sometimes cut out of trees: he would hand one to her on the point of his knife and tell her to roast it.

"Go on Elsie. That good fella tucker. Budgery, my oath! . . . Kid you haven't eaten plenty when you was living with old Judy."

It made a flood of blind anger well up in her: she wanted to rush at him and scratch his freckled face, slash at him with the knife.

Yet what a relief to get out of the range of Mrs Drummond's watching eyes! Saturday morning was a busy one at the homestead, with the bedrooms being turned upside down, and the whole place smelling of linoleum polish and soapy water; but as long as she was out of the way no one seemed to miss her. It was only when they caught sight of her that they remembered there were windows to clean and bedrooms to sweep. And as long as she was with the boys she was safe. She could sneak home just before the mid-day meal and have the table laid before Mrs Drummond or the house-keeper noticed she had been away.

Picnics on Sunday, quiet evenings in Mrs Rainey's room listening to the gramophone, racketty games with Don at the bottom of the garden after tea! It was easy for Elsie to believe she was one of the family. Yet the only human being she had real contact with was Don, and her pride was fed by the fact that he couldn't get along without her. A heavy-witted boy, he was slow in inventing games for himself. Sheer boredom gripped him if he were left alone for a couple of hours, and he could find nothing to do but mooch about the creek bank, throwing stones at the old punt by the windmill. Elsie, on the contrary, was as lively and ingenious as a young cattle-pup in a yard full of chickens; the boy's moodiness fell from him as soon as she put down her broom and danced out of the kitchen door.

For all his bluff, he depended on her and couldn't help showing it. There was the time she went down with pneumonia, after he had pushed her into the creek during the dinner-hour. He knew she hadn't changed her wet clothes for fear of his mother finding out, and something stirred in him as he hung about the garden, listening to her delirious babbling, sniffing in the whiffs of hot linseed that came from her bedroom. For once his imagination quickened and took charge of him. He saw her being put into a box of varnished pine and carried down to the mound in the creekbend where old Jimmy's gin was buried. He lived through

the intolerable emptiness of the days that followed. The sun, going down behind the mulga, had something sinister in its bleary eye. The voice of the mopoke, coming from the dark gums on the other side of the lagoon, was heavy with evil. When Elsie finally got better, and could sit on a veranda-chair outside her bedroom, life took on the colour of a long birthday. He was ready to carry out her tray for her, bring her drinks from the waterbag, play second fiddle in a way that would have disgusted the Fallon boys, making them believe he had lost his last scrap of manly spirit.

By the time she was thirteen, Elsie had forgotten nearly everything about her life at the camp. It seemed as if she had always lived at the homestead, going to sleep to the sound of Mrs Rainey's gramophone, watching the light spread on the blue walls when she awoke, getting up to kindle the fire in the big range and take Mrs Drummond's tea over to her bedroom.

All that remained of the old camp days was this dream, a quickening of some memory still lingering in the cells of her brain. And only the distant chanting of the corroboree, heard less with her ears than with her nerves, could carry her back into the world where she was, cold, forlorn, hopelessly lost.

By daylight it seemed far removed from her, though when she looked across the creek it was with a little shiver of repulsion. Dark figures moving around their fires, and old gins squatting among their dogs, eating their meat nearly raw and with their fingers! There were young girls of her own age, like Jessie, Joker's Nellie, Wanda, a daughter of old Judy; but she didn't know how to talk to them when they came over for stores. They watched her with curious, diffident eyes, dark with a knowledge deeper than her own, as she ladled out tea and sugar. There was even a secret hostility in their masked and flattened faces as they noted the details of her dress, the easy way she moved about the kitchen. Hanging about under the pepperina, they giggled among themselves, covering their skinny shanks with their tattered skirts and huddling together like rabbits when the men came down from the yard. Or on killing-days they clambered about the rails with the youngsters of the camp, sniffing up the scent of dust and blood, and remaining to roast bits of offal on little fires. Jessie wasn't fourteen yet, but the hawkker who came to the camp in winter wanted her to go off with him. And Joker's Nellie, a little stunted thing with a squint in her eye, was going to have a baby. Could anything be more terrible than having to live with Joker, a bad-tempered old creature who had had three wives and laid about him with a waddy when he was angry? Yet Nellie took him as a

matter of course, and never seemed to nurse a grudge against him when she had to appear with her head bound in a soiled handkerchief.

"Joker, he plenty fella cross lars' night," was all she would say.

Elsie knew she was different from them as she pulled her stockings over her slim legs, or stood before the glass admiring her soft curves. A queer sort of pride was awakening in her with her budding womanhood. She was handy with her needle and took pride in making her own clothes, sitting up late and poring over the housekeeper's fashion journals by the light of a candle. She liked the feel of silky stuffs against her body; liked crushing her feet into small shoes; liked the smell of scent and toothpaste that hung about her room. The people who came to the place were beginning to take notice of her.

"You're lucky, Mrs Drummond. It was quite worth while taking the risk you did. . . . Though of course it's not over yet."

And then the great change. Drummond had been talking for years about leaving the station in charge of Rainey, but even his wife was astonished when the decision was finally made. It was some trouble with his heart that convinced him he had done enough hard work; he was sixty, and intended to keep a few racehorses and live on his money. One of his problems in settling up things at the station was the disposition of Elsie.

"Better leave her here, I suppose," he said to his wife. "She's used to the place, and Mrs Rainey will be glad to have her. No good taking her in there."

But his wife was indignant.

"What? After I've had all the bother of training her! Don't talk nonsense, Bob. Anyone will do for Rainey's wife, but I've got to have someone who knows how I like things done. Elsie will be no end of help when she loses that habit of dreaming over what she's doing and learns to keep her mind indoors."

It was all settled over Elsie's head. Everything she had thought fixed and permanent melted in a few days and was fused into new shapes. Old Purdie drifted away to the coast, and Don was packed off to boarding-school; the Rainey's moved over and took possession. With the more personal belongings of the family Elsie travelled into Gunnedah in a truck driven by a half-caste boy who had been a tracker at the police-station, and was now going to look after Drummond's racehorses. He had a glib voice, a sophisticated mind, and a deep contempt for people, coloured or white, who had never known Gunnedah.

"You'll feel you've woke up when you get in there," he told

Elsie. "Cattle sales, people movin' round in cars, dance or pictures close up ev'ry Sattidy night. My oath! Yous people don' know you're alive out here. One day follerin' another like sheep through a gate."

Until then Elsie hadn't known how fully the familiar scents and sounds of that creekbend, with its blacks' camp on one side and its homestead on the other, had become part of her. Threads of life reaching up from the soil bound her without her being aware. The new house was a rambling two-storied place, surrounded by five acres of grassy paddock, and it lay on the outskirts of the town. The places of other retired squatters adjoined it and hemmed it in. From her bedroom Elsie could see fat ponies feeding on cropped slopes, half-a-dozen chimneys peeping out from surrounding shade-trees, a red road winding to a wooden bridge. On the far side of the river lay the town, a shimmer of colourless roofs in the sunlight. There was a tennis-court on the flat by the bridge, and every afternoon at four, the Fawcett girls from next door went dawdling towards it, swinging their rackets and waiting by the hollow box-tree for the clerks to come out of the banks.

How radiantly fresh and cool they looked, these girls, in their summer frocks and light silk stockings! Pangs of envy, of troubled desire, shot through Elsie as she watched them. She knew their names—Millie and Lena—for sometimes she had heard Don talk about them, and often she had speculated about their looks, wondering whether they were dark or fair. Don and his mother had stayed with the Fawcetts when they spent a night at the township, but Don's comments on the girls hadn't told her much:

"Too much talk about 'em. Always magging at one another—cockies in a cage. . . . Old Fawcett kept a pub once down on the Barwon, and made a pot of money; but he don't know B from a bull's foot, and sometimes he goes on the booze for weeks on end."

And yet those cool, sauntering figures, those slim, silk legs, that airy way of talking to the boys at the tennis-court—it all came out of a mysterious life far removed from Elsie. She would have given her eyes for the Fawcett girls' assurance. They looked as if they had never been hot and flustered in all their lives; an icy air blew around them. What did the young, sleek-haired men in flannels say to them when they lounged on the grass after a set?

No chance of her being drawn into their circle, in spite of the wistful eyes that were so like the dead Spider's! The young men of Gunnedah knew where to draw the line. It was a prosperous little town, with vineyards around it, three banks in the main street, and a habit of keeping Sunday and drawing rigid class-dis-

tinctions. Even the bushmen and shearers who rode in from the surrounding country to spend their cheques at the most furtive of the five public-houses, had a constraint laid upon them by the general atmosphere of order—young girls coming home demurely from choir-practice, cats being put out of back doors at ten. You couldn't imagine any outbreak of high spirits at Gunnedah. It was too old, too settled, too proud of its memorial hall, its paling-guarded trees in the main street, its five churches. Only at annual racetime, when nondescript men floated in from other places with glossy, berugged horses, and the hotel balconies were full of spielers and sporty young squatters, was there any sign of the town losing its head. Then for a few days a smell of straw, dust, spilt beer, filled the air. The landscape around was littered with bottles and torn newspapers; two-up was played by little groups in the main street; the trades-people privately counted their gains and publicly said it was time to put a stop to these orgies.

Yet Elsie saw little of such social life as there was at Gunnedah; her outlook was mainly from the bedroom window. The big rambling house with its disorderly garden was like a prison. In the mornings it was not so bad, for there was plenty to do in the kitchen, but how to fill the emptiness of the afternoons and evenings! She sat staring at the ponies in the next paddock, at the daily train coming in, at the bank-clerks sauntering across the bridge to tennis. It was no fun going over the bridge into the township herself, for the commercial travellers on the hotel balconies stared at her, the women shopping at the stores gave her sidelong glances, and sometimes the youngsters coming home from school chanted satirically:

Eenah, deenah, dinah, doe,
Catch a nigger by the toe. . . .

breaking off to whistle after her or ask her if she were going up to see Joey, the tracker at the station.

How the sound of that silly refrain made her eyeballs burn! She would have liked to run amok among these grinning youngsters, banging their heads together, burying their faces in the dirt, putting terror into them. But she only walked on demurely, swinging her shopping-bag as the Fawcett girls swung their tennis-rackets, and looking as if she had important business at some bank or store.

Occasionally the Drummonds drove her with them to places outside the town, and she sat in the buggy holding the horses while the men poked around the stables and the women sipped tea on the vine-shaded veranda. Then there were the rare visits to church on Sunday mornings, when Drummond's wife roused him from the

weekly paper under the figtree. Elsie was always taken with them for the good of her soul, and she sat stiffly in her pew, watching the Adam's apple move up and down in the parson's throat like a cud, and tracing the outlines of Millie Fawcett's hat on the back of her hymn book with her finger. What dark skins the Fawcett girls had! Almost as dark as her own! And Lena had at least one false tooth, that dropped a little when she opened her mouth to sing. Yet the young fellows followed them everywhere; there would be two or three hanging round to speak to them when they came out of church; others would be sitting on the rails of the bridge, waiting for the chance to exchange a word or two. Was it their looks that made the boys run after them, or just the way they dressed and the sort of scent they used? And how did they spend their time when they weren't playing tennis or driving to the station in the pony-trap?

But most of her imaginative life was spent in dreaming about Don, and counting the months till his return. She went over and over the talk they had had at the bottom of the garden the night before he left.

"I'm only going to do a couple of years at school. That's the dead limit. Then I'm coming back to run the station. Going to run it on my own."

His eyes looked at hers with a challenging grin as he switched at the long grass.

"How'd you like to come back and look after the house, Elsie? See to things while I'm out at the back of the run."

The thrill that shot through her flushed her forehead, brought a thickness to her throat.

"Me? They wouldn't let me."

"Let you? Who's to stop you? That's where you belong, isn't it? . . . Don't you worry: I'll fix everything up. The whole show's going to be mine some day. Rainey's only running it till I'm ready to take the reins."

He was perky and confident, standing there in the dusk of the garden, wide-open eyes jutting out prominently, legs thrust apart. She let her shy glance rest on him like a moth settling. When had he ever failed to get anything he wanted from his people? And how masterful he was! She thought of him riding down on his pony to the mustering-camp with the men, letting the overseer shut the gate behind him, bossing the blackboys about at the yards. A young and lordly male, born to power over other people, especially women! Subtle currents of devotion flowed out of her, surrounding his image

with mystery and glamour, making her ready to surrender herself to him, soul and body.

All the drowsy days as she moved about the Drummond's kitchen, washing up or preparing food for the fowls, this dream, vague but nourishing, of a return to the station with Don was at the back of her mind. To live in a world of her own, out of range of Mrs Drummond's eyes—that was something to look forward to in the afternoons when she couldn't sprawl on the bed or sit idling under the figtree without feeling that someone's disapproving glance was upon her. In spite of the fat greenness of Drummond's garden, she had a mysterious hankering for the dry soil she knew. She missed that smell of powdery, hoof-bruised dust that came from the yards, the miles of feathery, dove-grey mulga over which a garish glow fell at sundown, the swims in the hole beneath the crooked gum; she even missed the confused sounds floating over from the camp across the creek. Something was always happening out there. One of the old men had quarrelled with his gin; Turramorra Jack had come back from ringbarking with a big cheque; there was an Indian hawker camped with his covered cart beside the stock-route gate. She longed to hear the chatter of the young girls as they squatted with their sugar-bags at the kitchen door.

Yet she was ashamed of this hunger that gnawed at her secretly. It was silly, something she ought to have left behind her with her bare-foot wanderings down the creek with the boys. She deliberately put it away from her as she watched Mrs Drummond arrange flowers in a vase or put the last touches to a frock she was making, and she took pleasure in knowing what tray cloth to use when visitors came, and how to fold the sandwiches in light little rolls. They followed her with their eyes, these visitors, as she came out on to the veranda with the tea, noting the whiteness of her apron, the cool precision of her hands. Such clean hands, with well-kept nails!

"I brought Elsie in from the bush with me," Mrs Drummond explained. "Caught her young and trained her up. She'll make a good little servant yet."

And the wives of the bank-manager, the Presbyterian parson, and the police magistrate all agreed that she had wonderful possibilities. That instinct for refinement! It seemed inherent, as if her father had been, well, not just a knockabout bushman, but a man of class! Or was it merely that she had been caught young?

There were times when she looked in the glass secretly and compared herself with the younger Fawcett girl—the texture of her skin, the lines of her body, the set of her head upon her shoulders.

Something was beginning to bud in her. Her figure was taking on maturing curves; there was a fullness in her bust, a faint emphasis about her hips. She was excited about that vision of her stripped body. Even the colour of her skin wasn't so ugly as she thought it. With her savings she bought frocks she couldn't wear in the daytime, hiding them in the lower drawer and gloating over them before she blew out her candle. There was a thrill in the feel of silk lingerie against her flesh. Perhaps when Don came home. . . .

She lay in bed thinking of the scene, living it over by the sheer force of her imagination. Dusk after a hot day! No sound anywhere except the faraway whistle of the train pulling out of the station, and the faint plunk of tennis-balls from the court by the bridge. She is standing in the garden picking grapes for the table, wearing her cream fuji because Mrs Drummond has gone off for the week-end. How cool her silk underthings against her skin! The grape-leaves, too, on the nape of her neck, as she dives through the trellis after a bunch! Suddenly a shout, an arm around her waist:

"Good Lord, it's never you, Else! Why, you've grown so I hardly knew you. Thought it was Lena Fawcett come over for some fruit."

Don, with his eyes shining and his lips twisting in a self-conscious grin! Through her light frock she can feel his arm trembling against her body—her body that is about to melt and dissolve in the summer-drowsy air. Happiness wells up in her, breaking in bubbles of laughter in her throat.

For some time she had made preparations for his homecoming. She was knitting him a silk muffler, and had bought other things—a belt with his school colours, a cap, a gorgeously-embroidered handkerchief. And there would be lots of picnics and race-meetings that summer. Drummond was talking of buying a big touring-car, so that they could all go for long drives across country; he had plans for camping out and fishing, taking one tent for the men and one for the women. There was a place fifty miles away where the river that flowed through the township spread out in a wide lagoon, covered with water-lilies, filled with black duck and cod.

But it was a wearisome time to wait, and before the Christmas holidays Don wrote to say he was going to stay with another boy at the seaside. The summer slowly passed, with the grapes hanging in purple clusters on the trellises and the grass turning brown and brittle in the small paddock. There was the usual race-meeting on Boxing Day, with the town full of strangers, and leggy horses in rugs dancing about the main street. For weeks a tournament meandered on at the court by the bridge, and women in gaudy jumpers

floated about in a haze of fine, white dust. Lurid thunderstorms came bellying up over the edge of the horizon, discharging their venom in spears of light, and leaving the cracked earth thirstier when they passed. The outskirts of the township seemed to swarm with boys, fishing for yabbies in the creek, potting with their shanghais at greenleeks in the saplings, whistling at Elsie when they found her loitering alone:

Eenah, deenah, dinah, doe. . . .

Humiliation and dreams of running amok with the butcher's knife!

Even Drummond was annoyed when Don decided to go off with the school cricket-team at Easter. He didn't want the boy to be tied to his mother's apron-strings, but surely he remembered he had a home to come to in the holidays. What was this new passion for cricket and surfing that had taken hold of him? Was he going to grow up a town loafer, fooling about with sport and women instead of being a cattleman?

"Don't be ridiculous, Bob," his wife retorted. "Why shouldn't he have all the fun he can? He won't have too much, goodness knows, when he leaves his schooldays behind and settles down in the collar. . . . Anyway, he'll be home in July."

And this time there was no disappointment. He came in company with another boy, landing home a day earlier than he was expected, and looking tall and coltish in his long trousers and tight-buttoned coat. Elsie was not picking grapes, as she had dreamed, when he arrived; nothing so idyllic! She was out at the back, feeding the fowls, and after a short, puzzled stare at the two figures she dropped her dish and went spinning over the grass. Her dress was be-draggled, her hair wild:

"Don! . . . Oh, Don, I didn't know it was today you were coming. First I thought it was one of them travellers, and then . . ."

She became aware of the other boy, who had stopped to shut the gate, and grew suddenly embarrassed. Sully was the recognized wag of the school, a short, dark youngster, with a hard-boiled look about the eyes, a nuggety head jammed down tight on his shoulders, a slanting grin. He looked Elsie up and down soberly:

"Hullo, Don! Your sister, eh? This is something you've kept dark."

Don's voice was cracking and he couldn't control it. He grew red about the ears as he mumbled a greeting, turning from Elsie to glare at his grinning mate; but the awkwardness of the situation was relieved by Drummond calling out a boisterous welcome from

the veranda and coming down the path. In the general confusion Elsie faded away to the kitchen, her heart drumming against her ribs, her fingers fumbling with everything they touched. The world had suddenly become alarmingly complex. She had a suspicion she had made a fool of herself, but she couldn't see how or why. For the time being she was unable to separate Don's face from that of the dark boy with the hard-boiled eyes. If only she could see him alone for awhile! Perhaps after tea, when the dishes were washed up. . . . It was the time they had always looked forward to, and she had an instinct that he would get rid of the other boy and be waiting for her at the bottom of the garden.

She had already put the belt, the muffler, and the silk handkerchief in Don's room, and he would see them when he went to change his things. Sitting in the kitchen with the housekeeper she waited impatiently for the evening meal to be over, but the talk and laughter went on and on. It was nearly dark when the signal came to clear away, and she hurried so much that she dropped the yellow salad-bowl that Mrs Drummond prized. Not even the housekeeper was looking, though, so she bundled the fragments into a newspaper, intending to bury them under the figtree by the lower gate.

Quiet in the kitchen, the faint glow of a pipe on the veranda, a dim moon veiled with thin clouds. Elsie paused to look in through the raised blind of the front room; no one was there but Mrs Drummond, sitting at the piano. She fluttered down through the garden.

"Oh, Don, you're the dead limit," she heard someone say in the dusk.

It was Millie Fawcett's voice. Elsie stopped beneath the trellis, her heart thumping rebelliously as she saw four dim figures by the lower gate. One of them apparently the boy Don had brought home with him, was sitting astride the fence, swinging a belt.

"From Elsie with love," came his high-pitched voice. "What else was there in the parcel, Don? Tell us all about it."

A sound of girlish giggling, and Don tried to pull his companion from the fence.

"Now then, Sully, cut it out or I'll screw that bull-neck of yours."

"But she'd have mugged you if I hadn't been there—wouldn't she now? Fallen on your neck and done a close-up for the pictures! The Return of the Prodigal, in five reels! Back to the in-no-cent love of his early youth. Featuring Don Drummond and—what did you say her moniker was?"

There was a laugh from Don that didn't sound quite wholehearted. He had never liked being barracked; he was beginning to

lose his temper. The elder Fawcett girl pretended to take his part.

"Well, she's pretty, you know, Don. Better looking than most of them. Such dark, dreamy eyes she's got."

"So's my grandmother. You people think you've got a great joke on. I'm just the sort, aren't I, to pick up with a girl like that? . . . Give us that belt, Sully."

"Then show us the handkerchief. A red silk one wasn't it? The sort the hawkers sell to the young bucks out at the camps. . . . Here we are, ladies and gentlemen: a dinkum love-offering."

A scuffle, and Sully disappeared from the fence. The night seemed full of broken jests, laughter, careless horseplay.

"Steady Don!" came Sully's muffled voice from the grass, "you've just about broken my neck. Broken the belt, anyhow."

"Well, bury it somewhere. . . . And keep your head shut after this, or I'll scrag you properly."

"She might want the belt herself," suggested Lena Fawcett slyly. "In a couple of years she'll have a job to find her waist. They all get like that."

Laughter, the gleam of a struck match, a drifting of dim figures across the paddock to the bottom of Fawcett's garden! It was a night of stars, of faint scents, of flowers opening to the dew. Elsie remained transfixed beneath the trellis, watching the blurred spot where they had been and the shaft of light that came from the dining-room window. Inside her there was a chaos of hot darkness. She didn't know she had moved till she found herself in her room upstairs, squatting on the floor beside the open drawer that held her hoarded frocks and underthings.

Noises came from below, tinkle of supper-things, tap-tap of Drummond's pipe on the veranda; but they had lost meaning for Elsie. The one clear thing in her mind was that she had forgotten to bury the remains of the yellow salad-bowl beneath the figtree. Well, that didn't matter! She would be out of reach by the time Mrs Drummond came across it.

Passion broke over her suddenly like a dam bursting, blinding her eyes. She began to rend and tear, taking delight in the feel of the soft silk as it ripped beneath her hands. Her face was distorted, ugly; her body an engine of mindless fury. The mound of tattered fabrics grew around her. Still she went on snatching at this or that, tearing it to fragments, even when the first destructive impulse had spent itself and left her empty of feeling or thought. In the morning she was gone. She had taken the only track she knew—the one that led over the bridge, then to the left through scattered vineyards and over the plain toward the mulga ridges.

It wasn't possible to take her battered suitcase, so she had left it beneath the bed and crammed most of her belongings into a pillowcase—her old dresses, her hairbrush with the celluloid back, a pencil case, a spare pair of shoes. But as the load grew heavy in the heat of the day she discarded one thing after another.

That night she slept in an out-station hut, where a supply of food had been left in the meat-safe by a boundary-rider, and in the morning she started on without shoes. Now and then she went at a trot, as though to escape more quickly from something that was following on behind. The rattle of a buggy, with Don driving? A policeman seeking to charge her with breaking the yellow salad-bowl? They had all merged, those people, into the excited, gibbering figures of her dream.

But the memory of them, and the life they stood for, was becoming dimmer in her mind. Fatigue had blotted out thought and reflection; only instinct remained strong. It was stimulated by scents that rose from the bush around her; dried dust, parched leaves, tang of muddy waterholes, breath of the bony earth itself. All these things were part of what she now felt to be home.

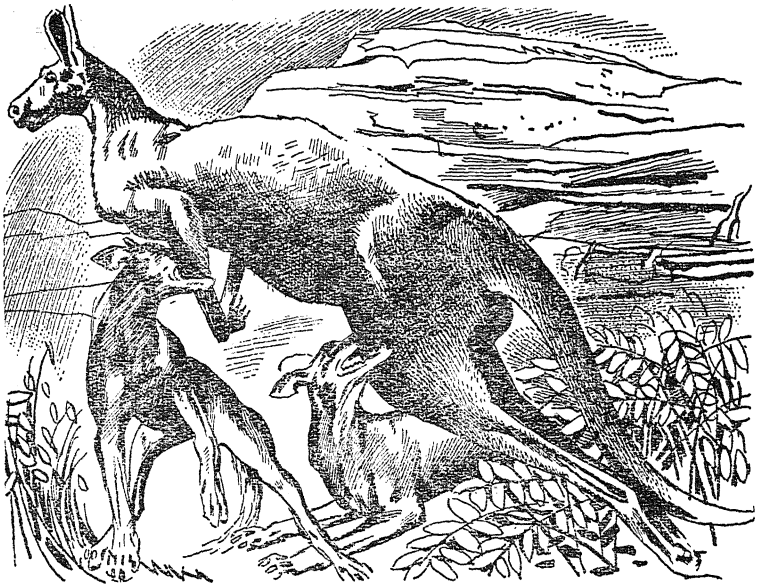
At the camp there was a great gathering for the winter reunion, and a loud shout at nightfall announced the beginning of a corroboree. It was followed by the howling of dogs, the beating of drums, till the dry earth and the darkening bush seemed to quiver in response to the sounds they had known for ages. Elsie heard them as she stumbled along the track from the stock-route gate, and they drew her magnetically, so that she crept through the undergrowth and squatted down just outside the circle of light. The leaping flames danced on gleaming bodies, on faces of old women slapping their thighs in the chorus, on grotesque, overhanging trees. A young fellow with white spirals on his chest and a dangling skin round his loins was prancing up and down the arena at the head of a file of men, his face shining with sweat and obscure emotions. Jerry, who used to be horse-boy at the station! And just behind him was Turramorra Jack, crouching like an emu. The dust rose from beneath their naked feet; hoarse barbaric cries rose from their throats.

A desire to join in that strange, half-remembered music awoke in Elsie's blood—a desire to surrender herself and be lost in the dark flood. Her body moved in response to the rhythm; her eyes rolled, showing the whites. From the darkness she looked at the faces of the chanting women—Ada, Joker's Nellie, Wanda, the daughter of old Judy, Jessie, the hawker's wife. A pungent odour

was in her nostrils, penetrating her secret being. Words she had forgotten rose in her mind, swelling like bubbles till they broke in her throat. Her lips moved without sound.

Suddenly she became aware that she was cold and shivering, and crept in closer and closer till she had joined the women and dogs around the fires.

[From *Sea and Spinfex*, 1934.]



LORD OF THE HILLS

By HENRY G. LAMOND

HILLS rough and low were piled one behind the other in endless confusion. Each was clothed waist-deep in greying spinifex, through which white boulders of rock shone and reflected the sun, and the whole was bathed in the searing light and burning heat of midday peculiar to western Queensland. A faint shimmer of dancing heat-waves lay low over the spinifex, and above the eternal hawks wheeled on still wings.

A wallaroo doe burst through the scattered fringe of gidgee-trees which skirted the base of one of the hills. She paused irresolute, and then headed straight up the hill. She was darker than her kangaroo cousin of the plains, being grey-brown to almost black. She was sturdier, wider of shoulder and more heavily muscled. Though she lacked the slim agility of the kangaroo it was more than compensated by her added strength.

She was used to hopping up hills. She leaned farther forward

than a kangaroo in action, and her bounds were a shade higher without having the same length. Her strength showed in the muscles rippling under her skin when she moved. Between her hind legs as she hopped up the hill her distended pouch showed like the swollen udder of a dairy cow. Inside that pouch a joey almost fit to leave its mother peeped over the edge and surveyed the world as it passed by. That doe was startled—palpably afraid of something—and her actions bespoke her need of pace. She was hampered by the swaying weight and the unwieldy shape of her pouch. Yet, notwithstanding that handicap, she swept up the hill, taking rough places and boulders in her stride, and her pace was a thing at which to marvel.

Behind that doe sounded the quick patter of racing paws. There came the harsh panting for breath, the rustle of hurtling bodies, and three dingoes burst through the trees from which the doe had come. Red as the setting sun, cruel beyond belief, with a stamina which knew no end, they were silent always in their foul work. They spread fan-shape, and laboured in their action as they followed the doe up the hill. They gained slightly for a while; but when they entered the thick spinifex and reached the rougher slopes then the doe more than held her own. Those brambly growths hindered the dogs; and they floundered over stones which the doe took in her stride.

The doe leaned forward farther, and her muscles corded and cracked as she gathered herself together for her bounds. She knew the death which pursued her; knew the value of the life she carried in the swaying pouch between her legs; knew instinctively all the rules of the hunt and the laws of evasion. And suddenly a wall of rock appeared before her—a steep bluff up which she could not hop, and precipitous to the extent of forcing a detour. The doe seemed to turn while in the air and in the middle of a bound. Then she sped along the well-worn pad which ran at the base of the bluff.

The dingoes had noticed the sudden turn. They drew across and cut an angle to intercept the doe. The one which had been running on the right eased its pace slightly to make the meeting at the point of the bluff; the two behind drew within striking distance. They had played that game before. It was an instinct with them. They knew, though it might take days, they could run down that doe in time. They also knew, if they could but turn a fleeing animal, then the load of fear which it carried would paralyse it, making it a nerveless thing without the power to

resist, sapping its stamina and leaving it bereft of cunning or reason.

The doe was, literally, going for her life. Her eyes stared, and strings of saliva floated from her lips. She reached the end of the bluff. She was on the point of turning it when a red demon with snapping jaws appeared before her. She stuttered in her stride, shuffling her feet, then turned and sped in a new direction. But the harm had been done; she had turned. Her faith in her power of flight had been shattered. And before the doe had taken two bounds in the new direction another red devil sprang beside her and turned her again.

She never hesitated: she turned and raced down hill for a distance until momentarily free of her pursuers. With an action almost too fast for the eye to follow, something happened. There was a blur of movement, a stumble, a little cloud of dust and the doe appeared to be struggling on the ground while her joey hopped away at right angles to the course she had been taking. Always, without exception, the 'roo mother jettisoned her joey when turned in flight and when in the last extremity. Without exception, the mother 'roo herself falls when she throws her joey free.

When that joey was thrown free, and he started with his absurd clockwork jerks of hops on the hill, the dingoes turned to follow him. That was easy game. But even as they turned another figure met their eyes—the old doe struggling on the ground. They turned in a stride, snapping back, and sprang at the prostrate figure which struggled on the ground so close to them. That was an easier win, simpler to take, and, in size, more worth the taking.

The doe floundered again as she made an effort to rise. She knew how to juggle inches and to play split seconds with the game of death. When she had taken the slayers' attention from her joey, giving him time to make good his escape, then she would be free to save her own life. Unhampered by the weight in her pouch, she could outpace those dogs up hill and through rough places, and her instinct would guide her to other mobs of wallaroos, to blind her tracks with theirs and to lose herself among them. She lingered to make her ruse complete. When the hot breath of the leading dog was ruffling her coat she bounded to spring away. But one marble-size pebble rolled beneath her feet. She went down in a surge of red bodies, and choked as the spouting blood gushed to her throat.

The joey hopped away and was soon lost to sight among the spinifex. Over the brow of the hill he dived into a thick clump, and there, with the peculiar scentlessness which is the best protection of a concealed young thing, he stayed till night. Motionless,

with his head tucked in and his tail curled about his body, he became part of the earth and of the growing vegetation about him, merely by the act of staying still.

When night came the joey picked up the pads of his fellows and hopped to the watering-place. That was a mickery in the hills—an underground water which the 'roos had smelt out and which they made available by scratching to a depth of nearly twelve inches. Here the joey mingled with others of his kind. He was cuffed and bitten and knocked sprawling when he attempted to mate with others older than himself. He was pounded and repulsed when he tried to force his way to water. Finally, the mob tolerated him, and after the others had finished, he had his drink. When the mob of about a dozen fed out from the mickery, the joey went with them. There was the old lord of the mob, brown almost to blackness, and scarred with the weals of many battles. There were half a dozen does—some with joeys, and some unhampered. There were two or three bachelor bucks, with the same number of maiden does—fliers, these latter were called. That constituted the mob. And following behind, feeling his way tentatively and trying to ingratiate himself, was the orphaned and outcast joey.

The mob fed during the night. In the morning they were lying on the eastern side of the slope of the hills, basking in the sun and dozing. Some were throwing dust over themselves, warding off the flies, raking it and tossing it in an almost human fashion with their hand-like front paws; some were picking at the short shoots of spinifex and nibbling tussocks of wire grass; odd ones were scattered about in various attitudes; the joey was sitting in the standing posture of his kind out in an open space. Above, two wedge-tailed eagles soared and swung in vast circles, gliding on motionless wings.

The joey stiffened suddenly, jerking himself to attention. Some age-old instinct warned him and in warning prompted him to take the right course to defend himself. A black thunderbolt in feathers was striking straight at him from behind. An eagle had marked him for a meal. The joey never moved. He may have heard the wind whistling through those taut feathers; he might have gauged the distance; perhaps, and more than likely, he acted without reason and trusted merely to the promptings of a blind instinct. But when that hissing death was within inches of him, and when already those talons were clutching to take him, the joey fell backwards—without warning, with no premonitory intimation of his action, and suddenly and instantly as if blasted by a bullet fired from in front of him. That was the only way to evade the death which rode in the skies. The bird dared not alter the

angle of its swoop when only bare inches separated it from the ground.

The eagle swept past, tapping the earth with its breast feathers as it swung in a grand loop to regain its altitude. Then the joey bundled himself together and dived for the shelter of the thick spinifex.

The second eagle followed in the course taken by the first one. As one 'roo mother was tucking her young in her pouch the second eagle drew its rigid wing-tips across her face. It breasted up and swung over. In a baffling cloud of feathers and smashing pinions it frightened that doe to her feet, bewildering her. She was too big to fear the eagles' attacks. But in her flurried fear she sought to escape from the horror which flustered her; she fled, her joey following behind her.

Before that joey had taken a dozen hops after its mother an eagle brushed its nose with its wing. That brought it up all standing. As the bewildered figure stood there a mighty vortex of rushing wings sounded above it, and for the space of half-a-second the other bird rested on its shoulders, behind its neck. It was enough. Those master slayers of the air knew the science of murder. The young 'roo hopped aimlessly in erratic circles, with some nerve centre numbed, then fell to the ground in a twitching heap.

The old man of the mob raised himself from the ground, and with some telepathic message called the attention of the mob. They followed him as he led the way to a new camping-ground. The bereft mother followed behind, again and again looking back to where her mutilated young was lying beneath a cloud of feathers. And in the middle of the mob, well protected from above, dodging kicks and cuffs of ejection, was the motherless joey.

A few months passed. The joey stayed with the mob which he had adopted. Stunted in growth, due to the loss of his mother, he had developed that pot-bellied appearance of a keg on stilts—the caste mark of all orphaned animals. Still, he was strong and sturdy. If his perpendicular growth had been retarded, it had not affected his lateral expansion: he was broad, blocky, thick-set, and muscular.

The season continued dry, and on those spinifex ridges the wallaroos found scant picking. They existed; but their sleekness was gone, and the youngsters of the mob suffered. Then from the west there came billowing waves of smoke, and on the wind was borne the turpentine tang of burning spinifex. A red glow lit the horizon that night. With the morning the fire was stilled. Spinifex, highly inflammable though it is, never burns in large areas. That fire

had been lit purposely. A 'roo shooter wanted better shooting, and the price of skins warranted his taking the chance of bringing the 'roos to him, instead of having to look for them.

For twenty-four hours the track of that fire showed as a black scar on the face of the hills. Then, as always after a burn, the spinifex commenced to spring. Tender green sprouts appeared, and in three days' time a sweet growth of green marked the course of the fire. The wallaroos flocked to that sweet picking. Mobs gathered from the hills and dotted the few thousand acres which had been burnt. With them came the orphan joey and the mob with which he ran.

The shooter was hidden in a bunch of spinifex on the edge of the burnt country. Opposite him and on the other side of the patch, there was a bluff of rocks. Between him and the bluff there fed a score or more of 'roos, and dotted about the bare area were another couple of hundred. He cautiously poked the muzzle of his .32 through the brambles. The 'roo nearest him sprang to attention and watched that sinister black hole in the end of a strange stick. It was the joey.

"He's too small," the shooter muttered under his breath. "He's only a joey. But ain't 'e a wide 'un! That's the stockiest young 'roo ever I saw. He's a regular young Sandow—that's what 'e is. Get out o' th' road, Nugget, till I draw a bead on your ol' pa."

The wallaroo addressed as Nugget, the motherless joey, shifted aside and continued feeding—he tired of looking at a stick which did not move. Instantly the smacking report of a .32 brought all the feeding 'roos to their feet with a bound. They stood erect and stared—ears waving, noses twitching. The bluff behind them caught the report and sent it rolling back with added force in an echo.

The 'roos bounded again. They were caught between two fires. They feared the noise from the bluff the more: they hopped away from that cliff and approached the hidden shooter. One member failed to move. He was shot through the spine. He writhed on the ground in his agony. He raised clouds of dust as he fought for his footing and, with his hands, he tried to raise himself. That echoing report broke the mob four times before they scattered and fled. Three of their number lay on the ground. One other went with the mob for a hundred yards or more, then, with a queer little coughing grunt, it staggered, fell, and choked on the ground.

The mob was disorganized and demoralized. The first to fall had been the old man, their lord and leader. Like a handful of rice thrown at random they scattered, each taking a line of its own and striving only to put distance between itself and the horror

which had come upon them. Some were absorbed in other mobs. The remnant gathered at the mickery, shunning the burnt area.

Almost immediately following the tragedy the rains set in. With the rains came the stinging pests of the air, the sandflies and the mosquitoes. The sandflies lasted only ten days after the rains. They took deadly toll of the wallaroos during their visit. Animals blinded and maddened by the ordinary flies flung themselves to rest in the shade of trees and in the shelter of small caves. The sandflies attacked them there; crawled in the 'roos' ears, poisoning those delicate tissues with their sting. Internal inflammation ended the fell work the flies had begun. Some shooters declared that the swelling entered the brain and burst it. However it was done, it was done surely. The sandflies took their toll, leaving bloated bodies on which the crows and other carrion feasted sumptuously.

When that scourge had passed, the wallaroos gathered together again. Nugget was among his mob. With the wonderful growth after the rains the earth seemed literally to burst into foliage. The young bucks suddenly discovered they were males; in the old ones the red blood coursed hot and passionate.

Timorously, nervously, and diffidently, Nugget approached a doe which had taken his fancy. With guttural murmurings he extended his nostrils to hers, when fury fell on him. The old man of the mob would not tolerate any bachelor bucks as hangers-on. When the cold blasts of winter had eased their ardour somewhat, the bachelors would return as units of the mob. While the red blood ran hot, those young bucks would have to form mobs of their own.

Nugget followed the immemorial law: he left the mob and with other young bachelors of his own age he followed behind. They strove to pick up stray does wandering lonesomely, but kept away from the fiery tempers of the old men. At the same time in each buck's heart the dominant ambition rose to possess a mob of his own.

At about two years of age Nugget captured his first mate. He was then nearly full-grown, though he had noticeable traces of immaturity. Standing fully erect, he would slightly top six feet in height. That was nothing compared to his strength, his width, his muscular development and the fire of his nature. Corded muscles played and rippled under his skin as he moved; great sinews gathered and relaxed as he bounded; his chest swelled till it looked like a drum when he drew himself together and flexed his fore-arms.

He was lying in a maze of tunnels and runways which the wallaroos made in the spinifex. Suddenly he bounded alert and stood poised. His ears had caught the drumming of feet and the

patter of others in pursuit. A doe swept into view. She was wild-eyed, panting with fear, and overcome with exhaustion. She ranged beside Nugget, glancing back and cowering in fear of that which hunted her. And hot on her track, running by scent, two dingoes appeared.

The dogs charged without a second's hesitation. The doe shrank behind a rock. Nugget, her defender, stood before her. One red bolt of death left the earth a full ten feet back and launched itself straight at the buck's throat.

With a downward chop of his right hand Nugget cuffed that dingo to the earth, sending it rolling on the ground. He swung slightly and turned to meet the other charging demon. Nugget caught it in the air, holding it in his arms exactly as a nurse takes a babe. He drew that struggling form to him, and his biceps bulged and twisted in knots with the strain he exerted in an awful squeeze of death. Struggling impotently, the dog's mouth opened in a breathless pant; its eyes protruded; its slaving jaws dropped open and its tongue lolled helplessly from that open mouth as it swayed from side to side.

With a pecking motion Nugget drove his rodentary fangs into the dog's shoulder, wrenched, and drew back his head. From his teeth strings of flesh and sinews trailed, and down the dog's shoulder blood trickled to the ground. The dog was voiceless under the punishment. In that vice of steel it could not even pant for breath. Nugget snapped with his teeth again; but as they closed he staggered and released his grip.

The other dingo had charged. It sprang from behind. Its jaws closed under Nugget's armpit, and its body hung straight down beside that of the 'roo. That was the one attack against which he could not fight. He never hesitated: as he dropped the clasped dingo he gathered his great muscles and sprang. In spite of the weight which was hampering him he rose fully five feet vertically, squirmed in the air, and returned to the ground with a jarring thud.

The dingo which had been hanging under the 'roo's armpit dropped to the ground, shaken from the hold it had taken. When it fell it took with it a great chunk of flesh, and a flap of torn skin waved loose along Nugget's rib.

Nugget ignored the wound. The red of the exposed flesh and flowing blood was no more fiery than his eyes. He spun on himself, lurched, and with a sweeping motion gathered that dog in his arms. Its gasp of fear was snapped short in a great gulp when that constricting hug tightened.

Nugget clutched his enemy to him till its head dropped to one side, its lolling tongue lay limp along its jowls, and its protruding eyes glazed. He held the body out from him. Deliberately, calmly and with method, he raised his hind claw and raked the dog from shoulder to hip. Above the gasp which the victim gave sounded the sharp crack of ribs snapping, the tearing of flesh, and a half-whimpered howl of agony. Nugget dropped the thing he held and turned to his other aggressor.

The other dingo had fled. Frankly and without shame it had tucked its tail between its legs, and slunk from view. An ordinary wallaroo was one thing. A black fiend was best left alone.

Nugget faced about and turned to the doe which cowered in the shelter of the rocks. The blood poured from him; the saliva dropped from his jaws; in great gulps he drew breath to his panting lungs. But he arched his neck—he mumbled softly and he stretched his nostrils to touch those of the doe which came to meet him. All was well! The fight had not been fought in vain.

Nugget gathered does and formed a small mob of his own. They kept together; they dispersed; they came together again. The mob fed over a recognized range of country. During the cold blasts of winter the bucks left the does and gathered together. Their blood ran sluggishly and they mingled in peace. But when summer came, and with it the luscious growths after the rains, the bucks split and gathered mobs of their own; fought to the death and obeyed the law.

The sandfly scourge had never been as virulent as that which afflicted the country during Nugget's first year of life. The wallaroos increased in numbers. As the price of skins was low they were molested but slightly by the shooters. A couple of years passed in peace, though the white scars on Nugget's body testified to his ability as a fighter and to the wars which he had fought for his rights.

With startling suddenness one of fashion's periodical whims manifested itself: wallaroo skins were in demand; the price of them rose and soared. Shooters invaded the country, and the cracking smack of their rifles echoed from hill to hill. Bare bodies stripped of their skins lay bloated on the ground, and the air was thick with black ribbons of crows in flight. Remnants of mobs sought refuge in rough and inaccessible places. Their nerves were frayed and their confidence gone: they jumped and fled from the least sound and from any unknown movement.

Nugget had been running with his mob in a ravine in the hills. Only a whisper of the massacre had come to him and he and his

mob lived peacefully. More, Nugget had captured many fleeing does from other mobs which had been dispersed. Lord of a flock of about twenty does and with an equal number of bachelor bucks and fliers as camp-followers, he moved about his ravine in undisturbed tranquillity.

That harmony was shattered by the crack of a rifle. One doe lay in a squirming heap on the ground. The mob split, racing in frantic fear. They propped suddenly, stood erect, and looked about them. The rifle spoke six times, and six dull thuds sounded as rippling bullets tore through living flesh. The mob fled in disorder. Those from mobs which had already been shot at were in the lead and out of sight; those that had fed in contentment realized death rode in the air. Nugget stopped on the top of a rise to have one last look behind him. And as he stood there a sighing message of death seared his ribs in its passage, and a red weal dripped blood.

No more than a skin wound, it was enough for Nugget. He fled blindly, taking great chasms, boulders, and rocks in his stride. Panting and exhausted, his coat flecked with saliva and matted with blood, he stumbled on to a pad just as the sun was setting. He remembered that pad. It would take him to his own old mickery in the hills. He followed it. His twitching nose, sensitive to every vagrant puff of wind and floating odour, told him there were other 'roos gathered at the mickery. Nugget felt the gregarious call of his kind; besides, he wanted company to soothe his disrupted nerves.

As the moon was rising Nugget came within sight of the mickery. About a dozen 'roos were gathered there. Nugget pushed through them as he forced his way to water. Before he had a drink he drew himself erect. He heard a grunt of protest and felt two eyes burning into him. He swung and faced in that direction.

A mammoth of an old man faced him. He was old, grizzled, scarred with many white weals, and mighty muscles played under his skin. He was the owner of that mob—the lord of the hills. He tolerated no intrusion. That watering-place was his right, won and conquered. The fliers looked to him for protection; the bachelor bucks looked to him for guidance. He moved ponderously and with jerky hops as he placed himself between Nugget and the water.

At five years old, and in all the glory of his maturity, Nugget had the right to be classed as an old man of the 'roos. He knew the challenge implied by the other's actions. He knew the etiquette of 'roodom: understood the law. He never hesitated. He drew himself to his full height, resting on the tripod formed by the end joint of his tail and his two hind tiptoes. He was ready. The

other old man was prepared. They circled slowly about each other. Their eyes glared red, and never for one moment did they disengage that stare.

With a shuffling of feet and a spurt of dust the warriors closed.

There was none of the feint and parry, the finesse and evasion of the kangaroos of the plains. These were giants. It was brute force opposed to brute force. They closed, and in closing, the arms of each strove to draw the other nearer. Their muscles stood out in corded knots; their breaths came in panting explosions; their backs were arched to resist the strain each exerted. Stabbing fangs pecked, wrenched, tore and brought back streamers of flesh and strings of writhing sinews. The blood poured down their bodies, and neither old man wilted beneath that terrible punishment.

For a full five long minutes they strained breast to breast. Each had shuffled a little and tried to bring his battering ram of hind feet and tearing talons into play. Those efforts were nullified by the close hug which prevented room to move with effect. Wisps of hair floated in the air and separated in little cloudlets as the raking front claws of each tore red lines along the other's back. Each panting mouth was open, and from it saliva, froth, and blood streamed.

Nugget's greater strength was telling. Youth would be served in that primeval arena as elsewhere in the world. He was slightly sore and lightly wounded. Against that, the older 'roo had just drunk deep, and his distended paunch told of his distress. Slowly, the older buck's back was bending to the strain. He came a fraction of an inch, giving slightly and regaining that loss as he fought in a wild energy of despair against it. Strain as he would, fight as he might and struggle to the limit of his power, Nugget's strength prevailed. But his cracking sinews and bulging muscles proclaimed the fight he was waging. The blood which poured from him was draining his strength, and unless victory came quickly then he must succumb.

Nugget swung his antagonist. He lifted his hind leg and drove while the other was unbalanced and free from him. The other gasped, choked, relaxed and fell in a crumpled heap to the ground. That death-tipped talon of destruction had ripped him from his brisket to his crutch. He lay heaving convulsively, and about him in the dust his entrails writhed like living snakes.

Nugget drew himself to his full height as he looked about him. He leaned forward and dabbed his forearms with his tongue till the saliva dripped from them. He swelled his chest; stood erect; threw

back his head, and grunted his challenge in booming syllables while red fire shone from his eyes.

Nothing answered that challenge.

Nugget went to the mickery and drank. The others made way for him in his passage. He nosed a couple of does which advanced to him. Without so much as one look backward he turned and hopped along the pad leading from the mickery. His new mob trailed behind, following the lord of the hills to the sanctuary into which he would lead them.

[From *Tooth and Talon*, 1934.]

THE YELLOW JOSS

By ION L. IDRIESS

[It was in the middle of a prospecting trip several years ago that my mate and I rode on the abandoned Chinese camp. We stared at those huts, even then overgrown with jungle. Such an obviously foreign camp had no right to be on Australian soil. In that isolated place it could mean only one thing; so we unpacked the horses and camped, and next day tried dish prospects up along the worked-out creek. We proved that creek to have been once surprisingly rich with gold, and felt very bitter because, but for the yellow trespassers, we would have found that wealth ourselves. A hefty buck of the Starcke River tribe told me those few parts of the story which I was unable to piece together. Here is the story; but beforehand know that about eighty miles north of Cooktown the Starcke River tumbles noisily from its craggy birthplace down to the sea. Much gold has been won along its short length by white men, but it is now abandoned and has gone back almost to the loneliness of the days when Captain Cook beached the *Endeavour* in Cooktown's bay. Its head creeks gurgle down from precipitous ranges that are clothed in entangling scrub, while many of its rock-walled gorges and gloomy ravines even yet have echoed to no human tread save the pad of the hunting aborigines.]

A THOUSAND feet up among the rocks in the main river gorge, and forty feet above a rushing creek that disgorges into the headwaters of the river, there was three years ago a little camp of Chinese gold-diggers. The camp site is well hidden deep down between rocky spurs and huge mountain bluffs, screened by the dark green of tropical scrub on one side and thick forest timber on the other. A luxuriant growth of man-high blady grass, choking the very tree-butts, was screening everything. On the site five very cosy camps clustered together. Four of them were oblong, cleverly built of supple sapling framework; thatched entirely with blady grass, nigger fashion; and having one manhole for ingress and egress. The other was square, a little larger than the rest. All were barely five feet high.

Thirteen men worked the camp. In the larger hut slept the serang and the cook, with the Joss. Between their mountain camp and the coast (as the crow flies a short twenty miles) are a series of small hills, all forest clad. The party had been quietly landed from a *bêche-de-mer* lugger financed by a group of Thursday Island

Chinese merchants. Their object was to seek for gold on the practically uninhabited Cape York Peninsula coast. Six months' supply of stores the party had carried in their baskets, jogging over the bush foot-hills and then struggling doggedly on up the jagged mountain gorge. At six-month intervals the lugger crept to anchor at an agreed point on the lonely coast, landing fresh supplies. At such times the serang handed over to the representative of the merchant syndicate its share of the gold won. Then silently the string of Chinese, with their enormously heavy loads, disappeared again into the great bush. They should not have been there. The law allows no Asiatic to mine. But the Chinese smile—"Eye no see-ee, heart no grieve-ee."

The chance of detection was very slight. Only two white men lived anywhere near: down near the mouth of the river a cattleman isolated in his bush home and interested in cattle alone; and an old, old fossicker in a weird camp among the foot-hills. The only dread of the Chinese was the wandering prospector, that nomad who may appear with the unexpectedness of a cloud in the most unlikely places. As for the blacks, they were given opium charcoal, which made them the serang's helpless slaves. The nearest town was little Cooktown, eighty miles south over the ranges. None but a decent bushman could follow that seldom trodden track that like a goat-pad crosses the mountains.

The first thing the yellow men did on picking their camp (even before seeking gold) was to make a Joss; for no Chinese undertaking can be successful without its Joss. And these men, far from their own kin, were trespassers deep within a strange and inhospitable land. They needed help indeed from the gods of luck. So with much thought and care and many mutterings, they constructed a squat image of red clay. It was hideous; but Chang Ho, the serang, fashioned its face tenderly so that it seemed to smile—such a smile as a father might wear while quietly watching the tribulations of his children. That smile of rare sympathy promised good fortune for the yellow men.

The night that saw it completed, they sat their Joss in state in the centre of the larger hut, and solemnly burned sandalwood sticks before him, their waxen faces looking strained and reverent as the closed-in place filled with a rich, heavy incense. Then Chang Ho knelt down and, with a whispered prayer that came from the heart, pressed heavily into the idol's forehead a pellet of dull yellow gold. That gold had come from the Chinese diggers' paradise, the Palmer River. This pellet was the eye of the Joss, and the symbol of what he must find for them.

Happy, happy thought of Chang Ho! The thirteen Chinese bowed low in the incense-filled hut with a happy song in their hearts that the omen was good.

It was Chang Ho who with trembling hands washed the first prospect in the new creek next morning. He stared with his slant eyes widening as the gravel swirled in the bottom of the dish, then with an exultant cry held up for all to see a little nugget of gold! The size of a pea, it flashed in the sunlight the rich yellow flash of the Starcke gold. Instantly thirteen pairs of Chinese eyes glittered at this miraculous realization of wonderful dreams. Feverish excitement held them clustered around Chang Ho and the little yellow pea. A wild gabble of shrill Chinese sounded among the quiet Australian trees.

Soon this madness would give place to systematic, intense toil; but first the thirteen, headed by the serang, marched one behind the other to the big hut. With shaking limbs they crawled inside to bow before the Joss; and there, with outspread finger-tips and foreheads they touched the earthen floor. This object of their reverence promised to be a most beneficent Joss. They kissed his clay belly in turn. With whispered beseechings Yuan Cheng, the cook, bathed the idol's face with his tears as he breathed to it of a flower-girl on the far off Yangtze Kiang, and the grandee's robe for himself. Chang Ho, with adoration shining from his strong flat face, offered his whispered promise of the ten best years of his manhood and strength if the Joss would but make the gold payable throughout the length of the creek. Then he firmly inserted that bright piece of gold into the clay forehead below the duller yellow of the Palmer metal. A gift to the Joss; forerunner of rich gifts to come! The Chinese bent very low. Yet again had Chang Ho shown grace to a good Joss and propitiated him to win favour for all.

With the tireless energy of their kind the Chinese worked the creek. Out in the icy cold water while it was yet too dark for the awakening of the birds, one gang would cut away the bushes, then pick out and heave aside the larger stones. The gang following would throw out the smaller stones; while the third gang would sluice the creek gravel into the water race, where the yellow metal was concentrated. They toiled, with only one pause for a quick meal, right throughout the day; systematically, methodically, so that the work advanced with the precision of a machine. When the evening grew too dark for them to see the job, they had accomplished each day an amount of work that would have staggered a similar number of white men. The cook toiled with the others, grudging the time needed to prepare their meals.

Each night, after the hungry evening meal, the party would light the floating shark-oil lamp in the serang's hut, burn new, sweet sandalwood sticks before their Joss, and pay him homage. First Chang Ho, the serang, the expression of the Sphinx on his big flat face, would with scrupulous fairness divide the day's clean-up of gold. First, the portion which went to the Chinese merchants who had equipped the expedition; then his own portion; then the twelve other portions. Each portion exact to the weight of a breath on the delicate Chinese scales before the fixed, unwavering eyes of every man present.

Then, in the deep silence of the hut, Chang Ho would take the largest piece from the merchants' portion and embed it in the clay of the Joss. From his own portion likewise he would take the largest piece, and with a muttered prayer press it into the Joss with his strong, squat thumb. And each other man of the twelve would do the same from his own portion. Then all would retire quickly for the few remaining hours of night to gather strength from sleep to gain yet more gold from the white man's land on the morrow.

The creek proved very rich, the gold held out strongly, in size mostly from a quarter to half weight pieces—like golden peas and beans. At the end of three months all knew that, if the Joss held true, each one of them at the end of two years, provided the dreaded white men did not find them, would go home to China to live a grandee for the remainder of his life.

Too short were the long, long days of toil. Too long were the short night hours when they must sleep. Then to Chang Ho came another happy thought. By day he took the Joss and sat him on a boulder that overlooked the creek. Every man by the upraising of an eye could see him smiling down upon him, glittering with his fast growing coat of bright Starcke gold. And they would bend their backs still more till wonder was that human frames could stand it. The listless blacks sitting in the long grass of the creek-bank, with bloodshot eyes and drug hungry, would dumbly wonder at these yellow men, who were madder in their thirst for the useless yellow stone than even the mad white men.

The Joss now was an ugly-shaped thing of flashing beauty in the sunlight. The clay was almost hidden by the devotees' gifts. Chang Ho still strove to keep the warm smile on the face, but the constant insertion of gold pellets had turned the mouth corners down until it leered on the sweltering workers with a cynical grin.

And a change came over the camp. No longer did they retire straightway at night; instead, the gambling cards and the dice came out in the serang's hut immediately the Joss had been propitiated.

The concentrated strength of the working day gave place at night to the intense brain-thrill of the gambler. They then forgot their Joss to worship individual greed. They crouched low in the smoking hut and gazed at the rolling dice as they stole the precious little yellow heaps from some men and stacked them on the fast growing heaps before others. Just the click of the dice, a sharp drawn breath and lingering sigh, the slithering as a clammy hand reached out to draw its golden gains across the table. Often now the new-born sun would beat warm on the Serang's hut and find them still at play—tragic play. The work too was different. There was no diminution of toil, but as they swung their heavy picks the hearts of eight men had ceased to sing. Months of toil, with their resultant heaps of yellow gold, had gone to others. Little devils dwelt within them. And still each night they played away what they had sweated for by day, in a frantic attempt to regain what was lost. And the ever-yellowing Joss leered over all.

When they met the lugger at the end of the first six months two of the thirteen went on board. They could live in China as grandees now. They would not take the chance of the dice any longer; nor the chance of the unstable gold "cutting out"; nor the chance of some wandering white men discovering their creek. The remainder went loping back up the big mountain retreat carrying their heavy loads of food-stuffs and their heavier hearts. So another six months crept by. Days of panting toil; nights of feverish gamble. And the grin of the Joss grew distorted like the hearts of the yellow demons working and playing beneath its sneering stare.

Again two men left on the lugger that sailed for Thursday Island, there to ship for Lotus Land. This trip the lugger brought new men to replace those who had left, for the distant merchant-syndicate wanted the work carried on while the luck held good.

Feng Shu, crouching broken and motionless in the serang's hut could swear that the Joss laughed at him—laughed, this grinning thing that his own hands had helped to fashion! As though all the demons of the nethermost hell were not already clawing at his heart! For the first time a feeling of animosity stole over Feng Shu against this Wonderful Joss. He glared back, a surge of hatred slowly gathering within him, and the yellow thing gave him stare for stare, deliberately. It seemed to possess life itself, this thing of gold. Gold! Feng Shu caught his breath guiltily, stealthily glancing round the smoke-filled hut.

But his companions were crouched around the playing mat, tensely gazing on the rolling dice. Feng Shu slowly turned his

bloodshot eyes to the Joss. It blinked back knowingly, tauntingly.

A dawn came when the serang opened his heavy eyes and looked wearily to the Joss. Gone! It was gone! The Wonderful Joss was gone!

Chang Ho sprang from his bunk with a yell that brought the fear of death to every man in camp. They rushed from their bunks to find the serang mad. The Wonderful Joss was gone!

The serang ran for the creek. No, the Joss was not on the boulder where he sat day by day. After one hopeless stare the serang jumped into the creek and feverishly dug a prospect where work had been left off the night before. He found not a colour of gold in the dish! He tried another prospect, and another. The gold was finished. It had "cut out"!

With tragedy in his eyes the serang gazed up at the Chinese watching, breathless, on the bank. He stood thus holding the empty dish in his hand, empty as all men knew now the creek to be. It was "worked out". It was then that Yuan Cheng, the cook, discovered that Feng Shu was missing. And his washing-dish was missing too! With a cry like animals about to stampede they rushed to his hut. He was gone!

A black man standing by pointed to hurried tracks leading away from the camp towards the coast side. Then the serang spoke. But it was not his voice. It was the growl of a snarling animal with the blood-lust clutching its throat.

"The Wonderful Joss has made the gold cut out because Feng Shu has stolen him. We must catch Feng Shu with the Wonderful Joss and bring him back!"

They started off immediately, just as they were; and the whole tribe of aborigines, eager at the promised reward of an enormous quantity of opium charcoal, ran along the plain tracks of the doomed man like children at play.

Feng Shu had done remarkably well, all things considered, during the night. He had found the sea. He was a stranger in a strange land, with far worse things than death at his heels. He did not know where he was when the welcome daylight broke, but had a hazy notion that there was a white man's city called Cooktown down the coast. He knew a Chinatown was there, and he felt he would be safe if once he could mix with countrymen of his, because he had gold—much gold. And gold is every man's friend. He glared cunningly at the heavy, glittering Joss in his arms.

He was not afraid now in this brave, warm sunlight. They would never catch him, he had too much start; besides, they did not

know what direction he had taken. All he had to do was to follow the sea-shore until he came to Cooktown.

Feng Shu had not the slightest idea of distances in this great white man's land, of the vast spaces without habitation. He didn't dream that, behind him, even the piccaninnies of the Starcke tribe were laughing at the plain tale his tracks told. He knew nothing of the sinuosities of the coastline, its maze of mangrove swamps, its tidal rivers to cross, with their deep holes, their crocodiles and sharks. More fatal than all, Feng Shu knew nothing of a thing called "bushmanship". If he had understood the meaning of that word not all the demons from behind the veil of death could have forced him to steal the Joss.

Soon the nice walking on the firm white sand led him in among trees, low trees, countless trees, trees seemingly thick as the sands upon the shore itself. But now there was no sand, and no shore. He was walking through mud, and could only glimpse the sea in random patches, through the thickly foliaged trees.

Presently the trees grew many roots that bunched out strangely from high above their butts. These trees grew so thickly together that their gnarled, tangled roots interlaced, strangely reminiscent of the demon trees that artists picture as growing in the land of the devils. Soon he was walking on the tree-roots. Often they snapped under his weight with a sharp, pistol-like report and he went down through the roots into the mud, jerking his head around in startled fear. (That sticky mud smelt like a charnel-house.) Then he must pull himself up and climb over the roots again, hugging the Wonderful Joss that was now growing heavier.

Feng Shu became very tired. Hungry, too. He longed to see the sky. Anxiously he peered around through the twisted branches for sight of the sea, but only heard a dreamy murmur. He rested, and ate the small supply of food he had brought with him. But there was no water to quench his thirst; the only water was salt. Dimly he began to realize that matters were not going well.

Starting off again, an hour's hard work over the roots made him dreadfully tired. He turned, and walked over the roots towards the sound of the sea. Surely there must be sand to walk upon out there.

There was, but it was many feet under water. A little wave splashed in among the tree-trunks and came gurgling to his knees. With a sudden fear Feng Shu remembered the tide! He turned abruptly, crashed through the tree-roots and felt mud claspng at his knees. Thick, oily, blue-black mud that swelled slowly up his limbs as it clung with a dreadful, sucking caress.

It was a pale-faced Chinese who struggled desperately back through the mangroves. How heavy the Joss was! He stared down at it, thinking rapidly. Of course, it was heavy with clay! And he carried his washing-dish with him! All he had to do was to break up the Joss, wash the clay out in his dish and throw the dish away. He would thus be rid of the weight of the dish and the clay and have the gold only!

As Feng Shu crushed the head of the Joss he shuddered. Somehow his spine turned icy so that his trembling hands could hardly wash out the derisive grin from between the clay and the gold.

And at that work they caught him, the bright red clay streaming into the sea water, the dish weighed down into the muddy sand with glittering yellow gold. Crouched there, with the dish in his hands, Feng Shu never moved—just stared drawn-eyed at the triumphant black men shouting to the labouring Chinese to hurry up.

It was the serang's tragic cry that drew their attention to the clay that was once the Joss, now but a fast-receding stain on the rippling water. The Wonderful Joss was gone!

They took Feng Shu all the way back to the mountain camp. They put him to death by the Thousand Cuts. But Yuan Cheng, the cook, who was operator and only an amateur, could administer no more than three hundred.

But the gold came not back to the creek.

[From *The Yellow Joss*, 1934.]



IT FINDS ITS LEVEL

By GAVIN CASEY

SHAREHOLDERS in the Open Reef were fortunate in that their exceptionally rich and isolated lease was only a couple of hundred miles from the coast. But in England, where most of them were, that distance appears to be much greater than it does beneath the Southern Cross. It loomed particularly large when the project of pumping water—water for treatment of the ore, and water for the settlement of the township—up through the ranges to the reef was placed before the directors.

The resulting debate was a long and heated one. Certain members of the board arrived from their suburbs after considerable study of maps and plans, determined on no account to send good money after bad. They found, however, that the enthusiasm of their general manager, who had seen the reef, was infectious. They also found their secretary armed with facts and figures.

After listening for a while they found themselves committed to

the securing of more capital, to the seeking of Government assistance and to the eventual building of a water scheme which would be one of the greatest private enterprises of its kind in the world. Beneath their bowler hats they strode away, feeling themselves to be Empire-builders in the truest sense of the term. If, during ensuing months, they suffered qualms, they knew it was too late, maintained brave faces, and talked airily of the mighty matter to their friends. They received attention and admiration from the Press and the public.

But their fame was as nothing to that of their general manager, who had hastened back to Australia with the laudable object of "getting things going". The general manager was received as a hero and a national benefactor. The atmosphere suited him; he expanded genially to the adulation he received as he sat in his office day after day, surrounded by his consultants and his subordinates, directing operations which would alter the face of half the State.

So the great scheme progressed through many months of labour and organization and reorganization. A number of contractors made modest fortunes. A minor scandal ended with the summary dismissal of a couple of subordinates. But the pipe continued to stretch towards the interior, and the general manager, who had experienced some uneasy moments over the incident, managed eventually to use it to convince his employers even more completely that he was "the right man in the right place".

Settlements along the proposed pipeline squabbled, and were bitter towards each other in bringing forward their rival claims to be sites of the various pumping stations. Districts on the route anticipated substantial benefit from the company's undertaking to supply water for irrigation and household needs. The general manager was guest of honour at numerous State Government and Local Government ceremonies. He grew stouter and smoother, and became aware of a vague regret that his wife was not a smarter woman—the kind with the social sense that is so helpful to the successful man.

Time resolved itself into years, and the two-hundred-mile conduit, with the big dam at one end of it and the phenomenally rich Open Reef at the other, became an accepted feature of State maps, and was less talked about. But Big Bill West, the general manager of the company, and the man behind the great scheme, remained as well known as the State Premier. Entrenched in the country, with vast residences at the mine and at the coast, and a couple of big cars in which to zoom over the dusty roads between them, he knew achievement and a contentment that was only slightly ruffled

when, after a quarter of a century of big profits, the Open Reef yield began to decline. It was not so serious, after all. Just a matter for tightening up here and there, and even if the reef at some distant date petered out altogether it would be long after his time, and the water supply, example of foresight and clever engineering, would remain as his monument for ever.

Examination of the state of affairs was, however, necessary. At odd moments, and by conscious efforts, he found time for the distasteful task of examining many sets of figures. Such of them as he found of unusual interest he passed on to his consultants and subordinates, and minor reforms followed. Soon only in one matter—that of costs of the company's pumping stations—did an unsolved mystery remain.

"Look here," said Big Bill to Martin, the water-supply line and plant supervisor. "Number 2 plant at Wendinnie is giving us the results we should be getting all along the line. See that? Less fuel, less repairs and costs per thousand gallons that make figures from the other two look bad, very bad. Look into it, will you?"

Initially, Martin "looked into it" by studying more carefully the costs sheets for various periods. He found them amazing. From his knowledge of the twenty-five-year-old plants at the trio of stations he considered that Numbers 1 and 3 were doing well in the matter of fuel and spares. Results from Number 2 were really astounding. In his dusty tourer he set out to inspect.

At Number 3, nearest the mine, the driver and his fireman were indignant. They were nursing their wheezy gear, and no men could do more than they were doing. "If you think any one can, try 'em," was the text of their remarks. Feeling a certain sympathy, Martin drove on the fifty miles that brought him into Wendinnie, and there interviewed McHenry, the apparent superman in charge of the superstation.

"I bin' drivin' here for twenty-five years," announced Mac with righteous indignation, "an' I *know* them ingines. Really know 'em an' look after 'em—not muck about an' talk big, like them fellers each side. 'Taint goin' t' worry me how them woodchoppers gits on. I'm givin' you th' figures, an' I can keep on doin' it."

Noiseless rods, plunging with smooth efficiency up and down their appointed paths, spotless polished brass, a stainless floor and an entirely satisfactory flow of water into the big concrete tank bore him out. Martin left, more than ever mystified.

Big Bill received his supervisor's report badly. To him it seemed, reasonably enough, that what one set of machinery could do, others

precisely similar could equal. He was not given to probing figures deeply or he might have reached Martin's conclusion that Numbers 1 and 3 were doing quite well, and that Number 2's costs could only have been kept so low by magic. As it was, the simple fact presented itself that all stations should strive to be as good as the best.

"Rubbish! Rubbish!" he assured Martin. "If McHenry can do it the others can. Stir them up until they do. I'll expect to see better figures in future."

But no better figures were forthcoming, despite the fact that Martin abandoned his own convictions and "stirred up" the drivers at Stations 1 and 3, paying more than usually frequent visits to their plants during the following six months. They muttered, and he lost sleep over the matter; but nothing was discovered except that comparisons at the end of the period showed that results from Number 2 were not quite as good as usual, though still superior to those from the other pumps.

Confronted by the black scowl of Big Bill, Martin felt the foundations of his job quaking. But he could do nothing more. The mystery might well have remained unsolved for ever had not the advent of a new licensee at the Wendinnie Hotel preceded by just a week one of the general manager's infrequent shooting trips.

Lakes to the north had been Big Bill's destination and duck his quarry. In one of his big motors, with a driver and a couple of cronies, the expedition had been made as comfortable as money could make it, but none the less it was after an exhausting and unsuccessful day that he arrived at Wendinnie. The car rolled down to the township from that unusual direction and into the hotel yard in the late afternoon.

The Old Man could see the big tank and smokestack of the pumping station looming over the scrub half a mile away, and contemplation of it gave him mild pleasure. In the closer foreground, however, was a sight less satisfactory. With pleasing and unusual industry, the hotel yardman was chopping logs from a big stack. Big Bill's first instinct was towards approval, but when he observed that the stack consisted of what was obviously five-foot bush timber railed to the town at the company's cost, for use at the company's pumping station, his eyes shone less benignly.

Irritated by the petty graft, he glanced along the back fences of Wendinnie's only street. In every yard stood a high pile of logs, and in every case they were of the roughly uniform length and size that showed them to be company logs! He breathed heavily

for a moment, and mentally noted what should be said to McHenry and Martin on the matter. Then the prospect of rest and comfort restored his amiability, and leaving the driver and his companions to attend to the car he strode into the friendly bar to order drinks.

He was, however, apparently fated to be annoyed. A toe stubbed on some bulky object which was holding open the door brought from him a flow of anguished expletives. Then he looked at the object. It was an L. 44 O.S. piston, as used in the engines of the Open Reef pumping plants! It was new! Language failed, and he made inarticulate noises, but with a self-restraint born of many board meetings he ordered drinks for the party and commenced to sip his own. It was amazing that so economically run a station as Number 2 could show such glaring evidence of wholesale waste. But the liquor was soothing, and he abandoned himself to calm enjoyment of it, until turning to assume a more comfortable attitude with one elbow on the counter, he noticed another occupant of the customer's side of the bar.

Stretched on a form against the wall, the Wendinnie's Hotel's other patron was asleep with his mouth open. He appeared to be as stiffly rigid as the boards on which he lay, and the only evidence that he was alive was the gentle swaying of his moustache in the fiery draughts that swirled to and from through it. He was none other than the model pump-driver, the faithful and flawless McHenry! Big Bill blinked rapidly.

"Tell me," he pleaded of the man behind the bar in stifled tone, filled with deadly menace, "tell me, will you, who is that man? I might be mistaken."

"Bloke from th' pumping station," said his host cheerfully. "Haven't bin here long enough t' know much about him meself, but I'll chuck him out if y' like. They told me when I took over that he was a real damn' nuisance, allus in arguments an' stayin' on th' bust for as much as a fortnight at a time."

"Fortnight at a time!" echoed Big Bill breathlessly. "Do you know the fireman? Where's the fireman?"

"Gorn t' th' lakes shootin' fer a few days," said the proprietor. "Great jobs these blokes 've got."

"Great jobs!" said the general manager in a sort of subdued roar. "Great jobs they *had*, you mean."

The whole meaning of the calamity had gradually impressed itself on the Old Man's brain. The plant should be running now! God alone knew how long it had been idle! If the tank emptied the pumps at Number 3 would draw air, and it would take days to

get the system running again. He pounced on McHenry and shook him until he rattled.

"G'way!" muttered the engine-driver drowsily. "G'tout! Wenni wakeup I'll rip y'r liver out."

"Water!" bellowed Big Bill. "Damn it, man, the *pumps!* The *water*, you fool!"

"Warrer 'll be orright," mumbled McHenry. "Warrer 'll fin' hish own level. Allus does."

With an air of finality, he settled back to comfortable slumber. Big Bill gazed at him wordlessly. Then he dived through the door, past his wondering cronies and into the car. He headed for Number 2 pumping station with the accelerator on the floorboards, but despite his haste he noticed that the fence around the shack next door carried sliprails made of L.P. 41 connecting-rods, and that a place three houses down was using L.J. 78 cylinder-liners for an extension for its wash-house chimney. There would be time to kill McHenry later, however. He stamped viciously and ineffectively on the already fully-depressed throttle pedal.

Silent engines and spotless metal greeted him in the plant engine-room. What was worse, almost cold fires. There was no steam, but it was better that the plant should be held up than that he, the general manager and a national benefactor, should descend to urging five-foot bush timber through the fire doors.

It was the last straw. The situation was hopeless. He sat wearily on a box and clutched his head in his hand. Then the look of anguish on his face slowly changed to one of wonder and doubt. Either he was going mad or he could hear, faintly but distinctly, the sound of gushing, falling water!

Heedless of the warning of his hammering heart, he galloped to the tank and swarmed up the ladder to its brim, thirty feet above the ground. It was three parts full, and out of the big duct above it water was, despite the silent engines, flowing freely!

"Well, I'll be damned!" said the general manager.

Slowly and reflectively he drove back to the pub. Siphonage! Siphonage! No need for a pumping station at all! Never had been! What a bloomer! No wonder McHenry, who had been in charge for twenty-five years, showed low costs! No wonder he gave away firewood, and requisitioned for spares and gave them away too! He'd had to, to have any costs at all.

Big Bill's lips tightened as he anticipated the abrupt cessation of the "good jobs" held by driver and fireman. Then they loosened again as his thoughts turned to what the directors and the Press

would say when Pump Plant Number 2 was closed as superfluous, after twenty-five years in action!

His memory roved, trying to locate the consultant or subordinate of early times who could be held responsible. He was distressed to find that, particularly to directors and the Press, it would most likely seem that he was responsible!

The point of view gave him further food for thought.

At the hotel Big Bill's cronies were in the yard, curiously awaiting his return. In the bar McHenry's slumber remained profound, and the new proprietor was cleaning glasses and regarding his supine form with considerable interest.

"Heard a crack and thought something had come apart at the plant. All O.K. up there, though," the general manager explained his absence to his friends.

There was something not quite satisfactory about it, but they had little time in which to think it over, for Big Bill was in a fever of activity. He'd made up his mind to drive on to Goalong for the night. The hotel there was better. It was a better town. They would have to hurry if they were to be there for dinner. He barked orders at the driver, piled them into the car, and before they knew just what had happened they were on their way. Big Bill was eloquent in the discussion of plans for more shooting next day.

So McHenry and his fireman continued to draw award rates. They started the engines only when phone messages from the towns on either side were to the effect that official parties were on the way, or when a general stoppage made it necessary. The inhabitants of Wendinnie went on receiving free firewood, and in spite of it, costs at the station were substantially lower than those at Numbers 1 and 3. Martin did not know why, and stopped worrying, as the Old Man no longer plagued him about it. But McHenry, after some discussion with the new proprietor of the hotel, felt that he need no longer be quite so careful, and when the general manager was a member of a visiting official party (which was seldom) he treated Big Bill with a little less respect than that worthy thought was due to a National Benefactor and Empire-builder.

[From *It's Harder for Girls*, 1942.]

GOING HOME

By MYRA MORRIS

HE called the little girls inside and looked anxiously at their faces. There was dirt under the rosiness.

"I don't want to be cleaned up," whined Julie, who was small for her three years and inclined to easy tears.

"You must," he said firmly, "Your mother's coming home today."

He led the two into the bedroom where the wind fluttered little whiskers of wood on the unlined walls, and washed their faces with the damp end of a roller-towel.

"And now you both keep clean," he cautioned, tugging helplessly at the plaits of the elder girl. "Don't loose your hair-ribbons, Kate, and do as Miss Bowden tells you."

He sped them outside with a good-natured cuff, and started his prowl up and down the passage, peering into the rooms. The house was spotless. It smelled clean. He had worked till late the night before, and had hurried over milking so that he could get to the kitchen stove. The stove looked nice now—just as Marge liked it—shining as though it had been lacquered, the kettles scoured, and the ash in the pan no more than a delicate froth of rose and white like pink-sugared apple-snow. The same order prevailed in the crowded little dining-room where he had evened up the crumbling bricks of the fireplace and raddled the hobs. The sideboard with its neat, crotchet-edged runner was polished, and the chimney of the green-bowled lamp bright and thin like a bubble about to burst. He had put flowers in a vase on the table, and the stumpy sprays of yellow jasmine with their pointed terra-cotta buds seemed still to wear the imprint of his awkward fingers.

He stood for a moment nodding his satisfaction, a tall, stringy young man with a long face burnt to the colour of dust. His features were sensitively cut; his high forehead with the skin drawn tightly across, clean and worn as a stone worn by the sea; his grey eyes keen and a little perplexed as though the spectacle of life puzzled while it enchanted him.

Pulling a felt hat down over his thinning, dark hair, he went out into the yard, walking with the headlong, slightly pigeon-toed gait of an active man. He could leave the place now with an easy mind. Miss Bowden, the obliging spinster from across the paddocks, would be here at any moment now to keep an eye on the kids. Already she had left the farm, and he could see her, a little square pepper-pot figure weaving her way among the dead timber.

Without hurry he backed the tinny single-seater out of the shed and waving to the children who were scooping up leaves under the shaggy gum, drove past the side of the bare, weatherboard house towards the gate. At the culvert a red-faced man in a billowing shirt roared at him.

"Day Joe! Goin' in for the missus?"

"That's right, Ted." Joe lifted his hand from the wheel and gave a salute. It was the gesture of a man used to driving with a whip in his hand. "Be back less than two hours."

He wished regretfully as the wheels of the car fumbled for the crown of the road that he could have driven the gig instead. The deep mud-crusteds ruts, the milky-yellow water lying in unsuspected seams and hollows, made steering difficult. But it was impossible to think of Marge driving home in the gig, sitting high up, exposed to the bitter winds from the plains, with a two-weeks' old baby in her arms. He was actually, now, at this moment, going into the township hospital for Marge and the nipper! The thought of it excited him, loosening in him a feeling of awe and pride. This was a fine and good thing to be doing, to be bringing home his wife and child to the place he had made for them. He had done it before, twice, yet it seemed now as if he were doing it for the first time. He straightened up over the jerking steering-wheel, ducking his head as the car splashed and bumped through the water, and a frail, dancing curtain of amber drops hung suspended between him and the sky. "Poor Marge," he thought, "poor girl, it isn't much of a place."

Sighing, he looked over the bleak, unaccented landscape. Bare paddocks tufted with winter-whitened grass and endless post-and-rail fences regular as printed staves of music; patches of young crop, unearthly green and tender, touched with quicksilver where water flooded the hollows; at the side of the road rusty mistletoe, bunched like old clothes on overhanging gums, and muddied grass and reeds; a farm or two with ragged stacks and jumbled outhouses that looked as if they would disintegrate with a touch. And over all a sky faintly rose at the edges, colourless as melting ice, floating textureless and formless as a frosty breath.

He thought back to his place alongside the road. Not as bad as some he had seen up north, but maybe he could have done more. "Stick it," he had said in the beginning, "we've got to stick it." He had been sticking it now for ten years and was at last forgetting to trot out the well-worn excuse for his failures—that he had started on nothing. Ten years and there wasn't much to show. The house had an unfinished look with the roof still unpainted, and the veranda only halfway round. But he had worked hard enough, God knew, putting the stubborn land into crop and pasture as far down as Simpson's Corner, keeping his cows in good fettle, and clearing the thick dead timber from some of the paddocks at the back of the house. With Ted Simpson he had invested in a saw-bench, and they were now cutting the timber and stacking it ready for carting. The sound of the saw biting into the resisting wood, that harsh, clanging whine with its brazen bell-like echo, soothed and gratified him, giving as it did an impression of immense stir and activity. Ted might be doing a bit of cutting this afternoon, he mused, thinking back to the figure who had hailed him at the culvert. Immediately his mind became a prey to little niggling worries. It was to be hoped that the children would not go rambling into the back paddock seeking sawdust from the pile. Ted, working with his young son, was a careless beggar. Anything could happen to kids. Those rusty nails bristling along the old fowlhouse fence were a menace—rusty nails, tetanus. He remembered with a sudden shoot of dismay that he had forgotten to shut the little gate and the chooks would be in scraping all over the place. . . .

Swallowing nervously, he turned the car into a smoother patch of road where metal was hard under the wheels. He felt all of a sudden excited and uplifted, aware of a grumbling discomfort in his belly. Nearly there now. Already he could see the tangle of roofs and posts and fences that made the township, the white bulk of the water-tower with its map-markings of rust, the new church wall lifting in all its defiance of raw, red brick, the glassy glitter of the hospital balcony.

He drew up in front of the big white hospital, the pride of the town, and looked at his watch. A painful shyness descended on him. He had visited Marge four times at the hospital, and on each occasion he had felt awkward and inadequate, knowing as he tiptoed down the corridors that the nurses laughed at him because he always blundered and lost his way. Sweat broke in beads on his face. He ran his fingers along the rough back of his neck. "I'm early," he thought with a feeling of relief. "I'll slip down the street and have a haircut.

Inside the hospital people sat about on wooden benches waiting with long, patient faces. Nurses rustled past importantly moving on ugly black-stockinged legs that did not seem to belong to them. Babies cried in the glass-doored nursery, their voices faint and far-away like the voices of magpies calling out of the grey void of early morning.

Marge waited sitting on a chair in the little ward that held two beds. She was a big-boned, composed-looking young woman with a fuzz of sandy hair and colour in her cheeks that, lying close under the skin, constantly came and went. She was dressed in a faded brown cardigan and a tweed skirt with loose threads and a gaping placket. Her big feet were thrust into down-at-heel slippers.

A nurse bustled into the room, cheerful and managing.

"You leaving at once, Mrs Anderson? Baby's all ready."

"Yes, I fed him at two and they took him away." Marge's voice was soft and unhurried, a little absent. "I'll be able to have more of him now."

"You won't want to be spoiling him," scolded the nurse. "Ach! You mothers! You want to keep to regular hours. And no taking him into bed, remember!"

She went out with a tread that set the bottles on the lockers jangling like little bells, and Marge and the grey-haired woman in the next bed exchanged a long, comfortable smile.

"What *they* know!" scoffed the woman with the grey hair. "I've buried two and reared five, and all of them slept in bed with me. Nibble, nibble, nibble all night long like little mice, till they dropped off."

"That's right," said the younger woman reminiscently.

"Your man's late, isn't he, dear? Musta been kep'."

"I don't mind waiting."

Marge looked peacefully in front of her, her big, red hands folded on her lap. It was nice to be going home, but she had been happy in here with the days each one like the day before, sliding past in perfect, unbroken rhythm. Sleeping, washing, eating, feeding the baby who was brought to her at stated intervals and whisked away again almost before she had had time to get used to the feel of him in her arms . . . sleeping again . . . eating. . . . It would be different at home with everything to do. The work in the house, mending, washing the napkins, the woollies that shrank and clotted together while you looked at them. Julie and Kate and poor old Joe eager to help but clumsy, clumsy. . . .

Her thoughts ran on easily, comfortably. And then, there was Joe standing in front of her, straightening himself after an awkward

kiss, looking sheepish, twirling his hat that had grease on the band, muttering breathless apologies. He was sorry he was late. He'd called in to Hogan's to have a haircut. The bloke had got him into the chair and kept him waiting, all bibbed-up, otherwise——

"It doesn't matter," said Marge, and the quick red patched her smiling face and ran down into her furrowed neck. "I'll tell nurse to bring baby. Have you brought my shoes?"

"Crumbs, no! I forgot them." Joe stared at her slippered feet, contrite and wretched.

"Oh well——" Her gaze, absent and unfocused, like the gaze of a young kitten, slid past him as she rang the bell. "Get my things out of that cupboard, and I'll want a warm top-shawl to put over him, and a rug over that. He's——"

It wasn't until he was in the car with the memory of the nurse's shrill, patronizing laugh diminishing in his ears that Joe felt completely happy and at ease. He looked at Marge as she sat with her head tilted, her chin topping the fringe of woolly shawl. He felt tender toward Marge, in an obscure fashion, grateful. He felt tender and grateful towards all women who went uncomplainingly down into the Valley of Shadow and brought life back with them. It was different with a man. A woman had the hard part—the burden of physical pain as well as anguish of mind. Look at Marge now! It was starting all over again for her—getting up to the baby at night, hanging over tubs eternally washing, coping with inevitable ailments, teething rashes, croup and the rest. Three children now at her heels! Three! And a mean little house and a lack of ready money. Pinching here, scraping there, making do. He was pierced by an anguish of pity for Marge, who said nothing, only stared steadily at the morsel of rubbery flesh visible between two folds of shawl while the car jolted over the ruts in the road.

Suddenly the girl straightened her sliding hat with a free hand and glanced bemusedly at Joe, only half-seeing him—his thin, sensitive face with its long forehead, his narrow shoulders hunched over the wheel, his hands pocked with tiny scabs of healing sores. Dear Joe, she thought vaguely. He's nice, he's good. . . . Some husbands. . . . It will be nice to be home. . . . That new food in a tin. All nursing mothers should have some. I must get . . .

"Everything right at home?" she asked with an effort.

"Fine," said Joe eagerly. He wanted to tell her in a rush. Women worried when they were away from home, imagined things. "Great kids, Kate and Julie. Been gathering eggs. The white chooks have

started to lay. I've knocked up some new roosts for them at the far end——”

He talked on but his voice faltered. She wasn't really listening. She was brooding, her mouth slightly open, her shallow brown eyes fixed on some inner vision. She gave a tiny, contented laugh.

“I'm glad he's not a bottle baby like Julie was. Of course it'll mean giving him a feed at six—bringing him into bed——”

Joe grunted, dimly offended. The car dipped into a muddy creek, rose again. Wind moaned along the wires of Simpson's new fences. A cloud of white cockatoos lifted tremulously and broke like glistening sea-spray against the arch of sky. The car panted and wheezed over the last ruts. The house, small and bare and definite in outline like a model house in an agent's window, came into view.

As soon as they were inside, the baby began to cry. Miss Bowden, loitering delicately, made clucking noises with her tongue and Marge looked at her with a remote, chilled look.

“He'll be all right,” she said softly.

“Well, your cuppa tea's ready,” said Miss Bowden, preparing to depart. “I've had mine. I'll be off now. Yes, it's a real nice baby and all.”

Joe went with her to the door and came back. Marge was putting the baby down in the cot. He was ready for her when she emerged from the bedroom, a child tugging at either hand. He waited on her humbly, drawing her chair close to the fire, putting a stool for her feet. He poured out her tea, stirred it anxiously. Good tea, wasn't it? Old Todd's best, Grade 1 Special. Not like that wish-wash at the hospital. And the fireplace? Did she notice the bricks he had evened up at the back? A nasty job.

“It's lovely,” said Marge, smiling. “Yes, I noticed that at once.” She began to unplait Kate's tight, blond plaits with practised fingers.

“And the flowers?” muttered Joe, clearing his throat and craning his thin neck. He spoke with a studied carelessness. That yellow jasmine stuff. “Pretty, I put it in——”

“It's lovely,” said Marge, peering about vaguely. “I noticed that too.”

But Joe's face had clouded. She hadn't really noticed it at all. She hadn't noticed anything. He was conscious of flatness. He smiled tiredly, listening to the little girl's piping prattle. “The chooks had got out of the yard, and had scratched up mummy's seed-bed.”

“Crumbs, I'm sorry, old girl, I left the gate open,” said Joe miserably. “I thought of it afterwards.”

“It doesn't matter, love,” said Marge, screwing up her eyes. A

few old seeds, she thought. What odds? It's round the sunny side of the house. I'll put the pram round there.

Joe clattered the dishes into the kitchen, wondering forlornly if Marge would notice the polished stove. Suddenly, from a point away at the back of the house, he heard the harsh, importunate whine of the saw. That would be old Ted with his gawky son. Damn. The sound went through him, plunging, cutting like a knife through quivering nerves and flesh and muscle. He had never noticed before how shattering the sound was, how inescapable. He went quickly into the dining-room.

"I'll stop that," he said. "At once."

Marge was sitting with her knees wide, looking in front, smiling contentedly at nothing. Joe, looking at her, saw that she was miles away, inaccessible, absorbed, wrapped in a dream of her own making.

"Stop what?" she asked in a blurred voice.

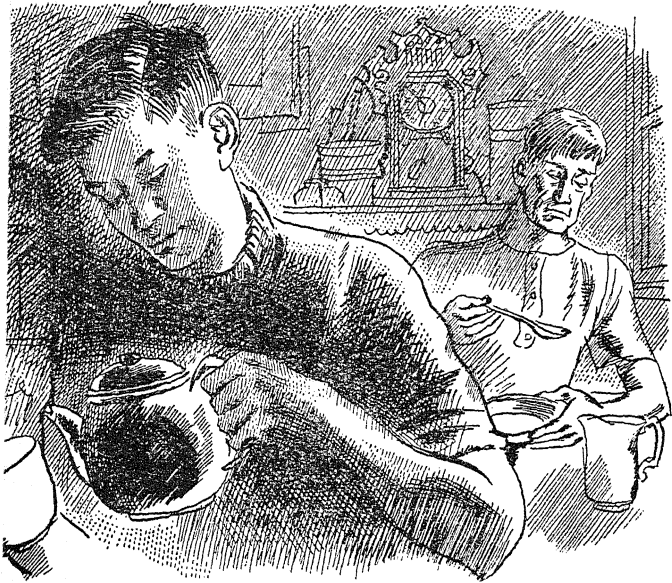
"The saw," he said stupidly. "It makes such a row. It'll wake the kid."

"He won't hear," she said surprised. "Anyhow, I don't mind. I really didn't hear it."

Joe tiptoed out into the yard. It was funny Marge not minding the scraping saw—funny her not minding the scratching chooks. She had always made a row before. He looked appreciatively about him. The afternoon light was beginning to fail. The dead-silvery timber, the sheds, the shaggy gum-tree, the cows down by the bails, the white fowls pecking near the grassy border, seemed washed with a cold greyish-lilac, seemed melting, dissolving into that shadowy lilac, becoming part of it, inseparable from it. All at once everything that he saw seemed precious and significant. He wanted to gather every detail up and hold it fast. He could see now. Marge in there. She was temporarily removed from him, complete in herself, happy and serene, above and beyond the little irritations and obligations of outside life. She was shrouded, safe in her motherhood, as in a cocoon.

"Wrapped in a dream," he thought as he moved through the lilac half-light, "wrapped in a dream."

[From *Coast to Coast* 1943, 1944.]



THE BLANK WALL

By MARGARET TRIST

At six o'clock his father got up and went out. It was pitch dark and very cold. The wind blew keenly through a broken pane in the window. Timothy, lying like a log in his narrow bed, drowsily half asleep, was conscious of the thinness of the blanket covered him—the blanket and the honeycomb quilt and his old coat. In the next room, which was the kitchen, his father moved restlessly about. Every movement his father made came plainly to Timothy. He heard him fumbling with the top of the stove, screwing it into a ball and arranging it, setting kindling upon the paper, replacing the top of the stove. After, the damper was pulled and a match struck. The paper caught. The pine crackled. His father coughed and rubbed his hands together near the blaze. Timothy opened his eyes, shivered and pulled his coverings closer to him. Then, resolutely, he tossed them away from him. The wind whistled sharply through the thin flannelette of his pyjamas and set

his teeth chattering. He clenched them and swung his feet on to the bare boards of the floor. Immediately the cold started to seep into them, making them ache. He felt at the foot of his bed for his clothes. Taking off his pyjamas he got into his clothes quickly—a singlet of harsh grey woollen stuff, pants, hitched up by an old leather belt, and a navy pullover.

The room was filled now with grey light. Timothy went to the washstand. On it were an empty tin dish and a jug of water. On top of the water in the jug was a thin layer of ice. It crackled beneath the weight of his fingers. He poured the water into the dish and sluiced his face and hands sparingly.

Shivering, his hands and feet and the tip of his nose paining, he went towards the kitchen. At the door that divided the two rooms he paused, suddenly remembering. Today was his fourteenth birthday. The fact was not of much interest excepting that he had reached school leaving age. A birthday as a birthday was not of much importance to Timothy. His family had long got over celebrating such trivial matters.

The kitchen was dark and draughty and smoke-filled. Timothy's father bent above the stove, blowing at the fire. He did not look up as Timothy entered, but he shivered in the wind caused by the opening door, and coughed as the smoke from the fire caught in his throat. After a while he stopped blowing the fire and stood erect. Without looking at Timothy he felt on the mantelshelf above his head for his tobacco and cigarette papers.

Timothy's father was tall, with a narrow chest that went inwards and hunched over his shoulders. He had on working trousers, heavy working boots and a grey flannel singlet. The singlet had elbow-length sleeves and his arms protruded from the sleeves, lean bones with a stretching of white skin covering them. The veins on them stood out as if the flesh were inadequate to hold them. There were veins in his neck, too. They stood out plainly every time he coughed. He had high cheek bones accentuated by the hollows beneath them, sunken bright dark eyes and thick black hair. At present it was uncombed and fell untidily about his forehead. He rolled his cigarette abstractedly and lit it. Then he stood by the now brightly burning fire, drawing at the cigarette, coughing over it and staring at nothing in particular.

There was a saucepan of rolled oats soaking on the side of the stove. Timothy's father stirred it and placed it beside the kettle. Timothy got the bread and started to slice it. In silence father and son went about their various jobs in preparing breakfast. Neither

felt anything odd about the other not speaking. After all, what was there about which to speak?

When it was ready Timothy's father ate his breakfast of porridge and thick bread and dripping and drank several cups of scalding tea. Then he took his coat from behind the door, wound an old scarf round his throat and taking up his tucker bag, let himself out into the morning air. Timothy heard the frosty grass scrunching under his feet as he went.

After the father had gone the children started to come into the kitchen. Half-dressed and unwashed they attacked the breakfast Timothy put down for them, and Doreen, who was twelve and came next to Timothy in age, made a cup of tea and a slice of toast and took it in to their mother. Their mother had been sick a lot of late. In winter now that the children were older she stayed in bed till the sun was well up. It was her chest.

Timothy helped with the breakfast dishes, then set out for school. The family rarely left for school in a body. They straggled away in ones and twos, some arriving very early, some very late, and some, if the fit took them, not at all.

Today Timothy was early. The frost was still thick on the grass as he crossed the paddock. The sunlight was weak and without warmth. Once on the roadway he began to run to warm himself. The school was on the other side of the town. The town was among the hills, so the road ran up hill and down hollow with monotonous regularity. The hills were topped with sunshine, so you sprinted to get into the warmth, such as it was. You went so fast that before you knew where you were you had plunged down into the shadow again and had your eyes fixed on the next patch of sunlight.

The road led through the shopping centre. The butcher shop had been open some two hours, but the grocery store had just been opened. Mr Kennedy, who owned it, was busy sweeping the pavement. He waved his broom at Timothy, half as a gesture of goodwill, half in annoyance. He liked Timothy, but Timothy's younger brothers and sisters irritated him.

"Keep them youngsters——" he shouted after Timothy; but Timothy sped on and took no heed.

By the time he reached the school he was quite hot. The school was a weatherboard structure, built to hold forty pupils. There was no one about, so he sat down on a tank stand. Now that he had turned fourteen there was no need for him to attend any longer. He was, according to the standards of the town in which he lived, educated. He had been in the highest class in the school for two years. He wondered now, idly contemplating the school building, why he

had attended so doggedly this last year. And now, today, was his last day. It stretched before him like a bright star of hope in a lost dark land. What he expected it to bring forth he could not define, but it seemed as if something must come to birth on this day; some culmination of all the days he had spent in the barn-like room; some fruition of the sums he had done, the verses he had recited, the sentences he had analysed, the maps he had drawn, the words he had spelt. This day must give him something to take forward into life. Timothy fully expected that it would.

The school day began as most other school days had begun, and went on in much the same way as all that had gone before it. The pupils fell into line in the asphalted playground. They marched into school and took their usual places at their desks. A hymn and arithmetic, and after that, reading. After playtime there were parsing and analysis and reading, lunchtime, then the afternoon lessons. As the afternoon wore on, a feeling of dismay possessed Timothy. It seemed suddenly as if he had come to a blank wall.

Then it was all over. The last lesson was ended. His education was complete. It came to Timothy in that moment that there were a great many things he did not know. He felt shocked and unsure of himself.

He lingered after the other children had gone.

"Well," said the teacher.

"Good-bye, sir," said Timothy.

"Oh yes, I forgot. You're leaving. What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know, sir," said Timothy, and backed towards the door, imploringly.

"Well, what is it?" asked the teacher.

"I don't know, sir," said Timothy, and backed towards the door.

"Good-bye, sir."

"Good-bye," said the teacher.

Timothy walked slowly and uncertainly back along the road.

There was something he wanted from life. Incomprehensible though it was, he knew he could not have it.

[From *In the Sun*, 1943.]

MISS RODDA

By HAL PORTER

IT was wet today. A vast voice poured in above the cataracting sea, over the sullied beach, over the streaming esplanade. The tamarisks tormented themselves in the hollow monologue. My back to the sea, I attempted to light a cigarette and, lifting my head after many failures, saw opposite the mansion in which Miss Rodda lived.

Designed by her architect father, the place is a parti-coloured folly fantastically narrow and lofty, a left-over from pantomime. I expected the rain to dissolve the almond icing which must be the mortar of its gladiolus-coloured bricks, or a woman with a plush rose and bella-donnaed eyes to appear and rest her bosom on the edge of one of the iron balconies while a Fortunello cackled at the frivolous upper windows.

Perhaps, inside, a word-haunted ephebe wrote on pink cards which one sometimes found on the stairs or in trinket-boxes . . . Xanthophyll, Quince, Chinchilla, Eau de Lavande, Crocodilo . . . words like the signatures of courtesans or melancholy tenors.

Or, maybe, among gilded harps and gossip-chairs of ormolu all velveted by a primrose dust, faded and faded some forgotten actress so frail that she must always recline, posed for no claque, a vinaigrette close to her topaz-cruised fingers, among smouldering pastilles . . .

My eyes climbed the windows seeking the white-leaded face and restless old mouth of this actress.

I found a face.

High at one corner of the house is an impurely romantic tower, red-tiled, with a circular Edwardian window. At this window was a white blob. I recognized the blob, the face of Miss Rodda, which I had not seen for ten years. Then, it was not askew on her shoulders like the head of an ailing bird, nor was it disformed by a lopsided smirk. Remembering, for the first time in years, my last encounter with Miss Rodda, I became embarrassed and was about

to move off when it seemed that—despite the distance between us of space and lost time, despite the curtains of sea-rain—her eyes turned from the sea and looked into mine directly and meaningfully as though we were mere centimetres apart in a footlight blaze. For no effable reason my embarrassment increased; I felt guilty, the author of a crime too abnormal to be mentioned, forgiven or even remembered. My cowardly eyes, eschewing her deadly stare, swung down and saw again the gate I had last entered when a youth of fifteen . . . ten years ago. . . .

. . . It is Thursday. It rains. A vast voice pours in above the careering waters. The tamarisks agonize in the immeasurable oration; my raincoat smacks like a fish.

My claws, senseless and purple, slip on the handle of amber glass. The gate lurches violently in, dragging my skinny body with it. I fight the door shut.

Weak now that there is no wind to strive against, I almost fall on the rectangle of asphalt that separates house from fence. There are infragrant shrubs dirtily wet. The height of the house, the colours of it, the insinuations of the shrubs, the sudden rankness, make me giddy.

I do not go to the front door, extravagant as a cathedral's. Miss Rodda, not looking at me, has said, without seeming to mean it or to care. "You will not come to the front door, never on any account. You will use one of the side doors. I shall show you which one." It is a small door that is entered from a long recessed veranda partially glassed-in and having a floor of tiles with a blue sweat on them. To myself I call this space a conservatory. Indeed, as heels strike tiles, I whisper, from habit, "Conservatory!"

Inspired by this tiny hiss I am able to hear distinctly my meagre quick aunt: "I've had a talk with Miss Rodda. Do you hear me? She's willing to give you music lessons; three guineas a quarter. That's really very cheap. But you mustn't say anything to anybody—do you hear me? She's giving lessons only to you. Something to occupy her time. Of course, she doesn't need the money. And she isn't actually a music teacher. However, she's studied under the best people—do you hear me?—at the Conservatorium."

Conservatorium . . . conservatory . . . a rabble of invalid ferns and begonias in green-painted kerosene tins with cut and curled edges. Stepping among these frizzed and perverted receptacles I hear the piano being played. Miss Rodda is playing. It is unbelievable that she can play such music—chill, fleet, sprinkling. I am tempted to look in the corners, among the tins, for a fountain, a naked urchin

of bronze hugging a bronze trout, maiden-hair fern, upturned scallops.

I knock on the door.

The music, the fountain, goes.

There is no sound of movement or feet.

The door makes no sound in opening yet is open, and Miss Rodda stands there. She is frocked, as always, darkly. She wears, as always, her necklace of mud-green beads.

"You are a little late." These words, crawling, have no intonation of reproach. Miss Rodda's lips scarcely move; the exterior of her face is so still with the stillness of something pendulent that the flesh seems heavy, the face a sullen fruit blanched in a mouldy gloom. It is as though not only the mechanism of her voice and emotions is worn out, but that some other inner spring is broken, permitting the subtle edges of her face, coiffure, shoulders, breasts and hips to sag. Robbed of tensing motif they seem affected, just perceptibly, by the force of gravity. Her feet should be large with down-drawn unused blood. They are not. They are small; while apparently dragging like an old woman's they take her swiftly into the house in which by legerdemain, she shuts the air as one would a sick brute.

I follow her, distressed that the blot of her frock will suddenly fuse with the twilight of the house, that she will vanish and leave me vagrant in this cave of many rooms, many openings, many greenish windows behind which grope shadows. The house is stupefied, undersea. The wind and the rain have delivered up form and noise and potency; amorphous shapes, blundering fish shapes, shapes of drowned men with lolling limbs, dangle sluggishly across the panes.

We reach the music-room where, because of candle-light and a fist of fire and two pianos in which the three candles and the fire are reflected and re-reflected, there is more an atmosphere of warmth, of sharp edges and definite planes. The fire, however, does not warm me as I pass the fireplace; the numberless plaques and caskets of Wedgwood, the Sheraton barometer, the pie-crust table, the congested marble of the fireplace, oppress me with their lifeless substance; here, too, formlessnesses flounder against the panes.

Fronting the mean fire is an armchair; on it a plaid rug, body-rumpled. "That is his," I think, "that is Mr Rodda's. He has been sitting by the fire." I have never seen him, but imagine him: tiny, dribbling from a pleated mauve face, creeping away from rug and fire at my knock. He is tottering and shivering now in one of the

rooms with all its doors and windows. There can be, I am certain, nowhere for him to sit: the absurd notion has months ago become mine that there are only two chairs in the house—his armchair and a neo-classical chair, lyre-backed, which sits before one of the pianos. Two chairs, one for him to occupy gnawing his old Chinese-coloured fingernails, one for her to use as she plays eternally and disinterestedly watery curves and sprayings of music; while purposelessly enclosing them in all directions are infinities of rooms crowded with ponderous treasures, suffocating with coffin air and aquarium green and nameless enervating emotions.

I take off my raincoat.

I wind my hands together furtively and painfully to warm them. It is useless.

I sit. The top edge of the lyre sticks into my scapulae.

I am forced reluctantly to use my voice. It does not sound like my voice. "What shall I play first, Miss Rodda?"

"Your new scales." She speaks as though she does not care whether I play or not. She touches her green beads without being aware that she has moved. I direct my hands carefully on to the ice-bound keys of a piano unwilling to give up its voices. I press down my right thumb and my left little finger. There is a silly brief noise.

Immediately after this noise I am startled to hear Miss Rodda speak again.

"How is your aunt?" Her voice is tintless; but her unusual question and some scheme remotely realisable behind the crust of the question tinge it with malice.

I lift my fingers and begin to twist them together. "She is very well, thank you, Miss Rodda."

She says nothing. In silence I think, "She does not care if my aunt . . ." The candle-flames do not breathe; it is cold; the green wind gulps at the windows.

Once more her voice creeps from inside the vase of her face: "I told you to play your new scales."

Confused, hurt, I re-arrange my hands at the keys. I play. My fingers scabble foolishly like crabs among the cold whites, the cold blacks. I make numerous discords, begin again and again and again.

Is she listening?

Is she *listening*?

She is not watching. At last I despairingly play the octaves down and up, and mar the triumph by merely one discord. I can do no better. I stop. She moves; with the slowness of something water-sodden she moves. She touches my shoulder. I stand. She sits. She plops her hands carelessly—unknowing, bored—into the toothy

sneer of the piano. She plays the octaves down and up, down and up, down and up. It is to continue thus for ever: she embroiders at some tasteless thought; she has forgotten me.

And then, to my horror, she makes a discord, my discord. There is no sign that she notices this except an imperceptible pause, after which, as I stand squeezing my hands together and expecting some unimaginable happening, she begins to play icily and easily the music of the fountain. And while the fountain arranges its jets and arcs of frosty drops her eyes turn with an incredible slowness towards me, and I hear her voice.

"How is your aunt?"

"She's—she's very well, thank you, Miss Rodda.

"She is very well? Eh? That is good. That is very nice." Then, astonishing me, her lips flinch open, next are sinfully pressed together and finally begin to make decisive clicking movements. Her fingers glitter water from the keys. Her voice takes on stinging, angry colours.

"You have been coming to me for a year?"

"Yes, Miss Rodda."

"You—your aunt owes me money for your lessons."

"I . . ."

"Your aunt owes me twelve guineas."

"Yes, I—I suppose so, Miss Rodda."

"You suppose so! You——! Has your aunt any intention of paying me?"

I am appalled, humiliated. I do not know what to answer. I recall that my aunt has said, "It's a wonder Miss Rodda hasn't sent her account. You might say something about it to her some day—do you hear me? Although with all their money . . ."

But how am I to explain this? I try to speak and am ultimately able to squawk into the violently disintegrating face, "I think my aunt was waiting for your account."

The result of this makes me call out. Miss Rodda's hands spring off the keys; she jumps up, knocking over the chair, and begins to speak close to my face in a rapid, flaming voice: "Account! Account! Account! Your wretched aunt had every right to send the money. Long ago. To send it to me." Her voice ceases in a tangle of unseemly sound. She is panting.

She almost runs, unintentionally, to the fireplace and strikes her hand venomously down on the marble mantle. Swiftly, crouched over, head forward, she returns to me where I stand like a gawk. Her eyes are open, the lids strained back off the slippery-dark balls. I see how suddenly passionate and mobile her face is; she is hand-

some—a straight nose, black eyebrows. Colour throbs on to her cheekbones, into her lips. Her teeth are white, white.

As I gaze at the ardent metamorphosis I am too ashamed and frightened to say anything. Indeed, the one explanation I have is so involved as to be impartible. I can only witlessly watch emotions flickering after each other upon her face . . . outrage, a kind of despair, anger, and increasing expression of hatred. Incapable of movement, I must see this last distortion intensify to its acme: Miss Rodda's face thins, becomes mottled; her gums show; her eyes are again half-hidden by heavy lids.

She grabs my wrists; clips in her fingernails and squalls hoarsely, furiously, with an unnatural effort, "I must have the money—must—must—must! Go and get it! Bring it here immediately! Your wretched aunt—send an account—she knows perfectly well I wouldn't. But I must have the money—I must——!"

She pushes at me exhaustedly, fiercely; she is thrusting me out of the room, out of the house. Her necklace of beads snaps, disappears with a thick cry, leaving her sinister and more terrifying than before, unrelievably impure and frantic. I stumble before her, dodging through a confused series of doors, beneath towering pedestals on which cower clods of marble, monsters of bronze. I feel that I am plunging through the windows, that the house is shuffling apart about me; there seems a mighty but muffled clamour of green seas and drunken winds through which Miss Rodda's voice flares like a knout, "Go! Go! I must have it! Bring it tonight! Go!"

I stutter repeatedly, I babble, and as I flee for a great length of time my stutterings and babblings seem always behind me, "Yes, Miss Rodda, tonight. Yes, Miss Rodda, tonight. I'll bring it tonight, Miss Rodda. Yes, Miss Rodda, tonight."

And then, through the last of doors, the rain, wind-weaponed, bounds at me. Miss Rodda has gone. A living gate with its inimical handle of amber glass resists me. God! God! God!

I am catapulted, trembling, on to the beach. I walk for days, automatically, for years. I have left my raincoat behind and become saturated. I am horrified at what has happened; I do not know how I shall tell my aunt, cannot conceive myself telling all those immoral, impossible things. At the same time I am explicably distressed for Miss Rodda; the wind brusquely rips from my lips a ceaseless ticket: "She *must* have it. She *must* have it. She *must* have it."

I reach home shivering, about to collapse.

My aunt pounces like a jay: "Where on earth have you been? Late for dinner. Where's your coat? Where's your coat—do you hear me?"

"I left it at Miss Rodda's."

"You what——! How on earth could you forget your coat?"

I did not reply.

"Speak, child! How could you forget on a day like today? You'll have pneumonia. And what was that idiot of a woman thinking of to let you go without it? Pneumonia, that's what. She must be mad. Go and change—do you hear me?"

It is impossible to explain to my aunt, even to speak to her. I blame her anger for my silence while realizing that, had she not been angry, I should still not have had the courage to mention either the twelve guineas or Miss Rodda's attack.

Thursday night rains by, wails by wind-whipped, creeps by with its tail between its legs.

I use Friday for the fascinating and subtle occupation of soothing my aunt. But I cannot speak of Miss Rodda, of the money.

On Saturday I begin to fret my aunt with elaborate and ridiculous reasons for requiring the money to pay Miss Rodda. I listen with disgust to myself saying such things as, "No, she hasn't mentioned it. But she's been looking at me—er—queerly. It spoils my playing. Besides, I may as well pay her—I've got to collect my raincoat—I'll pay her then. She may need it." I hear myself saying these foolish things too many times.

On Sunday, I am entirely devoted to the obtaining of the money; I am earnest, desperately insistent, nauseated by the knowledge that my aunt will be influenced by her own reasonable arguments rather than my factitious ones.

On Monday, exasperated, bewildered, my aunt wildly and peevishly flashes a cheque into existence. She vilifies Miss Rodda; she is sure I am crazy—do I hear her?

I run, actually run, impelled by an emotion irrefutable though intangible, to the gate with the glass handle.

I knock exultantly on the side door; I am shaking with an excitement; my throat is as dry as a crow's.

Following my knock a silence begins in the bizarre mansion, and behind this newly-made silence I uneasily realize a deeper silence, the solid infrangible silence that succeeds a cataclysm, the silence of utter cessation.

Suddenly the lesser silence is imprinted with footsteps. The other silence, the core, remains untouched, a senseless and eternal cube. I listen to the cubic silence and to the footsteps which make inexorably through wall after wall towards the door. The footsteps are not Miss Rodda's. And they are too heavy—I am sure of it—to be her father's.

Ultimately the door stirs; I hold my breath to watch it opening for a long time. When it is completely open, and not until then, I see a very tall, broad, flaccid shape. A strange shadow, like a biblical pillar of smoke, blurs it and its great face. I know that it is staring down at me, listening for my voice.

"Is Miss Rodda in?"

"No." Its voice is wide and profound; the sole word, reverberating back into the colossal hush, seems a sentence. The shape waits for me, eyeing me abstractedly as though I am a phasma or a little striped pebble.

"I have brought her money, the money for the music lessons."

A mass, a huge hairy hand, advances implacably from the obscurity and with astounding delicacy removes the cheque from between my finger and thumb. It is gone before I am conscious of intention to remove it.

Silence.

What shall I say now?

What shall I do?

I attempt to look closely at the shape before me. There is a faint buried roar and then a voice: "I am Mr Rodda." The voice dustily organs about dark abbey arches in the great body. "My daughter, for whom you have so kindly brought this acceptable cheque, is not at present home. No. My daughter is now a patient in the public hospital. She is seriously unwell. She cut her throat this morning!" I am so fascinated by the sonorous echoing, by the soothing and involved music of the voice, that I scarcely comprehend the meaning of the words. Gradually the echoes cease within him. The last subdued note has scarcely powdered away when the voice begins again. This time it opens strongly; a blast of anger makes the timbre brazen rather than resonant and, while the voice is yet turned inward, it *tells* me, as though the fact were censurable, "She used my razor."

I seem to see Miss Rodda's face and infringing upon it in bewildering sequence more and more quickly, like transparent shadows of machine wheels, expressions of outrage, a kind of despair, anger, hatred. Despair, hatred, despair.

Despair . . . terror. . . .

And then there is a silence, the silence of cessation.

As I retreat backwards, blinded by silence, prepared by polite habit to say good-bye to the gigantic structure into which the cheque has vanished like white bat into midnight, I squeak, "I am too late!" Mr Rodda displays by no gesture, no comment, no slightest movement, that he hears anything.

"I am too late!"

What do I mean? For what am I too late? I do not know; I . . . do . . . not . . . know. . . .

Today, with her head awry, her face ill-woven in an unravellable knot of grimace and silence, Miss Rodda looked down from the tower window. She looked—through rain and time—into my eyes.

Or . . . or . . . ?

It is unlikely, improbable, that she recognized me.

Therefore it was foolish of me to think unhappily, as I looked up to her, of calling out, "I'm sorry, Miss Rodda. I'm sorry. But I did bring the money as soon as I could."

[From *Short Stories*, 1943.]



CLEAR PROFIT

By DON EDWARDS

THE interior of the store was cool and dark against the glare of the summer's day that shone against the doors and windows and sent shafts of steady light across the boxes, shelves, and show-cases.

Enid leant against the counter, with stocks of clothing heaped about her. She moved them idly, putting a hat on a pile that stood near her, a roll of cloth on a shelf. Across the room she could see Lucy, the hired girl, serving Mrs Roberts with groceries.

Impatiently she pushed the goods aside and sat down on the counter. There was a sound of footsteps outside and hastily she sprang down to stand expectantly. It was only Harry Ridley with a note from his mother; wanting some groceries on credit again. If she had her way she would give the Ridleys what they wanted. For a moment she thought of telling Lucy to give Harry anything that the note asked for, but the knowledge of what her husband and father-in-law would say made her remain quiet.

She couldn't understand their attitude. They had plenty; people like the Ridleys had nothing, yet they refused to help the Ridleys in any way.

Her husband would say, "It's a matter of business, Enid. You can't run a business that way," and the old man would snort, "We Days have built up this business by hard work and we mean to keep it. Other people want something for nothing." It wasn't as if they didn't have plenty. They were rich. They could retire tomorrow, if they liked, and leave Delford and live in the city. But there was no chance of that.

When she had first arrived here and had heard a local resident say, with a mirthless laugh, "All Days are the same in Delford, anyhow," she thought it just cheap humour. It might have been true of Mr Day, but it wasn't true of his son. Gordon was different. But now she was discovering the truth. In the last couple of years he had altered, become more like his father, so that she often found herself wishing she hadn't married him. If it were not for the holiday that was so near she felt that she would tell Gordon all the anger that was pent up within her and try to shake him out of his complacency. But the holiday would make things all right again. After a couple of weeks in the city she would be ready to come back to the village and the store. If only she could persuade Gordon to have a holiday now and then, she wouldn't mind the place so much, for she would have something to look forward to, something to break the monotony. Perhaps he would enjoy the holiday so much that he would be willing and ready to take other holidays.

She knew what his father said, "Look at me. Haven't had a holiday for twenty years, and look at me," and she felt like replying, "You're a good argument for my case," but she said nothing, for even though she accused Gordon of being scared of his father, afraid to stand up for his rights, she was rather frightened of the old man herself, and life was miserable enough here without her having rows with Gordon's people. She always felt an outcast as it was, a foreigner who had been taken into the household, but not the family, merely because Gordon had married her, and because she was useful.

Even now, after all this time she had not grown accustomed to those rites that were called meals, with Mrs Day, Gordon, Leila and Mavis all staring deferentially towards the old man, who sat at the head of the table waiting to begin grace. The solemn progress of the meal, with old Day's steady champing on his food, Mrs Day's fluttering attentiveness to him, and the venturesome laughter of the

girls that broke in now and then as irrelevantly as a hearty shout in church, strained against her nerves set for the cracking of the tension that she always expected but that never occurred.

It wouldn't be so bad if she had her own home, to the privacy of which she could retreat. Then Gordon might be hers, too. Those early days when the house was new had been tolerable. She should never have consented to selling the place to that boarding-house proprietress, and living with the Days. But it wasn't easy to stand out against them all with them pestering her all the time and talking about the good offer she was turning down, the clear profit she was throwing away. It was no good worrying herself about these things now, with the holiday so close. She walked through the shop to the front door.

Standing in the doorway she looked out at the township, and her mood of depression returned as she saw the ugliness of the place. The main street stretched out, dusty and hot, from the scarred gully that was called "The Creek" to near the hill where it dived into a clump of gums as if pleased to be free of the village. The cottages, drab and untidy as the people, straggled along the road, here clustering like groups of gossipers, there spreading apart like folk who had just quarrelled. A few people moved about, and now and then a car passed.

Nearly opposite was the large house that Gordon had built for her. It was the best in the town, and she remembered how proud she had been of it and how she had planned the furnishing of it so that everything was quiet, tasteful, a contrast to the crude, vulgar reality of the village.

Gordon had said to her, "I'll build you the finest home in the district if you marry me, Enid," and he had meant what he said. She had found it difficult to restrain him and keep his ideas from running to mere cheap ornateness and over-decoration. But at least he had been sincere and anxious to please her and she had been optimistic of the future, confident of happiness.

When she had first come from the city to work in Delford she had enjoyed the quiet and peace of the place after the noise and hurry of the metropolis. The open spaces, the hot sun, the sense of freedom, had been a pleasing contrast to her life in the city. She had been eager to accept the new life and willing to make a success of things, yet she had been defeated. Now, everything seemed different; the store, the village, the people, her husband. The only one who had remained the same was her father-in-law and as she thought of him her mind repeated those words, "All Days are the same in Delford," and she looked across at her house which bore

a large sign telling people that it was a "First-Class Boarding House".

A woman passed and spoke to her, saying, "It's very hot, Mrs Day." She nodded thinking to herself, "Of course it's hot. It's always hot here, hot and dusty and lonely."

What she needed was a holiday, a change in the city. Well, tomorrow she and Gordon would be off for the seaside, and away from the village and old Day and his store.

She felt someone pulling at her arm, and turned to see Lucy. The girl whispered to her. "He's been watching you, Mrs Day, for quite a time."

She swung round quickly and saw her father-in-law standing in the gloom at the back of the shop, looking at her. At first she felt guilty, then angry, as she realized that in Lucy's eyes she was no better than a hired girl. And that was how all the people regarded her, and how the Days regarded her, and unless she was careful Gordon would think of her only in that way. The old man just stood there, his whole attitude expressing disapproval because he thought she was wasting time, because he wanted to see everyone working all the while. He wouldn't say anything to her, it wasn't necessary—his manner said enough. She wished he would say something, so that she could have it out with him. Thank goodness she was going on a holiday tomorrow. She knew how that worried him. "A useless waste of money. Haven't had a holiday for twenty years," she had heard him say to Mrs Day last night.

She walked down the store towards him, challenging him to say something; but he turned and left the building.

As the afternoon drew on towards the time when Gordon was due back, she became more restless, pacing up and down the shop in her excitement, serving the few customers in an absent-minded way. She had finished packing the suit-cases before breakfast and now she had nothing to do but wait for Gordon. He would rush in late as usual and make a great bustle and show of the few jobs he had still to do, and say he didn't know how the shop would get on while they were away. "Nonsense," she would say, "your father and sisters can run the place easily; besides, Lucy knows more about the business than any of us." It always annoyed him to think that anyone else could manage the store.

Old Day kept looking into the store, and each time he said to Lucy, "As soon as my son comes in, tell him I'd like to see him."

Probably it was just an excuse to see that she wasn't neglecting her work.

She went into the office at the back of the store and sat down for a few minutes to think about the city and her life here in the

village. Flies buzzed about her, and whenever a car passed, the red dust from the street floated in the window. The heat must have made her doze, for the next thing she knew Lucy was saying, "Your husband is back, Mrs Day. He's outside talking to his father."

She hurried to the door and saw Gordon and the old man standing on the footpath, talking earnestly. She waited, for although she was anxious to see her husband and talk about the trip, she was afraid to interrupt the old man. Presently her husband came towards her.

"You are earlier than I expected, Gordon," she said. "We could leave here before dark, and have tea on the way down."

He didn't answer, so she went on speaking quickly, as if to kill by her eagerness and enthusiasm any protests he might be about to make. "We could have a meal at that little hotel overlooking the sea. You know the place where we stayed when we were returning from our honeymoon."

His voice broke in on her abruptly, "We can't go just yet, Enid. Some important business has cropped up at Hillside."

She did not give him time to explain. He was captured by the place like the other inhabitants, like his father, who dominated him. She would be the same if she lived here much longer, narrow, unimaginative, complacent, ignorant. She turned away and walked towards the house. Gordon made no attempt to follow her.

Inside the house she went to her room and shut the door. She could hear Mrs Day and the two girls talking in the kitchen. Even in her own room she had no privacy. It wasn't her room really; they were likely to burst in at any moment without knocking. The sight of her suit-cases, ready packed on the bed, drove away her desire to cry and increased her feeling of revolt. She looked at the clock on her dressing-table. The service car would be through the village in about twenty minutes. Quickly she scribbled a note to Gordon, then picked up her cases and walked out stealthily on to the veranda.

She caught the car at the hotel. The only other passenger was a farmer, so she sat alone in the back seat. At first she felt only anger at her husband, and hatred of the village and the shop, but as night closed in, the purr of the car, and the invigorating coolness of the highland air soothed her till she was surprised and rather afraid at what she had done. Still, it might bring Gordon to his senses and show him and his family that she wasn't to be treated as a hired girl, a servant.

Even if he seldom gave any indications of it now, Gordon must still love her. If only he would forget the business for a while, and

throw off the influence of his father—things wouldn't be so intolerable. She wondered whether he had seen her letter yet and what he would do after he had read it.

At the station, before she had time to leave the car, the station-master came out and spoke to her. "You must be Mrs Day," he said. "Mr Day 'phoned me and asked me to tell you not to catch the train, but to wait for him at the Royal Hotel. He is on his way here now."

She returned to the hotel in the service car, and on the way she heard the train leave. She wondered whether Gordon would want to stay the night at the hotel or whether he would go straight on to the city. It was a beautiful night, clear and cool, and it would be delightful to drive down the pass to the coastal plain and then along the edge of the ocean towards the city. She hoped Gordon wouldn't be angry with her. Now she felt a little ashamed of herself. No doubt she had done Gordon an injustice. Things weren't as bad as she had imagined them to be back in the village. Already she was seeing things differently. She would walk down the street to a restaurant and have some supper and by then it would be almost time for her husband to arrive.

At the hotel she must have slept, for she was startled by a knocking at the door. Eagerly she ran to the door and opened it, to see old Mr Day standing outside. Her sudden feeling of confused disappointment turned to quick anger at the sight of the old man with his bent and almost cringing attitude. At once she seemed to be back in the shop, hating the village, and old Day, and even her husband. Surely Gordon could have left his father at home this time.

"Where is he?" she asked. "Where is Gordon?"

The old man put his hand on her arm, so that despite herself she moved away slightly.

"Gordon had to go over to Hillside on that business," he said. "He will be away for a few days, so after he read your note he asked me to 'phone you and then come and get you." He looked at her for a few seconds, then he added with a smile that was intended to be placatory, "We can't get along in the store without you, Enid, while Gordon is away. And this business will mean about £20 clear profit to him."

[From *High Hill at Midnight*, 1944.]

BROSIE

By BRIAN JAMES

To the side of the house and a hundred yards or so from it was a waterhole. It was in a slight depression and it dammed the water that ran down when the rains were heavy. A straggling grey gum, half-sapling, half-tree, grew out of its bank. It was a muddy hole and silted very much after all the years, but it still served the stock in the home paddock. A crazy pattern of deep tracks radiated from it.

The house was drab looking, and stood on a level space almost bare of grass. A few sad pepper trees on the same side as the waterhole gave no relief or setting to the house. Pepper trees are mostly like that.

In the house lived the Watsons—Tom, his wife, and little Brosie (short for Ambrose).

There was only Brosie—a sister had died at birth. After Brosie came, the doctor had told Mrs Tom there could never be any more children. Mrs Tom grieved about that, and told certain of her neighbours—in strict confidence. So, of course, everyone had known about it long since. And Tom would say—“What did you want to go near him for?” Tom had little faith in doctors and always reckoned that in the old days there weren’t any of them to go to; which was all to the good. And so his grandfather had lived to be ninety-eight.

Tom wasn’t progressive. He scratched in a bit of wheat each year, and a bit of oats for hay, which he stacked in a groggy-looking hayshed, prevented from sitting down by some saplings propped against the lower side. He ran a few sheep in the hills, a few cows and a few horses. He always said that when he found time he’d put in a few acres of lucerne down on the flat. It would grow splendid lucerne, he reckoned. But he never seemed to find time.

When Tom was working not too far from the house, little Brosie would take him his morning tea—in a blue enamel jug with a deep metal lid that served as a cup. It had also a swing handle, and

Brosie held this in one hand and a parcel of bread and jam and two pieces of cake in the other. Mrs Tom watched him across the paddock, for Brosie was hardly four. Brosie loved the importance of this errand, and felt prouder still when his father said—"Well, here we are again, old man!" or "What would I do without you!" Then Brosie would sit on the dusty ground with his father, and eat up his slice of cake, and rattle away about everything he saw. Sometimes he had a small drink of tea out of the lid-cup—not that he liked tea very much, but it seemed a big thing to do. Or he would take the crusts, if any were left, and give half to Kate and half to Tiger, and get quite a thrill from their soft exploring lips, and their pricked inquiring ears, and their kindly patient eyes. Then his father would light his pipe and say, "Now, off you go, old fellow!" and watch him over the paddock to the house. And so to an hour or two of ploughing before dinner-time. Occasionally Brosie was allowed to go to meet his father at dinner-time, and then he would be set on old Kate's back—on top of a cornsack, of course, for Kate's back was sharp and ridgy—and ride her to the shed. He said he was a real jockey, and Tom would laugh at the humour of Kate having a jockey aboard her. Mrs Tom didn't approve altogether, and would tell Tom it looked dangerous, and something might frighten Kate, and you never could tell. Tom said nothing could frighten Kate; which was true enough.

One morning Tom had brought a load of firewood and was tipping it out at the wood-heap. Mrs Tom called out: "Is Brosie with you?"

"No, why?"

"He set out to."

"Haven't seen him."

Mrs Tom called out "Brosie!" No answer.

Then a little louder; and then shrilly and with an edge of fear to it. Brosie didn't answer.

"Aw, he's all right"—and Tom went on unloading.

Mrs Tom gathered her scattered wits. "Tom!" she cried, full of foreboding. "He's not all right! He doesn't answer!"

She looked all round about—and then she ran frantically down the slope to the waterhole.

Brosie was there, sure enough. Dead, in less than a foot of muddy water. . . . A level bough from the grey-gum ran out over the waterhole, a thin low bough, and half-way along it was a wagtail's nest. That perhaps accounted. . . . But what was the use? What did it matter now! Brosie was gone!

There was the usual human spectacle of excitement and hurry

and rush. Kindly neighbours and condolence. Doctor, clergyman and coroner. And in the core of all the bustle something inexpressibly pathetic—the numbed wound growing into pain. At first it wasn't true that Brosie was dead—could be dead. A hopeless sort of hope that shaded into realization and despair. Mrs Tom's father and mother came over from Stony Creek, and some of her sisters came to help her cry. But after one wild outburst she didn't cry again. Her mother told Tom in a quiet motherly way that he must be very good to her, and Tom said he would, "My oath!" Then "I beg your pardon!" It was Tom at his best.

Old Sammy Bowen brought a bottle of whisky, well hidden, and with a show of mystery led Tom to the shed. He insisted on Tom having a nip or two of it. "Neat!" said old Sammy. "Neat, or she's no good to you." After that Tom broke down rather helplessly, much to old Sammy's satisfaction. "Do him good," said Sammy. "The only thing that will." Then Tom said again for the tenth time that there wasn't a foot of water in the dam, and he couldn't see how it *could* happen. "Not in a foot of water, anyway. Less than a foot!" Tom held his palms quite close together, the right above the left. "Not more than *that!*" Sammy didn't say anything; he just nodded understandingly, and poured out another gulp of whisky. Old Kate came by, clop-clop, stopped and looked at Tom in patient surmise. Tom broke down again. Old Sammy poured out more whisky, and had another very generous dose himself. Then he, too, started to sob. But he was tearfully sure that Tom would be all right now! You must cry or you're done. Tom would be all right now! Tom irrelevantly said he'd put that lucerne in next month.

Mrs Tom's mother and father stayed on for quite a time. The father was a little wizened, inept sort of man of whom no one ever took much notice. Not a bad sort, really, and Tom liked him. They mooned about the place, and looked at the crops and things, and went several times over that flat where Tom was going to grow the lucerne. And smoked a lot and even condemned the "Gov'mint". Tom's father-in-law was very bitter about the "Gov'mint"—in a very ineffectual way. And Tom would say, "That's right—what *have* they done for us?"—as farmers have said since ever there were farmers and Governments.

Up at the house Mrs Tom's mother looked round in a subdued cheerfulness and said—"Have you that 'Aunt Beckie's Own Cookery Book' handy? I want to make a plum cake." Or she would thrust a testing finger inside the oven and say, "Just right—pass me that

batch of scones!" Or "Just leave the cot there. I wouldn't move it. You leave it there, Elsie!"

Mrs Tom felt that her mother was a far more wonderful woman than she had ever imagined her to be. But then . . . nothing like this had ever happened to her. . . . And she had had ten children in her time. . . . And no doctor had ever told her . . .

"Tosh!" said her mother, "Don't take too much notice of what the doctors say. Look what they told Mrs Ben Aird!" Then followed a full and delicate account of the pertinent parts of Mrs Ben's career, ending with, "Even old Dr Winton said he couldn't believe it. Just couldn't."

Then she spoke to Tom about that waterhole. "Fill it in, Tom," she said. But Tom couldn't see it. "What for now?" he asked. "It can't do any more harm and I want it for the stock."

Mrs Tom's parents went home at last, and life went on. Tom did drag the logs off the flat, and after a heavy rain ploughed a few acres of it. He worked it fine and put in the long-delayed lucerne. It came up beautifully, with the covering oats, and promised well. He worked harder and more intelligently than he'd ever done before. Always he came home for morning and afternoon tea if he were near the house at all, and if at any distance Mrs Tom took it to him. The tea always came in a billy now.

Mrs Tom raised chickens—out of all proportion in numbers—and took an unwonted interest in them; and she poddied two calves and a pet lamb. "Do her good, perhaps," Tom reflected in some wonder. She asked Tom if he could get her a young kangaroo, and Tom cruelly shot a poor doe with a joey in her pouch. Mrs Tom adopted the joey with new enthusiasm till it all too quickly grew up to be a friendly nuisance about the place.

One evening Tom came back from a trip to town, and Mrs Tom, with very bright eyes, ran to meet him at the rails.

"He's back!" she said.

"Who?"

"Brosie, of course!—Come and see him."

Tom went with a strange fear in his slow mind. And there he was—a six months old baby boy in the cot! Happy and gurgling. And he *did* look like Brosie!

"What? Where . . .?" And the questions died on his lips.

Mrs Tom prepared milk on the stove and crooned happily to herself. Then to Tom: "It doesn't really matter, Tom, that I have no milk myself for him. Really it doesn't. Bottle feds are often the best. Now, Tom, bring in some wood for the stove."

Tom tried to think it out. Whose baby? And how? And what to

do about it? Something would have to be done, and he was afraid to leave her. He brought in the wood. Mrs Tom had the baby in the crook of her arm, feeding him. The baby liked it, very obviously.

If someone would only call that he could send to the Stoney Creek? Here was even worse tragedy than Brosie's death. And whose baby could it be? Mrs Tom babbled a lot and among other things said: "Tom I want you to fill in that waterhole. I don't like it." Tom said, "Yes." Then he looked down the darkening lane. Of course, no one *would* call—not when you really wanted them. Suddenly a pair of lights appeared in the gloom. It was a sulky, fast driven. Tom went down to the rails. It was Mr Sawyer from the Two Mile—recently moved into that old place of Rayner's. He was very much agitated. And then Tom knew. Before Sawyer could say anything Tom assured him—"The baby's all right! He's inside with the wife. Quite all right. No need to worry a bit, old man."

"But—my wife—nearly out of her mind . . ."

"Go back at once, will you and get her. The baby's all right. Get your wife. Do. And I'll try to think of something if I can." Tom tried to explain how things were, not very clearly, but he made Sawyer understand, partly, at any rate. "Only," he said, "don't go in now to see the baby. He's all right. Send someone as quickly as you can!" There was such honesty in Tom's tone and manner that Sawyer believed him. He turned back, and soon after young Bowen looked in. Tom sent him out to the Stoney Creek and then he laid a plan of campaign for Mrs Sawyer. This was something out of his line, and out of his depth. He had never seen Mrs Sawyer, and he wondered if he could manage her. She arrived at last. It was near midnight now, for it was a fair way to the Two Mile. In all her fear and grief Tom saw in Mrs Sawyer a woman who might understand. So he told her frankly, "Not dangerous—there's nothing to fear!" Tom knew all the fearing was his.

Tom couldn't understand how his wife had stolen the baby, and this he never discovered. Nor very clearly how the Sawyers suspected his wife. He was only too grateful that they had come to him before they went to the police. That was something. So he persuaded Mrs Sawyer to "come in and see little Brosie!" It wouldn't be long, he said. Just do this. The wife's mother would be here soon, and they'd find some way out. Just do that. Mrs Sawyer agreed. But there was fear and cunning in Mrs Tom's eyes when she saw Mrs Sawyer. It was a great relief that her mother from the Stoney Creek arrived just then.

So did old Dr Winton. He took Tom aside, and said the case looked rather hopeless to him. She couldn't be trusted. She should

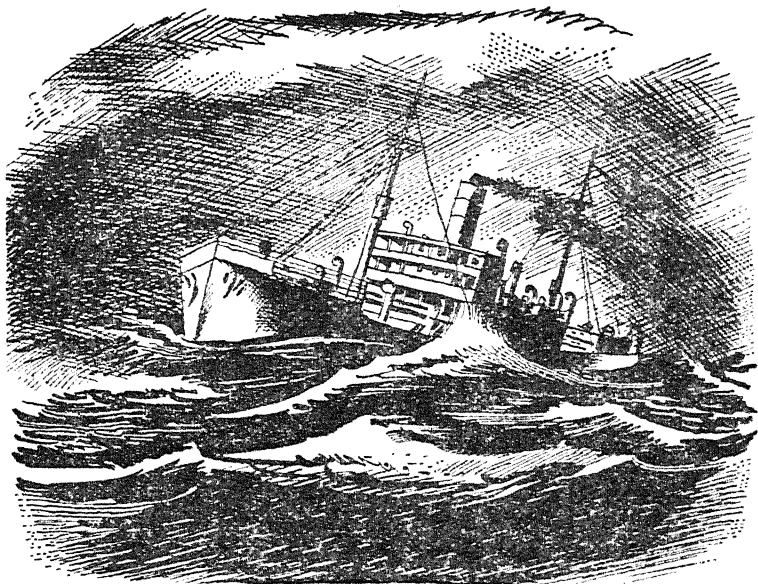
go to Sydney. No, he didn't think Tom could look after her. Not safe. He'd try to give her a sleeping draught to allow the Sawyers to get away. After that there was no telling. It was best to get her to Sydney. In the meantime, watch her closely. . . .

So they watched her. But she gave them the slip next day. Gone in an instant, and to be found nowhere. Her mother said, "The waterhole!"

There she was, sure enough. Perhaps she had found little Brosie at last.

Tom just went on and worked harder than ever. He filled in the waterhole—and scooped out another a little farther down the slope. In an absent-minded way he dragged off more logs and burnt out the stumps, and put in a lot more lucerne. It was a wonderful lucerne patch, everyone said.

[From *First Furrow*, 1944.]



QUITE A BLOW

By R. S. PORTEOUS

His name was Swinsby. Not a very imposing name, but then there was nothing imposing about the man. He was short and thin, almost frail-looking, with pale-blue watery eyes and a habit of carrying his shoulders hunched forward so that he looked slightly deformed. His hair, what little there was of it, was grey and always untidy.

I first met him when I joined the old *Tekowi* as mate. She was no crack liner, that old ship—only a small, coal-burning coaster on the Brisbane-Darwin run—but I boarded her feeling well pleased with myself. Small as she was she spelt promotion for me, a step-up from second—to first-mate. I didn't feel so pleased when I met her master, Captain Swinsby. He was pacing up and down outside his cabin, a small, unprepossessing, hunched-up old man. His white uniform was wrinkled and ill-fitting, on his head was an old felt

hat, and his bare feet were thrust into heelless leather slippers that flip-flapped on the deck as he walked.

I introduced myself, though I'd never have believed he was the master had it not been for the four-barred epaulettes on his shoulders. Later I learned that he detested uniforms, and only wore them because the company insisted. The uniform was a concession to the owners, the felt hat and the slippers an assertion of his own tastes.

"Mead?" he said, pausing in his walk to glance incuriously at me. "Oh, yes. You're the new mate. You'll find Mr Matson, the second-mate, up forward. He'll show you around. Been with the ship ever since she was launched."

He resumed his flip-flap pacing and I turned away in disgust. His off handed passing-over of me to the second-mate was so much on a par with his general appearance that I wondered how anyone could have been foolish enough to entrust him with a command.

Matson, I discovered, was a stolid, thick-set individual who certainly looked as if he'd been with the ship since she was launched. I judged him to be approaching his sixties. Utterly lacking in imagination or ambition, he was one of those men who are content to end their days as second-mates, always shirking the responsibilities that promotion brings.

During the next few weeks I saw nothing that altered my first impressions of Captain Swinsby. He seldom spoke, even to Matson, who had been shipmates with him for years, and I never heard him give a definite order. Sometimes when I was on watch he came up to the bridge; but he didn't interfere, just walked slowly up and down with his wretched slippers going flip-flap along the deck. Usually I cursed him under my breath for getting in my way.

He always arrived when I was particularly busy taking bearings and plotting the ship's position, when we were skirting a reef or making a turn in the narrow Torres Strait waters. When we were in clear, open water and I had time on my hands I saw nothing of him. Being young and full of my own sense of importance in those days it never occurred to me that his visits could be timed to coincide with the danger-points. He was so uninterested, so ineffectual. He didn't give orders or even advice, he didn't take bearings or enter the chart-room to check the ship's position; just flip-flapped up and down with his hands thrust into his pockets and his shoulders hunched forward like a pensive old vulture. And then, when I found time to relax a little, he'd disappear down the ladder.

Once, when we were approaching a submerged danger marked

on the charts as Dugdale Rock, I came down from the standard compass to find him standing on the lower bridge. There isn't much sea-room in that particular spot. To avoid hitting the rock a careful bearing must be maintained on Chapman Island light. The Old Man wasn't even looking at the distant steel light-tower, he was staring up at two squabbling seagulls fighting noisily for possession of the truck of our foremast.

"You'd think there wasn't room for the two of 'em up there, the way they squabble," he remarked, turning his watery blue eyes on me. They fascinated me, those eyes. Always seemed to be on the point of brimming over and yet they never quite did. He moved away without waiting for an answer, but after a few steps he turned. "Nasty rock, that Dugdale Rock, mister," he said in the same offhand tone. "Never shows. A very easy rock to hit."

I said, "Yes, sir. I was keeping well clear of it." But his slippers were already flapping down the ladder.

Things went on like that for three or four voyages. In my private opinion it would have made no difference to the ship if Captain Swinsby had stayed ashore. He was simply there to comply with a regulation that every ship must carry a qualified master. Certainly he always took the *Tekowi* in and out of port. I had to admit that he did it quite well, but it wasn't a difficult job. She was a good ship to handle, and I flattered myself that I could have put her alongside just as well or better.

As the *Tekowi* carried only two mates the Old Man always stood the morning eight-to-twelve watch, but apart from that I don't know how he put in the time. On one occasion I got an insight into what must have been his only hobby. We had to land a survey-party on a lonely stretch of the coast. A study of the chart showed that we would have to anchor two miles off-shore and then use one of the boats. A small tidal inlet seemed to offer the best landing-place. I showed Matson its position on the chart and said:

"You'd better study this carefully, Second. You'll be in charge of the boat."

"Did the Old Man say so?" he asked.

"No," I snapped. "I said so."

I don't know how it was, but without ever alluding to my age these two old fellows always made me feel like a mere schoolboy or at best a first-year apprentice.

"I think you'll find the Old Man's taking 'er in himself," Matson ventured mildly. "He ain't ever been ashore in this particular spot, and he's a bit of a crank for pokin' into strange places. Hardly a creek on this coast he ain't been into at some time or another."

He was right of course; he knew the Old Man a lot better than I did. Captain Swinsby took charge of the boat as if it was a perfectly natural thing for the master to be taking over the junior officer's job.

I didn't even remark on the strangeness of his behaviour. Already I'd come to a very satisfactory conclusion about my appointment to the *Tekowi*. Swinsby was a back-number, a has-been, though I doubted if he had ever been much good. As a figure-head or at every-day routine stuff he might be right enough, but in an emergency, in a situation calling for real seamanship and initiative, he'd be absolutely hopeless. Knowing this, the company had looked around for a smart, up-and-coming young officer to take his place. And I was the man. I was very young and too ignorant to have even the beginnings of an inferiority complex in those days. It never occurred to me that I could have been put there to learn something from a man who knew more about the sea than I would ever know.

On our next trip south, trouble leapt on us out of the night as we were threading our way through the narrow, reef-infested inner route between Thursday Island and Cooktown.

Few stretches of navigable water in the world are so confined, so hemmed in by hidden reefs and shoals as this Inner Passage. Countless small islands dot the course, but they are so small, so low-lying, that they are more in the nature of menaces than aids to navigation. There is, perhaps, one favourable thing about this route. The outer reefs of the Great Barrier break up the ocean swell so that inside it is usually calm.

It was calm enough when I handed over the watch to Matson at midnight, though a southerly breeze was springing up, and there was a definite cloud-bank on the southern horizon. The barometer, too, was low for that time of the year, but I had no thought of cyclones as I entered the reading in the log. The cyclone season on the Queensland coast usually extends from late December to March, and this was the first week in November. I nearly bumped into Captain Swinsby as I stepped out of the chart-room. I was wondering why he was on the bridge at midnight on a clear, starry night when he said:

"What's the glass doing, mister?"

I told him the reading and he nodded.

"We're in for a bad blow," he said. "There's a cyclone not far off. You'd better get some sleep while you can, mister. I'll stay here."

If he chose to spend the night on the bridge that was his affair. As for me, I had four hours' sleep coming to me and I wasn't going to waste one minute of them.

For once I awoke without being called, roused from a deep sleep by a steady drumming roar. Obviously the ship was being driven hard, for the engines were going faster than I had ever heard them turn. Their vibrations rattled the cabin bulkhead. But it wasn't only the engines. Another noise was coming from outside. I stepped out on deck and discovered the cause of it. It was wind—wind that struck me like a blow from some huge padded fist, forcing me aft till I was literally running backwards along the deck. I grabbed frantically at a stanchion and brought myself up with a jerk that nearly tore my arms out of their sockets. Rain was driving horizontally along the deck, lashing my body painfully through my thin pyjamas. Clawing from one hand-hold to another I struggled back to my cabin. I dressed hurriedly, pulling seaboots, oilskin and sou-wester over shirt and trousers. The time, I noticed, was three-thirty.

Captain Swinsby and the second-mate were both on the bridge when I arrived. Rain was crashing against the heavy plate-glass of the bridge windows, and the whole bridge structure was vibrating under the wind-pressure. The roar of the heavier gusts made speech difficult, even in this well protected enclosure. If you had anything to say you waited for a lull. Just abaft our beam and very close to us I could see the wet blur of a blinking light—feeble, watery streaks in the blackness of the night. Four quick flashes I counted, and recognized it as the light on Waterwitch Reef.

Edging close to the Old Man I said, "My God, skipper, it's blowing!"

He treated that fatuous remark with the silence it deserved, and moved away to caution the helmsman about his steering.

There was something strange about his appearance, but I couldn't think what it was until he bent over the lighted binnacle. The light glistened on his wet oilskin, but it was his headgear that really attracted my attention. He was wearing his felt hat lashed down with several lengths of spun-yarn tied under his chin in a huge bow. The general effect was ridiculously like an old-fashioned poke-bonnet.

We were groping our way blindly through a maze of reefs. On our port hand lay the imperfectly charted labyrinth of coral that goes to make up the Great Barrier; to starboard were shoals and foul ground. Directly ahead of us lay Bow Reef, a small outcrop of coral marked with a black square beacon. Normally we would alter course as we approached it and pass half a mile off the beacon. On a clear night the turn could easily be made by a bearing on Waterwitch light, but tonight Waterwitch would be no help to us; already the rain was obscuring its quick flashes.

It was a dangerous situation I felt should never have arisen. A prudent, competent master would have anchored in the lee of Waterwitch Reef. But we were barging blindly into the teeth of the worst gale I had ever met with, and instead of a competent master the ship and the lives of all in her were in the hands of this absurd, ineffectual little old man in a poke-bonnet!

Hoping to make him realize the gravity of the situation I moved across and asked him what he intended to do.

"Eh?" he said, glancing up from the lighted compass-card. "Do? Oh, keep on. It's the only thing we can do. We're only making five knots, so we should pick up Bow Reef beacon in daylight."

Five knots! Little more than half our normal speed in spite of the increased engine revolutions! There was no big sea running. We were bucking into a short steep chop, and, because our holds were almost empty, were pounding a little. Certainly that pounding could take a knot or so off our speed, but it wouldn't reduce it to five knots. It could only be the terrific wind-pressure on our high superstructure that was holding us back.

"Do you think we'll ever pick up the beacon, sir?" I asked. "Even in daylight, with this rain?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "It's only coming in squalls at present. It's come on very suddenly. Don't ever remember seeing a bad blow come with so little warning, but with any luck the worst of it won't come for a few hours."

I was going to ask him what he intended doing if it *did* get worse, but he moved away and spoke to the second-mate. Something about standing by, he said. Anyhow, Matson did not go off for his watch below. I don't know what good his presence did. For an hour and a half we didn't see a thing except the faint, wet halo around our mast-head light and the dim shape of our fo'c'sle-head. Occasionally we caught a gleam of white as a wave curled over in a burst of phosphorescence. When the heavy rain-squalls hit us even these nearby things were hidden.

Daylight found us pounding along against driving rain and a wind that was rising in great whooping gusts. A careful check of the log showed that our speed had dropped to four knots. Half an hour later we picked up Bow Reef beacon, a faint square shape rearing itself out of a welter of dirty foam where the breakers swirled across the reef. We were due to alter course again here so as to pass a mile and a half off Ellis Island, but instead the Old Man ordered me to run off a course straight for the island.

Inwardly I said: "Thank God. He's going to anchor in the lee of Ellis." It was obvious that we couldn't keep up this blind groping

for landmarks in the ever-worsening visibility. Sooner or later we would miscalculate our leeway and pile up on a reef. To add to our worries the tide was at three-quarter flood, allowing what must have been a tremendous ocean swell to surge over the outer reefs in a confused, broken sea. The old *Tekowi* was thumping her nose into it and flinging sheets of spray clear over her bridge. Admittedly Ellis Island was far from being an ideal anchorage, but it was a case of any port in a storm.

The man who marked Ellis on the chart as an island must have had a sense of humour, for it is nothing but a narrow sand-strip less than half a mile long and a tenth of a mile wide. The highest point of it is only six feet above high-water. A few stunted bushes grow on the summit, but by far the most outstanding feature of the island is the big black square beacon standing a full twenty feet above the tallest bush.

Approaching Ellis from the north-west, as we were, the island is steep-to, but on the southern and eastern sides a coral reef extends for over two miles. Even at high water when the reef would be covered I felt it would offer us some measure of protection from the force of the sea. And we'd be in need of protection if things got any worse! Since daylight the wind had shifted steadily to the eastward, a sure sign that they would.

"You'll be anchoring in the lee of Ellis Island, I suppose, sir?" I said to the Old Man.

He smiled at me, and from under the brim of his absurd poke-bonnet his blue, watery eyes regarded me with something like pity.

"No, mister," he answered. "I won't." He nodded towards the chart-room. "Come in here and I'll show you what I intend to do." Bending over the chart he picked up the dividers and indicated a tiny inlet on the coast almost opposite Ellis. "Do you see this place? I'm taking the ship in there."

I examined the locality closely. The chart showed shallows extending two miles offshore. It showed outlying reefs, and a shaded section indicated that the mouth of the inlet dried at low water.

"But, my God, skipper!" I exclaimed. "You couldn't get the ship in there! There isn't enough water to get within a mile of the place. Besides, we don't know anything about it, the extent of these reefs or anything."

"I do," he answered. "I took a boat in there once, nearly five years ago. It's a snug little anchorage once you get inside."

Once you get inside! That was just it. It was one thing to take a ship's lifeboat in there in fine weather, but quite another to take a steamer in through those shallows in a howling gale and blinding

rain-squalls. Even if he could see landmarks, how could any man memorize what he'd only seen once, and that five years ago?

The Old Man must have read my thoughts, for he smiled and said, "My memory isn't failing yet, young fellow." He tapped the back of my hand with the dividers. "I'm going to tell you a few things, for your own good. You're young and ambitious. With a few hard knocks and a bit of experience you should make a good seaman. Never forget this: our job is ninety-eight per cent routine, but if we ever lose sight of that other two per cent it's time we swallowed the anchor because, sooner or later, we'll find ourselves called on to make a big decision, one where no previous experience or book of rules can help us. When that time comes we can only weigh the facts carefully, make a decision and stick to it."

He emphasized the point by bringing his fist down with a bang on the chart-table. I looked into his face, and quite suddenly I saw a side of Captain Swinsby I'd never seen before. His blue eyes were just as watery as ever, but behind the moisture they were hard, hard and unwavering. And his jaw! Strange that I'd never noticed that jaw before. It jutted forward aggressively, compressing his mouth in a thin, hard line.

"Ellis Island would never save us from the blow that's coming," he went on quietly. "There's a lot worse to come. If we stay out here and try to battle it out we won't stand a chance. We've got no sea-room. Both anchors and a full head of steam wouldn't keep us from drifting on to the reefs. In the next few hours you're going to see a blow that will tax your powers of comprehension." He stated the facts as calmly as if he'd been announcing his intention of going down to breakfast. "In another hour it will be high water. We're approaching spring tides, which means we'll have an extra nine feet of water over those shallows. We're drawing eight-foot-six aft, so we've got a fair margin of safety. The worst feature of the lot is visibility, but I'm counting on a few breaks in the rain."

"And if we don't get the breaks, sir?"

"If we don't," he said, "it's quite possible that I'll pile the old girl up on a reef, rip the bottom clean out of her." The corners of his mouth twitched upwards in a lopsided, whimsical grin. "You're young and strong. You might get ashore. And then, if you're picked up, you can tell 'em that that old fool Swinsby drove his ship on to a lee shore in spite of your advice to anchor at Ellis."

We stepped out on the bridge, and I couldn't help wondering how we'd ever pick up Ellis Island in that grey waste of tumbled sea and driving rain. I had the impression that we were just pile-

driving up and down in the one place while the tortured sea slid past underneath us, and dirty, ragged clouds streamed overhead. Actually it took us an hour to do three and a half miles from Bow Reef.

At 6.15 we sighted Ellis Island. Perhaps that is not quite correct, for the seas were breaking clean over the tops of the bushes. We had an occasional glimpse of what might have been bushes among the breakers, but we *did* see the black square beacon, a vague, strangely unfamiliar mark that leant crazily over under the terrific wind. That beacon was set in concrete, stayed at the four corners with heavy cables, but even as we stared at it it collapsed and vanished in a sheet of flying spray. And with it went any illusions I had about Ellis Island as a possible anchorage.

Captain Swinsby brought the ship round at once and steadied her on a course of south seventy west. With wind and sea now abaft the beam the *Tekowi's* pounding changed to a sharp wallowing motion. The wind-pressure kept her heeled over to starb'd, but at last she was really moving. Compared with our plodding progress she went fairly roaring along.

Six miles to go! Six miles to what? I wondered. To safety or to certain destruction? The odds, I felt, were too heavy against us. I thought longingly of my life-jacket. It was down in my cabin, but I was hanged if I'd ask permission to get it while that wizened-up, watery-eyed little old man went without one. I glanced from my own seabooted feet to his, and I'm blowed if he wasn't still wearing his slippers!

Captain Swinsby called the second-mate over. "Go for'ard and rouse Chips," he said. "Clear both anchors. You won't hear anything, but keep your eyes on me. When I hold up a hand, let go. Don't try to check your cables. Let 'em run till I show a hand again. And both of you watch out you don't get blown overboard. Understand? You'll be no help to me in the water."

We watched Matson ease himself cautiously down the ladder, and then, after ordering the standby seamen to be ready to work the engine-room telegraph, the Old Man turned to me.

"I'm keeping you with me," he explained, "because you might learn something. Matson never will. Besides, you've got better eyesight than he has and we'll need good eyes. Up top with me. And hang on."

He headed for the ladder leading up to the standard compass with me following. I was young and strong, but I needed all my strength to claw my way up that ladder. I clung to it as a moun-

taineer might cling to a projection on the face of a perpendicular cliff, feeling that if the wind didn't tear me loose it would at least rip the clothes from my body. And always those wretched slippers were two steps above my hands. Heaven knows how they stayed on his feet, but then Heaven knows how that little old man hauled himself up that ladder. Did I say he was frail? He looked it, but his muscles must have had the pliant strength of steel hawsers.

If it was a struggle to climb the ladder it was a continuous battle to stay on the exposed platform of "Monkey Island". I had experienced gales before, and if I thought of them at all it was as impersonal things, strong winds that pressed against you, forcing you to turn your back and hunch your shoulders for protection. But this wind was nothing like that. It was personal in its savage fury. It battered me, mauling me like an infuriated wrestler seeking to tear his opponent apart limb by limb. I grasped the rail with both hands, half expecting it to be ripped out of the deck and go hurtling over the side with me still clinging frantically to it.

Captain Swinsby practically wrapped himself around the standard compass, crouching over it so that he looked as much a part of it as a shellfish glued to its rock. Speech, of course, was impossible. To open one's mouth facing the wind would have invited instant suffocation. An order or a warning shouted down-wind would have been torn to pieces as it left the lips, drowned in the roar of the gale that was like the continuous roll of thunder occasionally rising to a wailing shriek as the wind split itself on the funnel-stays just behind us.

The violence of it combined with the lashing rain was numbing my very brain and depriving me of the power to think. As a ship's officer I was useless, as a spectator I could see a waste of confused and broken grey water, tattered grey clouds that raced past just above our mast-head; and all around us, completely isolating us and blotting out all trace of the land ahead, was a curtain of lashing rain.

I don't know how long I clung there before realizing we were in the shallows. I could feel it in the jerky movements of the ship as if she sensed the bottom close under her keel and was shying away from the danger. The sea was a dirty brown, discoloured by churned-up sand. Directly ahead of us, and so close that I could see the ugly black niggerheads of dead coral half-bared in the troughs of the waves, was a reef. I tried to shout then. The effort was quite useless, of course, but the Old Man had already seen the

danger. His mouth was pressed into the speaking-tube and the ship's head was swinging in obedience to his order.

Our first glimpse of land was as faint and shadowy as a motion-picture projected on to a screen in broad daylight, yet I judged it to be less than half a mile away. Through the rain we glimpsed dim outlines of breakers crashing against a stretch of low coast, a bold tree-clad point and, just to leeward of the point, a narrow inlet, the bar across its entrance a smother of dirty yellow foam.

Captain Swinsby lifted the heavy brass cover from the binnacle and I saw the wind tear it from his grasp and fling it far out to leeward. That cover must have weighed ten pounds, yet it sailed away like a child's toy balloon.

The Old Man wasn't worrying about its loss; he was taking a bearing on the inlet, an unnecessary precaution, as it turned out, for we never lost sight of the opening. A few minutes after we sighted the bar we were on it, really on it, for the old ship thumped down with a jar that fairly rattled her. The next wave lifted her and she dragged herself over. We were in deeper water then, with the inlet swinging in behind the high point to form a small land-locked anchorage.

The *Tekowi* made the turn grudgingly, drifting broadside-on as she brought the wind on her beam. To me it was obvious that she could never fight her way around sufficiently to face that wind. I was wondering why the Old Man didn't give the order to let go the anchors before we were blown ashore when I saw the cables racing silently over the revolving windlass. Who ever heard of ship's cables going down silently? Yet of all the clattering roar they must have been making, not the faintest sound reached us. Along the point trees were bowed almost to the ground, writhing in agony as great limbs were torn from them and tossed across the anchorage like feathers before the gale.

I felt the ship lurch heavily and then straighten up on an even keel. Matson and Chips were screwing up the windlass brakes, I saw, but it wasn't the anchors that had brought her up. She wasn't facing up to them properly. The only other explanation was that we'd run aground. The Old Man was already dragging himself towards the ladder and I wasted no time in following him. Aground or afloat I felt that any longer on that exposed platform and I'd be battered unconscious by the wind.

In the comparative shelter of the lower bridge I struggled to regain my breath and at the same time announce my discovery.

"Skipper," I gasped, "we're aground."

He stood there with one hand on the telegraph, this quaint-looking little old man. Rain dripped from his absurd headgear and trickled down his lined face.

"I hope so," he said. The telegraph was at *Stop*. He jerked the handle to and fro several times and left the indicator at *Finished with engines*. "It's a good blue-mud bottom in here," he added. "That should hold her."

[From *Coast to Coast*, 1949-50, 1950.]

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

WATKIN TENCH

(1758-1833)

LIFE in the early settlement at Port Jackson was a mine of interest to Captain Watkin Tench, of the marines, from the time of his arrival with Phillip until his departure at the end of 1791. Observant and witty, Tench made good use of the journal he kept during his stay. In 1789 he drew on it for his *Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, a lively account of the journey out and of the beginning of the settlement.

The success of his first book, which ran into three editions and was translated into several foreign languages, led him to write a second, *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* (1793). This is an entertaining and surprisingly modern piece of writing, animated by wit and brightened by shrewd choice of incident.

JAMES TUCKER

(1808-66)

[See also *Ralph Rashleigh*]

IN 1827 James Tucker arrived in Sydney under sentence of penal servitude for the term of his natural life. He had had a good education, presumably at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, but on arrival was sent to the agricultural establishment of Emu Plains, across the Nepean River from Penrith, where his experiences provided him with material for part of the novel *Ralph Rashleigh*, from which comes the incident I have called "The Biter Bit".

In 1831 he was a quarryman in the Department of Public Works, but in 1833 secured a post as messenger in the Colonial Architect's office, where he made his way until he was promoted in 1837 to the rank of overseer. In 1839 he lost his ticket but was granted another in 1840 for the district of Maitland. In 1844 he lost this also and was sent as a "special" to Port Macquarie. There he became storekeeper to the Superintendent of Convicts and there he wrote *Ralph Rashleigh* and two plays, as well as several others that have been lost.

In 1846, when the settlement at Port Macquarie broke up, Tucker was granted a ticket of leave; but this, too, he lost and went to Goulburn a prisoner.

After twenty more years alternatively out of and in penal and hospital establishments, he died of "decay of nature" in Liverpool Asylum.

JOHN LANG

(1818-64)

JOHN LANG was the first native writer of fiction. He was born at Parramatta in 1818, and grew up in the society that was built upon the convict assignment system. In 1838 he was sent to Cambridge and became a barrister, returning to Sydney in 1841, where he practised law for a year. As a lawyer he got to know the tricks of the convicts and home-grown law-breakers, and when he settled down in England a few years later to use his leisure time as a writer, he naturally used his knowledge of the colony for a background.

The Forger's Wife (1855) also known as *Assigned to his Wife*, is still a readable novel, even though one is inclined to smile at the melodramatic picture of the old squire forgiving his wilful daughter and revealing that the erstwhile convict is his natural son. Those parts of the yarn that deal with the capture of a gang of bushrangers are well written. Lang packs plenty of violent action and passion into his short novel. His familiarity with the mixing of assigned servants and free immigrants in the earlier part of the century enabled him to paint a clear picture of that bizarre society, when corruption was rife and bribery the order of the day, and when many human beings fell into a condition of slavery.

Just as the beginnings of European civilization in Australia were linked with the penal system, so the beginning of our literature is willy nilly bound up with the behaviour of its victims. Lang did not deal with convict life from the inside, but more with its impingement on free society. He is the forerunner of Caroline Leakey, to name one who knew the "System" at first hand, and of Marcus Clarke, William Astley, William Hay, and Roy Bridges, all writers who depended on research for their materials.

Lang's *Botany Bay* (1859) is our first collection of stories with any claim to literary merit. These tales are vivid, authentic, sometimes amusing, and always interesting. "The Ghost Upon the Rail" is the first account, I think, of the story of Fisher's Ghost. Lang makes a macabre tale of it. "Three Celebrities" is the first narrative of the escape of Pitt, Fox, and Burke—three transportees who dignified themselves with these names—and some female convicts, who built themselves a Happy Valley in the mountains. "Tracks in the Bush" is a frontier story of a settler lost in the bush, overdone deliberately to impress English readers. "Sir Henry Hayes" is the first account of that eccentric Irishman's importation of five hundred tons of Irish soil to build a dyke round his Vacluse estate as a ward against snakes. "Kate Crawford" and "Annie St Felix" deal with the fortunes of two "specials", one in commerce, the other in matrimony. "Music a Terror" is a frontier tale, less intimately connected with convictism than "The Master and His Man", which well illustrates the use Lang made of first-hand acquaintance with penal administration under Bourke and Gipps.

R. P. WHITWORTH

ROBERT PERCY WHITWORTH was born in England in 1831 and migrated to New South Wales in 1855. He lived successively in New South Wales, Queensland, and New Zealand, finally taking up residence in Mel-

bourne, where he became editor of the *Australian Journal*. His principal collections of stories are *Stories Round the Campfire* (1871), *Under the Dray* (1872), *Spangles and Sawdust* (1872), *Beneath the Wattles* (1872), and *Velvet and Rags* (1886).

Whitworth invariably gathers his speakers together in a sort of traditional prologue. There he fixes their characters and creates the background for their story-telling. The settings in which the stories are told are closely related to the titles of the collections except in the case of *Spangles and Sawdust*. In this book the characters are gathered together on a picnic a few miles down the river from Brisbane.

Whitworth's stories have a wide geographical range and adhere accurately to setting. They are told in character, with vocabulary and style to suit. Their idiom is that of Henry Kingsley and Charles Dickens. The author strives to create an Australian atmosphere. It is in the sketches in which natural description bulks largely that he succeeds best in capturing the tone and colour of the Australian landscape. The accuracy of Whitworth's settings is less remarkable than his range of types and selection of incident. He was one of the earliest writers to turn the city larrikin to literary account in a variation of the picaresque conte, his successors, on a larger scale, being Ambrose Pratt and Dyson and, later, Louis Stone. His episodes from the bushranging phase in Australian social development after Rowcroft's *Bushranger in Van Diemen's Land* (1843), are the starting-point for "Rolf Boldrewood". Browne's more realistic treatment is the result of more intimate contact with it—he has himself described the sources of his celebrated characters. Whitworth's bushranging stories are written from the editor's chair, Browne's from the magistrate's bench. Certain weaknesses in construction betray Whitworth's handicap, in the story incorporated in this volume no less than in others. His achievement, nevertheless, is a notable one. The tale selected, from *Under the Dray*, cannot be read without appreciation of the influence of its style and matter upon the better-known writer.

These tales were popular in their day, edition following edition without delay. At that time, before the *Sydney Bulletin* had begun its crusade, these cheap paper-covered collections of tales formed an important landmark in the history of story-telling in Australia.

CAMPBELL MCKELLAR

CAMPBELL MCKELLAR, of Strathkellar, Victoria, whose first volume of short stories was published in Melbourne in 1887, became a celebrity in Europe because of his interest in Balkan politics. All his remaining books were written after he had left Australia and were published in Great Britain. His work in London, Douglas Sladen says, did much to win recognition in England for Australian art.

McKellar practised literature in three genres: the novel, the story, and the drama. His dramatic sketches were published in 1894 in London under the title of *The Old Stradivari and Other Dramatic Sketches*. Of his three novels, *Lothair's Children* (1890), *A Jersey Witch* (1892), and *In Oban Town* (1896), the second and third are interesting for their critical connection with the regional novel developed in France by Pierre Loti, Jean Revel, and René Bazin, and in England by Hardy. His best work is in the story; and

of his stories, his first collection, *The Premier's Secret and Other Stories* (1887)—from which comes the story included here—is better than the second, *Gräfin Rimsky and Other Tales* (1892).

In addition to the title-piece, the first collection contains four striking stories. "A Daughter of the Vikings" is the tragic tale of a nineteenth-century Norsewoman, descendant of a royal house, and Wagnerian in her every lineament. This story has action, vigour, and colour. "A Romance of the Tower", in which a family feud is happily settled when man and maid are accidentally imprisoned together in a cell, is witty, graceful, and urbane. "The Princess's Black Pearls" is the romantic story of a hopeless love affair. The last story "Vergiss-mein-nicht", returns to Australia. Its setting is in a German colony in Victoria. A sentimental narrative, it tells the story of a German girl who dies in the hour of her triumph as she reconciles father and mother after a long estrangement.

This collection of McKellar's tales is as good as anything done in Australia before the rise of the *Bulletin* school. It deserves a better fate than to lie on a library shelf, unread and unknown.

JESSIE CATHERINE COUVREUR—"TASMA"

(1852-97)

JESSIE CATHERINE COUVREUR, the daughter of a Dutch migrant to England, Alfred James Huybers, was born in London and came in infancy to Tasmania. In 1876 she moved with her husband, Charles Forbes Fraser, to Melbourne. About this time she began her literary career with short stories, one of her earliest being that chosen for this anthology, "Monsieur Caloche", which was contributed to the *Australasian* in 1878 and reprinted in *A Sydney Sovereign and Other Tales* (1890). This story reveals her sympathy for the alien immigrant, at sea in a bewildering new world of linguistic and social perplexities. In 1879 Mrs Fraser went to live in Europe, where, in France and Belgium, she made use of her Australian experience in giving lectures and writing articles upon Australian subjects. A sojourn in Australia during 1883 and 1884 was followed by her marriage in 1885 to Auguste Couvreur, a Belgian journalist and politician.

In her subsequent literary career "Tasma" turned to the novel, her first production being *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill* (1889), set in Melbourne and its environs. Its significance here is in its portrait of the clash between old and new in a young society in which distinctions of class and ancestry are subordinate to an aristocracy of merit. Two other novels, less notable than *Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill*, are *Not Counting the Cost* (1895) and *A Fiery Ordeal* (1897).

The title-piece of *A Sydney Sovereign and Other Tales* is a short novel written again round the theme of class distinction. More attractive is the tale, "How a Claim was Nearly Jumped in Gum-Tree Gully", in the same collection, which treats the theme of mateship, painting it as a sentiment stronger than the love of man for woman.

"Tasma" has been freely represented in anthologies and miscellanies, including Mrs Patchett Martin's *Under the Gum Tree* (1890) and A. Patchett Martin's *Over the Sea: Stories of Two Worlds* (1891). The story in this book was also included in Mennell's *In Australian Wilds* the year before it was reprinted in *A Sydney Sovereign*.

WILLIAM ASTLEY—"PRICE WARUNG"

(1855-1911)

WILLIAM ASTLEY took his *nom de plume* from his mother's maiden name, Price, and the aboriginal name for Sydney Cove. He was born in Liverpool and came as a child in 1859 to Victoria, where he was educated. His work as a bookseller led him to journalism, first as proprietor of one newspaper and later as editor of another. His life thenceforth was lived in the newspaper world. In the early eighties he moved to Sydney, where he married in 1885. Labouring under difficulties induced by poor health, he continued the work of Marcus Clarke in recounting stories drawn from the records of the convict system. In all he compiled four books of such tales, *Tales of the Convict System* (1892), *Tales of the Early Days* (1894), *Tales of the Old Regime*, and *The Bullet of the Fated Ten* (1897), and *Tales of the Isle of Death, Norfolk Island* (1898). These were followed by a collection of stories recounting incidents occurring about the Murray River and its affluents, *Half-Crown Bob and Tales of the Riverine* (1898).

Of Astley's convict collections, the first—dedicated "to the memory of Marcus Clarke"—from which our story is drawn, is the most striking. On the title-page are the words of Archbishop Whately, spoken in the House of Lords in 1840: "The Transportation System . . . is a monument such as, I suppose, was never before erected by any people, Christian or Pagan, of combined absurdity and wickedness."

The stories appeared first in the *Bulletin*. When we are reminded by the author that they are "true in essence" and that they are "suggested by, or based upon, fact", we are amazed that Lord Birkenhead was able to write in his notorious preface to *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* (1929):

The evolution of a civilized society is a slow and painful process; the harshness of the laws under which it develops is seldom greater than is dictated by the needs of the community for its protection and peace. There is no just cause to feel shame that such experiences as are here recorded could befall Britishers. One may, perhaps, regard the disappearance of the transportation system, and all that it connoted of human suffering, with relief and satisfaction; but in an historical sense it can be said that the wisdom and justification of that system lay in the incontrovertible fact that it worked well.

Astley writes of his book as an "attempt to describe the subjects of The System"—that unholy alliance of law and crime—"as men and women, and not as chattels—things—numbers". His subsequent words anticipate the attacks of P. R. Stephensen half a century later: "It has been said . . . that the pages which record the penal chapters of Australian history 'should be turned down.' We cannot turn them down, if we would."

It was true of the nineties that the Transportation System had "knitted itself into the fibres of the national being". It is equally true today that it has left its legacy—in tight-lipped comradeship, impatience with the industrial traitor, hatred of tyranny, and fierce resentment of unreasoning authority; in political life; in legal insinuations; in colloquial idiom; and in the belated championship of those simple human rights in the struggle for which not a few of Astley's men and women were committed to a living hell. He looked into prison records with an eye made sharp by the power of human sympathy. He saw the implications of convictism in real terms. To objections

against his resuscitation of those horrible incidents may be brought the words of Browning:

*All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall.*

Astley's book is too powerful to lie long forgotten. It should be reprinted as a constant warning lesson against the injustices of intolerance.

His themes include the desperate, unreasoning rebellion against the moral degradation engendered by the System ("How Muster-Master Stoneman Earned His Breakfast"); the sacrifice of an innocent soldier to the brutality of its jailers ("Lifer Dale" and "Egerton of Ours"); laments for the absence of humanizing influences ("The Convict's Sacrament"); and the hideousness of punishment unjustly administered ("Marooned on the Grummet").

JOHN ARTHUR BARRY
(1850-1911)

JOHN ARTHUR BARRY, who was born in England in 1850 and came to Australia in his early twenties, has written stories set on both sea and land. He had gone to sea at the age of fourteen, and after failure on the diggings returned to a seafaring life until 1879. He then went on the land and became manager of a mixed station. Encouraged by Ernest Favenc, he began contributing stories and sketches to Australian and English periodicals. In 1890 he returned for the best part of the year to London, where his first collection of stories, *Steve Brown's Bunyip and Other Stories*, appeared in 1893. Rudyard Kipling wrote introductory verses to the book. It ran through three editions, the last, illustrated by Lionel Lindsay, being issued in Sydney in 1905; the text of "Number One North Rainbow" is taken from the third edition. Barry returned to Australia to practise journalism and died in Sydney.

In 1896 Barry issued a collection of sea stories, *In the Great Deep*. Although he attempted the novel with *The Luck of the Native Born* (1898) and *A Son of the Sea* (1899) he was more at home with the shorter story, which suited the anecdotal nature of his writing. His sea stories are every whit as good as those set on farm and station or in mine and camp. His dramatic power is lightened by a gleam of humour that sometimes becomes the dominating characteristic, as in the title-piece of *Steve Brown's Bunyip and Other Stories*. Other collections of his short stories, of which *Against the Tides of Fate* (1899) and *Sea Yarns* (1919) may be mentioned, concentrate more markedly on the sea, whereas *Steve Brown's Bunyip* offers an all-round picture of Barry's ability. The publication of a volume of his selected stories would best vindicate the opinion that has led to his representation here. In addition to the title story and that which follows, "Dead Man's Camp", "Two Far South", "The Mission to Dingo Creek", and "A Cape Horn Christmas" possess vigour and maintain interest at a high level.

ERNEST FAVENC
(1845-1908)

EXPLORER and writer, Favenc, born in London in 1845, came to Australia in 1863 after an education at the Middle Temple, Crowley, and Berlin. His exploring activity began in 1865 and continued until 1883. Between those

years he became intimately acquainted with that part of Australia lying within the tropic zone. "Rolf Boldrewood", in his preface to Favenc's first collection of stories, *The Last of Six: Tales of the Austral Tropics* (1893), was able to say truthfully of the man that his name was "a household word among bushmen and bookmen from Albany to Thursday Island", and that to him "the endless solitudes of the 'Never Never' country were familiar as highways".

Browne described the stories as "strange romances which write themselves, often in letters of blood, in the half-unknown, mysterious regions of tropical Australia". I find the choice of the title-story to represent Favenc supported by the appreciation of its realism expressed by Professor E. Morris Miller—who quotes from it in his *Australian Literature* (1940).

"The Last of Six," the opening story, is almost devoid of sentiment. The awesome situation is well-nigh appalling. The desolation of the region and the desolation of the heart are fixed in the phrasing. The very clamminess and reek of the mangroves creep into and through the words.

One of the stories of this book, "The Parson's Blackboy", later appeared in A. G. Stephens's *Bulletin Story Book* (1901) and was repeated in Dr George Mackaness's *Australian Short Stories* (1928). Recalling the dilemma of a parson who is made the innocent sport of a bushman's jest, it is shot through more strongly than any other of his stories with the humour that Favenc could summon to his theme as he willed.

Favenc's exploring expeditions bore literary fruit not only in the story but also in the novel. Every schoolboy of my generation was acquainted with his *History of Australian Exploration 1788-1888* (1888), a work which, while discounted today because of minor breaches of historical accuracy, was to us an enthralling text-book. It mentioned incidents that Favenc worked into two of his novels, *The Secret of the Australian Desert* (1895) and *Marooned on Australia* (1896). Favenc's panegyric of Leichhardt has since been watered down by Alec Chisholm's *Strange New World* (1941). A second worthwhile collection of stories, *My Only Murder, and Other Tales* (1899), maintains the blend of humour, terror, pathos, dramatic action, gripping horror and suspense which makes Favenc one of the best story-tellers of the nineties.

Although the first collection is the finer of the two, a selection from Favenc's stories should be reprinted for the modern reader. Of the other stories in *The Last of Six*, "A Cup of Cold Water" is a grim tale of vengeance set in the seemingly endless bush; "The Rumford Plains Tragedy" is a humorous account of the good fortune attending the Chinese cook upon the death of the station's pet emu; "Spirit-Led" is an eerie fancy bred of the loneliness of the camp-fire; "Pompey" is a tragedy of the clash of black and white on a north Queensland cattle station; "The Story of a Big Pearl" is a fatalistic tale of murder and death following the discovery of a valuable pearl; and "The Missing Super." paints in realistic terms the vengeance taken by the blacks for their ill-usage at the hands of the whites.

LOUIS BECKE

(1855-1913)

GEORGE LEWIS BECKE lives in his books of island stories, which are a true reflection of his predilections and experiences. He was born at Port Macquarie, in New South Wales, and while still a boy made voyages to America

and the South Sea Islands. While scarcely more than a boy he began trading. His exciting adventures about the islands included an encounter with the notorious black-birder, "Bully" Hayes. At the age of twenty-four he left the sea and went gold-mining on the Palmer River in north Queensland. He did not remain long on land. In 1879 he fell in with "Bully" Hayes as supercargo and later faced—successfully—a charge of complicity with Hayes in a Brisbane court. He thereupon set up as an independent trader and gained an intimate knowledge of the islands which he later turned to literary account. After his marriage he went in 1891-2 to Sydney, where under the guidance of Archibald he began contributing to the *Bulletin*.

In 1894 Becke published his first collection of stories, *By Reef and Palm*, introduced with a preface by the Earl of Pembroke, who drew attention to their truth and realism. In the following year a second collection, *The Ebbing of the Tide*, appeared. When a collected edition of Becke's work was published in 1924, these two series appeared in the first volume; it is from this edition that the text of "Ninia" is taken. Among the best stories in *By Reef and Palm* are "Enderby's Courtship", "A Basket of Breadfruit", and "The Revenge of Macy O'Shea". Other stories in *The Ebbing of the Tide* equally as good as "Ninia" are the title-piece, "The Feast of Pentecost", "An Honour to the Service", and a notable tale of passion, "Nell of Mulliner's Camp", set on a mining-field in north Queensland. Becke's best stories are in these two books. Although "Enderby's Courtship" is more compact and possesses more intense dramatic power, "Ninia" more richly realizes his talent for weaving the life of the South Sea islanders and white beach-combers into a striking pattern.

At this time Becke "collaborated" with Rolf Boldrewood in the writing of *A Modern Buccaneer* (1894), and with Jeffrey in *A First Fleet Family* (1895).

From then until his death in 1913 Becke poured forth volume after volume of short stories, interrupted with an occasional novel. Of the latter, *The Adventures of a Supercargo* (1906) and *The Adventures of Louis Blake* (1909) are most significant biographically.

Becke is not a striking novelist. His novels lack cohesion. Their plots are too loose. They possess scant unity of construction, while development of character is alien to his manner.

Of some twelve or thirteen remaining collections of stories and sketches, the *Sketches from Normandy* (1906) relate to his residence on the Continent. Other notable series are *Pacific Tales* (1897); *Rodman the Boatsteerer* (1898), the title-piece of which appears in Volume XI of Sir John Hammerton's *Masterpiece Library of Short Stories*; *Under Tropic Skies* (1904); *The Call of the South* (1908); and *'Neath Austral Skies* (1909). His last book was *Bully Hayes, Buccaneer, and Other Stories* (1913).

Becke has been well represented in anthologies. The first was Lala Fisher's *By Creek and Gully* (1899), followed by A. G. Stephens's *Bulletin Story Book* (1901), in which "Long Charley's Good Little Wife" was reprinted. In 1928 George Mackaness selected "The Fate of the *Alida*" for his *Australian Short Stories*. In the following year his annotated edition of *Louis Becke's Tales of the South Seas* appeared.

HENRY LAWSON

(1867-1922)

HENRY LAWSON, the prince of Australian story-tellers, was born in a tent at the height of a storm on the Grenfell goldfield on 17th June 1867. His father Peter Larsen, a Norwegian sailor-miner-carpenter, built a home at Eurunderree near Mudgee, where at the age of nine young Henry enrolled as a pupil under John Tierney. His mother Louisa Albury, a strong-minded woman of dominating personality, had within the next ten years, upon separating from her husband, moved to Sydney, where she became a pioneer of feminism and a worker for democracy. She there edited *The Dawn* and brought out the first of Henry Lawson's books, *Short Stories in Prose and Verse* (1894). Lawson himself had come to Sydney after working as a house-painter at various places in the Blue Mountains, had learned the trade of coach-painting and had begun contributing prose sketches and verse to *The Australian Worker*, the *Bulletin*, and other liberal periodicals. In Sydney in 1896 Lawson met and married Bertha Bredt, a young Gippsland nurse on holiday there.

In the same year the Lawsons went to Western Australia to try their luck. During that time *While the Billy Boils* (1896) was published and won wide acclamation for Lawson. He was soon back in Sydney and in 1897 went—for the second time—to New Zealand, where *Joe Wilson and His Mates* (1901) was written while he kept the Maori school at Maungamanunu near Kaikoura. His son Jim was born at Wellington a few months after the Lawsons had left Maungamanunu.

Upon their return to Sydney Lawson came under the notice of Earl Beauchamp, Governor of New South Wales, who persuaded and assisted him to go to England. Leaving his many friends and fellow-writers—among them Roderic Quinn, E. J. Brady, John Le Gay Brereton, Victor Daley, Albert Dorrington, Bertram Stevens—he went to England in 1900, the year when *On the Track* and *Over the Sliprails* appeared. Happy for a time, he soon yearned irresistibly for the sunshine of his native land. While in England he published two books of stories and sketches, *The Country I Come From* (1900) and *Joe Wilson and his Mates* (1901). The latter volume, with *While the Billy Boils*, contains the best of Lawson's work. In 1902 a miscellany of prose and verse appeared in London under the title of *Children of the Bush*. The prose section has usually been grouped since 1907 under the separate titles of *Send Round the Hat* and *The Romance of the Swag*.

In 1903 Lawson was back in Australia. His best work was behind him. He fell upon evil days. Short of money, careless, improvident, generous to the extreme, a victim of his weaknesses, he wrote one more series of stories reflecting the inward fire of the man, *The Rising of the Court* (1910). His simple soul became lost in the maze of the world. An uncongenial post as a clerk gave him hours of intense spiritual agony which issued in eccentric behaviour distressing to his friends and ludicrous to the onlooker. He was in 1910 rescued by E. J. Brady and taken for a sojourn to Mallacoota Inlet. In 1912 Lawson was still in Sydney, living a precarious and lonely estranged existence. Articles and verse still came from his pen, but his clarity of vision was fading, his imagination becoming tarnished and amorphous. In 1916 he was placed on a small farm at Leeton by the Government of New South Wales, his duties being to bring the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Scheme into his writings. In 1921—back in Sydney—he became seriously ill and was taken

by his friends to hospital. He died on 2nd September at Abbotsford and was given a State funeral.

The occasion of his death called forth many tributes to his deep humanity and literary genius. A collection of reminiscences edited in 1931 by his daughter and John Le Gay Brereton, *Henry Lawson: by His Mates*, indicated the esteem in which he was held by those of his generation who knew and walked with him. Fred J. Broomfield's *Henry Lawson and His Critics* (1931) elevated him to the rank of Maupassant, Burns, Walt Whitman, Kipling, and Bret Harte. David McKee Wright had in 1918 called him "the first articulate voice of real Australia". Nettie Palmer grouped him in 1924 with Chekhov, and in 1930 H. M. Green reiterated his strong Australianism.

EDWARD DYSON

(1865-1931)

EDWARD GEORGE DYSON was born on the mining field at Morrison, Victoria. His boyhood was spent there and at Bendigo, Ballarat, and Clunes; so that he early became intimately acquainted with gold-mining in all its stages. He left school at the age of thirteen and went to work as a whimboy. He followed mining in Tasmania and Victoria during his youth, abandoning it at the age of twenty for journalism. In 1886 he joined the staff of *Life*, Melbourne, as sub-editor. He soon made his mark as a colourful writer of verse and prose, one of his earliest stories, "A Golden Shanty", forming the title-piece of the miscellany of *Bulletin* contributions edited by Archibald and Broomfield in 1890. In this volume also appeared his "Mr and Mrs Sin Fat" and "The Washerwoman of Jacker's Flat", both of which were included in his first collection of stories, *Below and On Top* (1898). Many of the stories in *Below and On Top*, including "After the Accident", were reprinted in *The Golden Shanty* (1929), the last book he issued.

Under the influence of Bret Harte, Dyson cultivated his power in verse. In *Rhymes from the Mines and Other Lines* (1896) is included the immortal "Old Whim Horse", intensely vivid and reminiscent of his boyhood experience. His verse is represented in most Australian anthologies, notably *The Bulletin Reciter* (1901) and Walter Murdoch's *Oxford Book of Australasian Verse* (1918) in the latter case with "Peter Simson's Farm" and "The Worked-out Mine".

After writing two novels, *The Gold Stealers* (1901), in picaresque vein, and *In the Roaring 'Fifties* (1906), a more ambitious romance, Dyson turned to the city, and in *Fact'ry 'And's* (1906) concentrated upon the larrikin class which had developed in Melbourne since Whitworth first noted it. Ambrose Pratt had published *King of the Rocks* (1900) and in an article on "Push Larrikinism in Australia" in *Blackwood's* in 1901 had drawn attention to its social significance. He made further literary use of his research in *The Great Push Experiment*.

After Dyson, Louis Stone in *Jonah* (1911) returned to the push for his inspiration (see *Twenty Australian Novelists*). Dyson's stories are linked into a series in novel form, as are Steele Rudd's in *On Our Selection* (1899) (see *The Australian Novel*). His characters are life-like, his treatment humorous and zestful. A further series, *Benno and Some of the Push* (1911), was followed by a resuscitation of earlier work in *Spats' Fact'ry: More Fact'ry 'And's* (1912).

Archibald and Broomfield's *Golden Shanty* (1890) was the first miscellany to include Dyson's work. A. G. Stephens selected "The Funerals of Malachi Mooney" for *The Bulletin Story Book* (1901). "A Golden Shanty" reappeared in Mackaness's *Australian Short Stories* (1928) and Clayfield's *Modern Short Stories* (1940).

ALBERT DORRINGTON

(1871-)

ALBERT DORRINGTON, who was born in England in 1871 and educated in Birmingham, came to Australia in his youth. After varied experiences in Melbourne and Adelaide and—as a hawker and canvasser—in the back country of New South Wales and Queensland as well as in north Queensland, he took up residence in Sydney in 1895.

His life on the road and his reading of Dickens are mirrored in the story included here, although the central figure owes to Dickens only his physical form. His temperament is diametrically opposite to that of the malicious villain of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. "Quilp" comes from Dorrington's first volume of stories, *Castro's Last Sacrament, and Other Stories* (1900), the title-piece of which was reprinted in Mackaness's *Australian Short Stories* (1928). It offers an illustration of Dorrington's power in emotional prose. As Mr H. M. Green has already pointed out, Dorrington strives for emotional crises. He is capable, says Green, "of greater emotional achievement than either Becke or Favenc"; and adds that "on the other hand, he is never far from falsity and the palpably artificial". This is a sound summing-up. In Dorrington's manner there is a thinly veiled glitter of tinsel and a noticeable smack of melodrama.

Another outstanding story from this collection is the back-country drama "A Bush Tanqueray"—included by A. G. Stephens in the *Bulletin Story Book* (1901)—which tells an old tale in a new setting.

The year after his return to England in 1907 to pursue a literary career, Dorrington's first novel, *And the Day Came*, appeared. His subsequent work in prose fiction consists of some half-dozen novels of mystery and terror and four novels set in and about Australia. The most notable is *Children of the Cloven Hoof* (1911), a romance of south Queensland which is intimate and lively enough to edify our own generation. Dorrington's later short stories, in *Stories to the Master* (1926), do not rise to the level of his pathematic earlier work.

RODERIC QUINN

(1867-1949)

RODERIC JOSEPH QUINN, of Irish extraction, was born in Sydney and educated at the Marist Brothers' High School, Darlinghurst. After a few months as a teacher in a country school he took up journalism in Sydney and began contributing to the *Bulletin* and other periodicals.

Quinn cared more for the cultivation of his poetic gift than for the development of his talent as a story-writer. In 1897 his first book of verse, *The Hidden Tide*, awoke his fellows to the depth of his emotion and the charm of his melody. It was followed in 1901 by *The Circling Hearths*. In the same year the story which brings him into this volume was reprinted in A. G. Stephens's *Bulletin Story Book*.

A task awaiting completion is a collection of Quinn's prose work, contributed mainly to the *Bulletin* and the *Lone Hand*. It is one that should be undertaken; the general reader and the student who has no access to an extensive periodical library have scant opportunity of measuring the real merit of Quinn's work in prose.

In 1904 his verse was reprinted in *A Southern Garland*, and gave rise to a mild critical controversy on the poetic message Australia should give to the world. His "Camp Within the West", the finest poem he has written, has appeared in many anthologies of Australian verse.

Mostyn Stayne (1897) was Quinn's only attempt at the novel.

BARBARA BAYNTON

(1862-1929)

BARBARA JANET KILPATRICK, of Scone, New South Wales, was three times married, her literary name being derived from her second marriage, in 1890 to Dr Thomas Baynton. After a short residence in Queensland during the eighties she went to live in Sydney, where she began contributing to the *Bulletin*. "The Tramp", which first appeared between covers in Stephens's *Bulletin Story Book*, and which was originally called "The Chosen Vessel", is one of the grimmest pieces in Australian literature. Its unrelieved realism, rising to a climax of horror expressed in a few harsh words, brings to mind Kuprin's narrative technique; although it is, of course, impossible that Kuprin and unlikely that Chekhov exercised any influence on her. She is more likely to have studied the work of Maupassant, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Edgar Allan Poe and one wonders whether she ever read Ambrose Bierce's *In the Midst of Life* (1891).

Whatever her influences, she presents undiluted tragedy, stark as Webster's, though less far-reaching in its moral consequences.

"The Tramp" appeared also in Barbara Baynton's collection, *Bush Studies* (1902) and was included in Mackaness's *Australian Short Stories* (1928). *Bush Studies* was re-issued in 1917 as *Cobbers*.

In her novel *Human Toll* (1907) Barbara Baynton offers no relief from the sombre tone of her short stories. It is a depressing work and—unlike Dostoevsky's—lacks the power of arousing sympathy for its morbid characters lost in a confused maze of bitter cynicism and pathognomonic speculation.

After the death of her second husband Barbara Baynton removed to England, where she married Lord Headley in 1921. Her death occurred in Melbourne.

MRS CAMPBELL PRAED

(1851-1935)

[See also *Twenty Australian Novelists*]

EXAMINATION of Mrs Campbell Praed's copious literary remains confirms the title to celebrity conferred on her by Dr E. Morris Miller. During a life of rich and vigorous social and intellectual activity, she produced some forty-two works of prose fiction, among them several notable volumes of sketches and short stories, *Australian Life* (1885), *Dwellers by the River*

(1902), *The Luck of the Leura* (1907), *Stubble Before the Wind* (1908), and *A Summer Wreath* (1909). In one of the stories of *A Summer Wreath*, "The Bushman's Love-Story", she refers to the story by Henry Lawson included in this volume.

Outwardly placid, the life of Rosa Caroline Murray-Praed was marked by spiritual crises that nourished the seed of her subsequent literary activity. Through a long and tragic life she threw back the challenge of Fortune with high courage. Born on Bromelton station, on the Logan River, Queensland, in 1851, and brought up on three stations and in Brisbane, she married Arthur Campbell Praed in 1872. The Praeds went to live on a station on Curtis Island, during which time their daughter Matilda and eldest son Bulkley were born. Soon afterwards the station failed and the family moved to England. Two more sons, Humphrey and Geoffrey, were born to Mrs Praed before 1880.

Mrs Praed had as a girl been of a literary turn of mind and domestic circumstances urging her to gain an independent income, she sent *An Australian Heroine* for publication. Meredith offered her wise counsel—his very words are used in a later work, *The Scourge Stick* (1898)—and after revision the book was published in 1880 under her maiden name. From then until 1916 Mrs Praed continued to write, drawing intimately upon her own experiences and those of her family and acquaintances for her material. Her close and spiritual friendship with a little-known English writer, Annie Harward, domestic estrangements and family disasters, subsequent separation from Campbell Praed, literary collaboration with Justin McCarthy, her attachment to spiritualism and her belief in reincarnation may all be traced in the novels she published.

It may be said that her earlier work leads up to *Nyria* (1904), a non-Australian work, and that her later work looks back to it. That almost all her volumes of short stories appeared after that date is due to influences other than occult. She draws for her Australian stories upon her own experiences and those of other members of the Queensland family circle. Of the tales thinly strung together in *The Luck of the Leura*, for example, she tells us that the one included in this volume is true; while "A Scare of the Blacks" relates to an actual raid on a station in the Burnett district, where she was as a child and "The Doctor's Yarn" recounts an incident from life.

A notable point in Mrs Praed's writings is her attitude to the Australian aborigines. She firmly believed that the vice and cruelty of degenerate whites caused most of the friction between white and black. In her books there is abundant evidence of a fair estimate of the intelligence and fidelity of the natives. She was probably one of the earliest Australian writers to do justice in fiction to those characteristics—and wrongs—which demand the attention of Federal legislators today.

Mrs Praed died in London in 1935, four years after completing her exhaustive *Soul of Nyria*, in which she expounds the basis of the earlier novel.

E. S. SORENSON

(1869-1939)

EDWARD SYLVESTER SORENSON was born of mixed Norse and Australian parentage at Dyraaba, near Casino, New South Wales, in 1869. At the tender age of eight he began earning his living as a cowboy, and he left home when but nine years of age to live with a farmer. His education at

Greenridge Public School was spasmodic: in his own words, he attended school "between corn-planting and corn-pulling time—if there was no chipping to do". In 1883 he was apprenticed to a carpenter in Casino and continued his education at a night-school. Two years later he was stock-riding. His subsequent life was spent farming and dairying, stock-riding, bullock-driving, droving, working in a butter-factory, waltzing Matilda, gold-digging, and acting as rouseabout on Stony Desert stations. During 1900-1 he was a publican at Tibooburra and acted as secretary of the local Jockey Club.

Encouraged by J. F. Archibald, Sorenson began his literary career by contributing to the *Bulletin*. He extended his range with verse, sketches, stories, and articles in the *Sydney Mail*, the *Town and Country Journal*, *Melbourne Punch*, the *Australasian*, and the *Queenslander*. Many of these have never been collected; but a series appeared in book form in *Quinton's Rouseabout and Other Stories* (1908). The title-piece is a love story set on a Victorian station. "Under the Gum Tree", which introduces the quizzical figure of Murty Brown, ranks with "The Case of Black Eckert" as the best work in the book. "The Station Spy" relates in lighter vein an incident rising out of the old feud between squatters and selectors. "Bandy Hollow" links love and cattle-duffing in a story with a romantic dénouement. Murty Brown reappears in the book named after him and published in 1925, which relates a series of incidents in his breezy career on the track. *Chips and Splinters* (1919) is a collection of prose sketches and verse.

In addition to these and the simple novel *The Squatter's Ward* (1908), Sorenson wrote three books of nature stories and sketches which reflect his enthusiasm as a naturalist and his activity as a member of the Royal Australian Ornithologists' Union and fellow of the Royal Zoological Society. *Friends and Foes in the Australian Bush* (1914) was followed by the better-known *Spotty the Bower-Bird and Other Nature Stories* (1921).

Beyond representation with an early story—one below his best standard—in Stephens's *Bulletin Story Book* (1901) and in two early unimportant collections, Sorenson appears to have been undeservedly neglected by reputable anthologists. His stories are told in easy natural fashion, with a leaning towards the periodic style: almost all maintain interest by reserving the climax until the dénouement is reached. The weakest are those which fail at this point by tailing off aimlessly or those which present an inartistic attempt at burlesque.

RANDOLPH BEDFORD

(1868-1941)

RANDOLPH BEDFORD, the original of Henry Lawson's "Jack Cornstalk", was born in Sydney, where he attended the Newtown Public School. At the age of twenty he entered journalism as a reporter for the Broken Hill *Argus*, which he left in the following year to join the Melbourne *Age*. In 1891 his robust personality sent him wandering throughout Australia writing as a free-lance. He followed mining in Australia and New Guinea and danced about the world after the manner of Chorley's "Roamer".

A memorial of his Mediterranean travels exists in his reprint of *Bulletin* contributions, *Explorations in Civilization* (1916). Two novels, *True Eyes and the Whirlwind* (1903) and *The Snare of Strength* (1905), belong to his early period. "The Whirlwind" is an epithet for Bedford himself, the hero of the

first, Billy Pagan, mining engineer, whose name provided the title for a sketch-book of Bedford's mining experiences in Australia published in 1911.

In 1917 Bedford became a member of the Queensland Legislative Council; upon its abolition in 1922 he was elected representative for Warrego in the Legislative Assembly. He remained a member of the Queensland Parliament until his death. Part of his unfinished autobiography, which is marred by patchiness, was published posthumously as *Naught to Thirty-Three* (1943).

Bedford's short stories have not been collected. His "Fourteen Fathoms by Quetta Rock" was reprinted in George Mackaness's *Australian Short Stories* (1928) and in *Australian Short Stories* (1951), selected by Walter Murdoch and H. Drake-Brockman. His "Language of Animals" may be read in Nettie Palmer's *Australian Story Book* (1928). "To Pay Paul" comes from the *Low Hand*.

A. A. D. BAYLDON

(1865-)

ARTHUR ALBERT DAWSON BAYLDON was born at Leeds in 1865 and educated at the Leeds Grammar School. He had already published two volumes of verse when he came to Australia in 1889. He entered journalism in Brisbane and in 1897 printed a collection of *Poems*. His varied occupations included those of tea-merchant, canvasser, private secretary, lecturer, and advertising script writer. He was at one time a well-known swimmer. He lives at present in Sydney.

Bayldon's verse has received more attention from critics than his prose. His sonnet on Marlowe is reprinted in Serle's *Australasian Anthology* (1927). His stories were collected in *The Tragedy Behind the Curtain and Other Stories* (1910) from several periodicals, including the *Bulletin*, the *Sydney Mail*, the *Sydney Worker*, *Steele Rudd's Magazine*, and *Australian Country Life*.

This collection has been adversely criticised by Dr E. Morris Miller, who considers that the stories are patchy and taper off tamely. Neither Nettie Palmer nor Mr H. M. Green has referred to them, while Vance Palmer's collection of articles by A. G. Stephens in his *A. G. Stephens: His Life and Work* (1941) contains nothing to indicate the Red Pagan's views. Yet they reveal no slight power in the creation of atmosphere. Standing outside the circle of his characters in dramatic objectivity, Bayldon is able to enlarge the reader's heart with sympathy for them. What is more, there is in these stories evidence of artistry in the way they represent intensity of passion and pathos.

In its matter the title-story reminds one of so many of Pushkin's themes, while the sincerity of its half-pathetic bitterness brings it within the possible range of Chekhov's influence. "Document in a Mirror", a macabre tale of an Italian beauty fallen in with the drug traffic in Sydney, stands nearer to Poe. "Dr Graham's Great Experiment" recounts the grotesque experiences of a poet who becomes a subjective factor in a fanciful pseudo-philosophical experiment. "Benson's Flutter for a Fortune" is a photographic excerpt from the world of the diver in north Queensland. "Thirst", a realistic representation of a mental experience, carries its action forward in psychological terms. The moving "Triumph of Faith" provides in its title a characterization of the story selected for inclusion here. "Ned's Return" is an exposition of the Shakespearean text, "The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance." Pathos is the moving sentiment in "Waiting", which deals with a broken romance

and a broken memory; "A Pawn of Fate's", telling a story of death riding in the train of a poet's emotional regeneration; "The Invisible Enemy", in which paternal love sacrifices itself on the altar of Chance; and "A Study in White and Yellow", wherein maternal love, triumphant in death, works a moral regeneration.

Neither does Bayldon lack humour. His clever parody of Dickens, "Little Paul", may be linked with "An Experience of Old Yorkie's" in illustrating its ironic overtones.

The collection closes with three short fantasies related to the mystery of life and death, the inspiration of man, the vision of poetry, and the enigma of philosophy.

It would appear that Bayldon has been undeservedly neglected by the critic and anthologist. The reappearance of this collection would probably be hailed by the reader of today, who would see in Bayldon's stories qualities which would assure them of a new lease of life.

JAMES EDMOND

(1859-1933)

JAMES EDMOND was born in Glasgow and educated at a private school until the age of twelve, when he began to earn his living. In 1878 he migrated to New Zealand. Four years later he went to Queensland, where he served on the staff of the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* for a short period in 1885. In 1886 he joined the staff of the Sydney *Bulletin* and from 1892 to 1903 was financial editor, leader writer, dramatic critic and later sub-editor. In 1903 he succeeded Archibald as editor and carried on the traditions formulated by his predecessor. During this time he had made use of his Australasian experiences in the composition of short stories and sketches that won him a reputation as the leading humorist of his day. His earliest appearance in readily accessible book form was in Archibald and Broomfield's *Golden Shanty* (1890), with contributions under his own name and that of "Titus Salt". Professor Cowling and Frank Wilmot selected one of these, "Up a Northern River", for inclusion in their anthology, *Australian Essays* (1935).

In 1901 A. G. Stephens reprinted in his *Bulletin Story Book* "A Row in Our Boarding-House", which Mr H. M. Green conjectures may have suggested the mildly satirical boarding-house sketches of Ernest O'Ferrall, collected in *Bodger and the Boarders* (1922). In 1913 Edmond issued *A Journalist and Two Bears*, which takes its title from the opening story. The witty dedication is an indication of what the reader may expect in this collection of tales, sketches, and verse from the *Bulletin* and the *Lone Hand*. Most of the stories have an Australasian background—"Todd's Clothes"; "A Midsummer Night's Idyll"; "The Three Skeletons"; and the three already mentioned. Others are derived from his travels abroad—"In the Land of the Unspeakable"; "Barrios, Consul for Galatia". The remaining pieces are purely imaginative—"The Great Experiment"; "A History of the World"; and, doubtless, "The Girl in the Turkish Bath".

Those which are, as Edmond alleges, based on "a shred or two of fact", are pervaded by the writer's humour. "A Row in Our Boarding-House" and "The Curse of the Lost Soul Mine" are in Edmond's richest vein. It was noticed, after the latter had been chosen for inclusion here, that "despite its apparent improbability, [it] is possibly a little closer to actual fact than

any of the others". It is to be suspected—those who knew Edmond could affirm or deny—that its author enjoyed perpetrating a hoax. His stories are studied in construction. The humorous effect springs as much from the writer's attitude to incident as from his method of chronicling it. He possesses a copious vocabulary and power of sustained periphrasis. At times he brings Mark Twain to mind. His stories form an important link in the chain of Australian humour. In this illustration of his office he provides, too, a bond with the many writers whose pens he directed and whose technique he developed.

HARLEY MATTHEWS

(1899-)

HARLEY MATTHEWS, born in Sydney in 1889 and educated at the Sydney Boys' High School, entered law but abandoned it in 1914 for service in the A.I.F. He returned to Australia severely wounded in 1917, and after recovering, joined the staff of the *Sydney Sun*, to which he contributed a series of stories and sketches. These were collected with three others from the *Lone Hand* to form the volume *Saints and Soldiers* (1918). After a sojourn of two years in the United States as a free-lance journalist, Matthews returned to Australia and became a wine-grower at Moorbank, New South Wales. He now lives at Ingleburn.

Saints and Soldiers is Matthews's only collection of stories, although he has contributed others to periodical literature. His poetry, published chiefly in *Under the Open Sky* (1912) and *Vintage* (1938), has earned appreciative commendation.

The opening sketch of *Saints and Soldiers*, "The Music of Life", is an intimate resumé of the impact of the World War of 1914-18 on the life of the soldier. Matthews paints his characters to the life. The title-piece possesses a salty humour that rings a bell with the Australian reader. Sometimes his humour is hard, as in "Swan Song", or ironic, as in "The Poverty of Riches", or sardonic, as in "Why Ikey Turned" and "The Best Policy". In "The Dinkum Australian" he is in quieter vein; while he passes through the genuine pathos of "A Man and a Girl", "The Great Gamble", and "The Higher Finance" to a realistic portrayal of the brutality of war in "The Test of Courage".

DOWELL O'REILLY

(1865-1923)

DOWELL PHILIP O'REILLY, son of Canon O'Reilly, was born in Sydney in 1865, and was educated at the Sydney Grammar School. Upon his father's death in 1882 he and his brother Thomas assisted their mother in a small school at Hayfield near Parramatta. During this time he contributed verse and prose sketches to the *Bulletin* and in 1885 issued a slender book of verse, *Australian Poems* (1885), followed by *Pedlar's Pack* (1888), a miscellany of verse and prose. In *Knocking Round* (1930), a sketch of the young Dowell O'Reilly is given by John Le Gay Brereton, who in 1895 "drifted haphazard through Tasmania" with him and got to understand his geniality and kindness.

From 1894 to 1898 O'Reilly was member for Parramatta in the State Legislative Assembly and introduced the first resolution establishing female suffrage to be carried in that Parliament. In 1895 he married Eleanor McCulloch; his second wife was his cousin Marie Miles, who after his death published his letters to her in *Dowell O'Reilly from his Letters* (1927). From 1898 to 1909 he was a master of the Sydney Grammar School, during which time he continued to contribute to the *Bulletin*, the *Sydney Sun*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Bookfellow*, the *Lone Hand*, and other periodicals.

In 1910, after a second bid, this time unsuccessful, to enter Parliament, he was appointed an officer of the Commonwealth Taxation Department.

O'Reilly's selected prose, *Tears and Triumph* (1913) and *Fivecorners* (1920), were reprinted, with a selection from his poetry, *Illusions*, in one volume. From it the text of the poignant "Twilight" has been taken. It was first printed in the *Bulletin*.

For her 1928 anthology Nettie Palmer selected "His Photo. on the Wall", the tragic-comic reflections of an old couple whose son has been killed on Gallipoli. "Bulldogs" was reprinted in Mackaness's *Australian Short Stories* (1928). Other prose pieces which maintain a high emotional level are "Black Peter's Last Kiss", the grim little story of a woman's betrayal of her bush-ranger lover; "Ancestors", two horror stories in the vein of Edgar Allan Poe, and "Innocence", a moving delineation of an old man's recollections. Of the remaining stories, "Out West" recounts a series of incidents from the experience of an outback parson, and "Thistledown" presents ironically the old theme of the eternal triangle.

O'Reilly's selected prose remains as slight; but his phrasing is so delicate, his sense of language so keen, and his appreciation of beauty so true, that their permanent place in Australian literature is assured.

H. E. RIEMANN

(1884-)

HERBERT ERNEST RIEMANN was born at Clermont, Queensland, in 1884 and after an indifferent education in boyhood had a varied experience of station life. From coastal trading in Queensland he went about 1907 to West Australia, where he engaged in pearl-fishing off the north-west coast.

In the preface to *Nor-West o' West* (1924), Riemann writes: "Long before aeroplanes droned through those faraway skies—before the motor-cars of station-owners purred along those almost endless highways, or shearers flashed across the country on motor-bicycles—the writer lived a happy life in 'port' and 'up-river', sleeping where night overtook him and growing fat on the very roughness of it."

"These stories," he continues, "have been written to commemorate his sojourn in that Great Lone Land, the Nor-West of Western Australia."

They were first contributed to the *Lone Hand*, the *Bulletin*, the *Sydney Mail*, and the *Western Mail* (Perth). All are set in or about Peepingee, a small coastal port inhabited by a polyglot population, and deal with the activities of the same characters in a way which gives an atmosphere of unity to the collection. A popular story from the series is "Copper Jack's Alibi", which was reprinted in Nettie Palmer's *Australian Story Book* (1928). Especially noticeable for their dry humour are "A Golden Opportunity", "The Parson's Crime", "A Bed of Rubies" and a vignette of female fickleness,

"The Right Thing". Riemann is in more serious vein in "The Hospitality of Big Hat"; while "The Man Who Prayed" is a powerful reminiscence of the grim story of the *Méduse*.

Riemann never strives for effect. His action is swift and his narrative straightforward. He gets his atmosphere in sharp strokes that bring his hard-living characters into a bright light.

MARY SIMPSON

MARY SIMPSON—"Weeroona" of the *Bulletin*—a native of Stawell, Victoria, who before her marriage was Mary Williams, came of English West-country stock. In many of her stories she avails herself of her intimate knowledge of the speech and mannerisms of Cornish immigrants. It was during her early days in Melbourne, after the death of her father—which left the family in parlous financial circumstances—that her sister sent one of her sketches to the *Bulletin*. Thereafter she contributed regularly to it and to the *Woman's Mirror*. The pen-name she adopted is reminiscent of residence for a time near Lake Weeroona (Bendigo). Besides stories and sketches she has written light one-act plays for amateur production.

In 1926 she collected a series of stories contributed to the *Bulletin* in *Tell Tale Stories from the "Bulletin"*, from which "The Backslider" has been taken. Another included in it, "Santa Claus", was reprinted in 1928 in both Nettie Palmer's and George Mackaness's anthologies.

Mary Simpson's sketches and stories are excerpts from life in city, suburb, and country town. They are based upon everyday affairs such as the activities of the Salvation Army ("Where the Big Drum Grows"); events in the home ("A Domestic Interlude", "Boarders"); and the trials of immigrants of varied caste and colour ("The Discomfiture of Councillor Bangs", "The Shirt and the Heathen"). Almost all abound in broad humour and are marked by sharp characterization.

VERNON KNOWLES

(1899-)

VERNON FRANK KNOWLES, son of Major F. L. Knowles, Paymaster of the South Australian Military Forces, was born in Adelaide and educated at the Pulteney Grammar School and the University of Western Australia, which he left without taking a degree. His first work, in verse, is of slight consequence except as an indication of his introspective character.

His genius is best revealed in three books of stories and sketches that explore the world of reverie and fancy. The title-piece of the first, *The Street of Queer Houses and Other Tales* (1925), is an allegory depicting the spirit triumphant. *Here and Otherwhere* (1926) was followed by *Silver Nutmegs* (1927), the most satisfying of his books. "The City of All Cities", included here, is in his richest vein. In *Silver Nutmegs* there occurs also the satirical parable of "The Ladder", which was reprinted separately in 1929. Through inordinate curiosity a village is depopulated as its people climb this magic ladder and disappear into the blue. "The Great Onion", describing a pro-

fessor's experiment that brings imminent disaster upon Great Britain, is his most successful satire. "The River and the Road", which is akin to "The City of All Cities", is a delightful fairy tale.

The appositeness of Knowles's allegory and the beauty of his imagery appeal to both mind and heart. His unfettered imagination provides him with rich designs; while his humour, ironic and satirical, possesses a flavour of bizarrerie that gives it an unusual appeal.

KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD

(1884-)

[See also *The Australian Novel*]

KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD was born at Levuka, Fiji, and came in infancy to Australia. She received part of her education at the South Melbourne College, of which John Bernard O'Hara was at the time principal. After some journalistic experience in Victoria and New South Wales, she worked for six years in London as a free-lance.

Her first work in prose fiction was *The Pioneers* (1915). Three outstanding novels from her hand are *Working Bullocks* (1926), *Coonardoo* (1929), and *Haxby's Circus* (1930).

Her first book of stories, *Kiss on the Lips* (1932), is set chiefly in the out-back, although the title-piece is a slum vignette indicative of its author's broad humanity. "The Curse", which was included in the *Centenary Gift Book* (1934), is an artistic cameo in a purified impressionistic style. "The Cooboo" appeared in both Nettie Palmer's and George Mackaness's 1928 anthologies. In the latter also is "The Grey Horse". Of the remaining stories, "The Swop" is quietly humorous; and "White Kid Gloves" relates the sequel to a war episode in Egypt.

A second book of Katharine Prichard's short stories is *Potch and Colour* (1944).

Bush, farm, station, mine, slum, and the track, with all the varied human types that live and toil there, provide her with themes and backgrounds. Her treatment is realistic, but not brutal; kind, but not sentimental. Her work is pervaded with a glow of compassion and possesses an unmistakable Australian atmosphere.

ERNEST O'FERRALL

(1881-1925)

ERNEST FRANCIS O'FERRALL, who contributed to the *Bulletin* under the pen-name of "Kodak", was born in East Melbourne and educated at the Christian Brothers' College there. After a little commercial experience he joined the staff of the *Bulletin* in 1907, becoming well known as a writer of whimsical and mildly satirical short stories. He collected a series of

humorous city pieces under the title of *Bodger and the Boarders* (1921), derived from the impulsive central character and his associates. One of these stories, "The Lobster and the Lioness", reappeared in Mackaness's *Australian Short Stories* (1928).

The text of the story included here is taken from a posthumous collection issued from the *Bulletin* office in 1933, *Stories by "Kodak"*. In it a wider and more satisfying selection from O'Ferrall's work is presented. He takes his readers through the streets and lanes of the city, into the cheap residential, the park, the eating-house, and the office, in a series of tales which move easily and naturally. His stories reveal a sympathetic appreciation of the eccentricities of human behaviour.

LES ROBINSON

(1886-)

LES ROBINSON, a native of Sydney, where as a boy he attended various private schools, evinces a talent that is distinctive for humour and fantasy. Much of his boyhood was spent out of doors. He carried the propensity forward into later years and it permeates the greater part of his work. In his youth he worked unhappily as a junior clerk and drifted subsequently through a series of occupations which took him into a variety of offices and warehouses. This existence, though seemingly aimless and often irksome, was not to be without its compensations, as may be glimpsed in many of the contributions he later made to Sydney periodicals. These contributions were made chiefly to the *Triad*, the *Bulletin*, the *Sunday Times*, *Art in Australia*, and *Smith's Weekly*.

His first collection in book form was *The Giraffe's Uncle* (1933), in which a love of outdoor life plays with *naïveté* upon a variety of subjects that range from complete nonsense to extravaganza. "The Week I Worked", "The Removal", and "Complete Rest" are informed with his ingenious artlessness.

VANCE PALMER

(1885-)

[See also *The Australian Novel*]

VANCE PALMER was born at Bundaberg and educated there and at the Ipswich Boys' Grammar School. After some experience in journalism in Brisbane he went to London as a free-lance writer. On returning to Australia he worked as tutor and book-keeper on a Queensland cattle station. A second visit to London followed, during which he married Nettie Higgins of Melbourne. Since his return to Australia Palmer has written consistently in verse and prose and is freely represented in anthologies. In addition to his creative work he has done much by his criticism to enliven public interest in Australian literature.

Of his novels the best are *The Passage* (1930), *Daybreak* (1932), *The Swayne Family* (1934) and *Legend for Sanderson* (1937).

His earliest published work was in the short story. *The World of Men* (1915) has been referred to by M. Barnard Eldershaw in *Essays in Australian Fiction* (1938) as a "seed plot for the succeeding novels as well as for the

later short stories". "Father and Son" is the best of these early stories and sketches. Two better-known collections are *Separate Lives* (1931) and *Sea and Spinifex* (1934). The story by which Palmer is represented here closes the latter volume. It illustrates his quiet, easy, durable style as he treats with a sure hand a theme upon which a less complete artist might have expended needless colour. Like all his best stories it tells its own truth. It defines concisely the cleavage between black and white which haunts the stories of earlier writers. "The Seahawk", which opens the same volume, won first prize in the Melbourne Centenary Short Story competition in 1934. Of its remaining stories, "The Trap", "The Rainbow Bird", "The Dingo", and "Stowaways" rise to a high level.

Three stories from *Separate Lives* have appeared in well-known anthologies: "The Birthday" in Mackaness's *Australian Short Stories* (1928), "The Brigadier" in Nettie Palmer's *Australian Story Book* (1928), and "The Jackass" in Clayfield's *Modern Short Stories* (1941). Three others of emphatic merit are "Jettisoned", "Ancestors", and "Delaney's Bus".

HENRY G. LAMOND

(1885-)

HENRY GEORGE LAMOND, born at Carl Creek, North Queensland, has won a reputation as a writer of animal stories after the manner of Jack London. After preliminary education at various schools, he attended the Queensland Agricultural College for a time. From 1902 to 1927 he was engaged in station work in Queensland of all kinds and for the following ten years he lived on Molle Island in the Whitsunday Passage.

Lamond's experience as a cattleman and horse lover provided him with the material for his first book, *Horns and Hooves* (1932), a romantic presentation in the form of connected sketches of pastoral work in Queensland. In *Tooth and Talon* (1934) he reprinted a number of stories contributed to American magazines. It was followed by *An Aviary on the Plains* (1935) and by three books in the novel line: *Amathea* (1937)—published first in the *Bulletin*—the story of a horse, told as only one intimately and sympathetically connected with the life of the horse could tell it; *Kilgour's Mare* (1943), in the same inimitable vein; and *Dingo* (1944), later called *White-ears the Outlaw*. He has also written a biographical work, *From Tariaro to Ross Roy* (1943).

Whether Lamond deals with incidents in the lives of station stock, of feathered creatures of the bush, of the kangaroo or of the reptiles of Australia, he gives evidence of shrewd understanding of their habits. His stories and sketches are vigorous flashes of insight into wild life. Especially striking are "A Feathered King", "Scaly", and the story included here. In clear, unaffected, straightforward prose he carries his tale onward with no apparent loss of detail. His vocabulary is apt and his idiom a racy fusion of the classical and the colloquial. These stories are an inspiration for any young writer who would extend the inquiry of the artist into the literary possibilities of Australian zoology.

ION L. IDRIESS

(1890-)

BORN in 1890 at Broken Hill, Ion L. Idriess, from the age of 15 until he settled down in 1930 to the life of an author, roamed the continent north of 33°. He was first a lamp trimmer and bosun's mate on a coastal tramp running between Newcastle and Sydney.

Signing off, he took to the bush as a station hand, eventually landing a job as rabbit poisoner near Walgett. This he deserted for the Lightning Ridge opal fields, which he left to become horse taylor to the celebrated Pony Drover. After this he wandered through the length and breadth of Cape York Peninsula and Arnhem Land, accompanied by two half-caste brothers, fossicking for gold and tin.

During World War I he fought with the Fifth Light Horse at Gallipoli, Sinai, and Palestine, returning in 1918 to the North, where he travelled round the Coral Sea. He spent some time with MacFarlane, the "Wandering Missionary", in the ketch *Herald*.

By whaleboat, cutter, and lugger, by native canoe and catamaran, he sailed the fringes of the Barrier Reef out through the Arafura Sea, along the northern coast to the Timor Sea and the Indian Ocean. By camel, horse, and mule he travelled through the inland, down through the Centre and back across the territory to the Kimberleys. Next he traversed the vast deserts of Western Australia by camel, horse, and motor truck.

Through forest and jungle, over plain and mountain, across fertile land and desert he covered scores of thousands of miles. No part of Australia was finally unknown to him.

In 1926 he wrote his first book, *Madman's Island*, a blend of fact and fiction that was slow in winning popularity. It was *Lasseter's Last Ride* (1931) that pointed out to him the way he should follow. From then he has produced at least one book each year, till his tally runs up into scores of books. Of them, *The Desert Column* (1932), *Drums of Mer* (1933) and *The Yellow Joss* (1934)—from which this story comes—*Forty Fathoms Deep* (1937)—an excellent collection of stories—and *Nemarluk* (1941) take the leading place.

GAVIN CASEY

(1907-)

GAVIN STODART CASEY was born at Kalgoorlie, where he attended the State school and the Kalgoorlie School of Mines. Pen pictures reminiscent of his experiences there occur in the stories and sketches originally contributed to the *Bulletin* and collected to form a first volume, *It's Harder For Girls* (1942), from which "It Finds Its Level" is taken. This collection won the S. H. Prior Memorial Prize for the best Australian book published in 1942.

In 1943 Casey was Publicity Censor for West Australia. The following year he became attached to the staff of the Federal Department of Information. He later became Director of the Australian News and Information Bureau in New York, and then returned to Australia to join the staff of the *Sydney Sun*. He is now (1953) with the *Australian Magazine*, Sydney.

Casey's stories are familiar representations of excerpts from working life. The difference between his manner and Lawson's reflects the difference

between talent and character. Casey has studied his models well; he brings a conscious application of the art of the *conteur* to his native perception. In style he stands somewhere between Lawson and Palmer; less dependent upon native idiom than the one, less studied than the other.

The conformity of Casey's themes to a set environment is maintained in his second volume, *Birds of a Feather* (1944). Most of his work is hard and bitter. Although his ironic humour lacks the ease that was Dyson's strength, it does not fail to add a characteristic gleam of brightness to Casey's writing. There is disciplined consistency in his stories. The opportunity residence in another country has afforded him to organize his emotional reactions to the Australian scene may well issue in future work of high standard.

Casey's novel, *Downhill is Easier* (1946), set in a mining town in Western Australia, is a carefully planned work of the same texture as his stories. Its technique looks back to that used by Rolf Boldrewood in *Robbery Under Arms*. His latest novel is *City of Men* (1950).

MYRA MORRIS

[See also *Twenty Australian Novelists*]

MYRA EVELYN MORRIS, who was born at Boort in the mallee country of Victoria and educated in the Brigidine Convent at Rochester, first made her mark as a writer of prose tales and verse. A selection from her numerous prose contributions to periodical literature appeared in 1947 under the title of *The Township*.

Displaying a preference for the short story, she has been consistently represented in well-known anthologies. Nettie Palmer and George Mackaness early acknowledged the well-rounded attractiveness of her work by the inclusion in their collections of "Sun" and "Our Little Life". Three other stories have appeared in *Coast to Coast*: "The Parson" (1941), "The Township" (1942), and "Going Home" (1943). The last of these, a compact little story, included here, was first published in the *Bulletin*. It is characteristic of Myra Morris's patient, pastel-toned work. The afternoon glow of her style bathes her placid thought in a warm light. A quiet acceptance of the nature of things is inherent in all her work, from the early verses to her later flights in the novel.

MARGARET TRIST

ONE of the most talented of the young short-story writers of today, Margaret Trist usually approaches with cheerfulness the thousand-and-one incidents, trivial and important, which form the stuff of life. Born at Dalby, Queensland, she spent most of her girlhood on the Darling Downs, which provide the background for some of her early stories. A year spent in the Blue Mountains had literary issue in her mountain stories and in the much-acclaimed novel, *Now That We're Laughing* (1945), published in the United States under the title, *Sun on the Hills*. Over a hundred of her stories have

appeared in the *Bulletin*, *Southerly*, *Home*, the *A.B.C. Weekly*, *Meanjin Papers* and other periodicals. Her tragedy in little, "The Blank Wall", a photographic reflection of a national problem, first printed in the *Daily Mirror*, is included in the collection, *In the Sun* (1943), which has passed through two editions. A second collection is *What Else is There?* (1946), which includes one of her broadcast stories, "Per His Majesty's Mails". Several of her short stories, for example, "No Use Frettin', Love", have been dramatized for broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

Margaret Trist's work has been represented in all the *Coast to Coast* anthologies, and in Edith M. Fry's *Tales by Australians* (1939).

The title-piece of her first collection is a skilful presentation of an adolescent Sydney girl's view of life. "Sunday" (*Coast to Coast*, 1941) records the reactions of a small child to the trials of the Sabbath Day. "Show-Day" is an animated sketch of a day spent at a country show. The poignancy of "Stars in the Grass", a portrait of an emotional shock experienced by a trusting country child, persists in "Halcrow Street", which is set in a dingy Woolloomooloo environment.

Margaret Trist's work has an unmistakable air of reality, derived from the neat, deft strokes with which she constructs a background distinctly Australian in tone and colour.

HAL PORTER

(1914 -)

HAL PORTER stands consciously, one might say deliberately, apart from the ordinarily accepted Australian tradition in short story writing. His work attempts to bring exotic influences to bear upon an artistic interpretation of native phenomena. A Victorian of Anglo-Swiss extraction, he began to write short stories at the age of seventeen. This *fleurs-du-mal* period was followed by serious searching of the work of continental masters and reading of Joseph Conrad. He was for a time a modern language teacher at Prince Alfred College, Adelaide, from which he transferred to the Hutchens School, Hobart.

Porter's first collection of stories, *Short Stories*, was privately printed in 1943. Of those included in it, "And Nothing More" appeared in *Angry Penguins* (1943), and "At Aunt Sophia's" in *Coast to Coast* (1943). "And, from Madame's . . . ?" was a prize-winner in the Sydney Sesquicentenary short story competition of 1938.

His stories open the door to a host of complicated influences. "The Room" reveals traces of the naturalism of George Moore. The spirit of Katherine Mansfield haunts "Gone Away". There is a flavour of Théophile Gautier's technique in "And, from Madame's . . . ?" His search for a novel and fastidious revelation of the human life of his environment—from which he would perhaps do well to divorce himself for a while—has in it a strong element of the inspiration of Baudelaire; while through his whole art beats a measure he has caught from Maupassant.

So we might go on discovering what Porter has gleaned from Chekhov and Gogol, and what he owes to Henry James, Edith Wharton, Cabell, and E. M. Forster. When all is said, these are legitimate and invaluable formative influences. Sometimes they are patent, as in the Thomas Browne-

De Quincey atmosphere of the proem to "Miss Rodda". That these models may also be potent devitalizing factors is a danger of which Hal Porter appears to be aware, which he is consciously endeavouring to offset, and yet by which he is compellingly attracted. With all these powers crowding upon him, he has nevertheless arrived at a synthesis—not yet completely purified, perhaps, but sufficiently so to enable him to produce work of unusual type and quality.

Of the stories in his only collection, "Miss Rodda" appeals most because it bears in its presentation of the story proper signs that Porter may bend towards the main current of short story writing in Australia. It is photographic. The actual house and the characters, even the event that forms the kernel of the story, possess that definite air of having had their originals in the writer's experience. The rococo framework in which the incident is set accentuates its stark reality.

Porter does not, like Casey, Margaret Trist, Edwards, and Brian James, sail down the middle of the stream. His little skiff is nosing into creeks that join it. His peril is that he may be lured into a backwater when he might have headed his craft towards the open tide.

DON EDWARDS

(1905-)

DON EDWARDS, born in Sydney, received his preliminary education at various primary and high schools in the country and in Sydney. He graduated in Arts and taking the Diploma of Education of the University of Sydney, entered the service of the Department of Education. He has had a varied experience in journalism and has travelled extensively throughout Australia and in the East. In addition to short stories he writes literary critiques for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Edwards made his first literary flights in verse, but quickly availed himself of the periodical to publish stories of undoubted merit. His stories have appeared three times in *Coast to Coast*. He has won prizes in such literary competitions as the *Bulletin* short story competition, and has published stories in many periodicals. "Clear Profit", which first appeared in the *Bulletin*, is taken from his collection, *High Hill at Midnight* (1944), published by arrangement with the Commonwealth Literary Fund. His first novel, *The Woman at Jingera*, appeared in 1948.

Edwards approaches his themes with marked reserve. His work is typical of that of not a few contributors to contemporary journals in that he gives closest attention to working-class people, beset with the menace of uncertain prosperity. The spectre of unemployment haunts them. Its threat to the stability of domestic life is a recurrent theme. Not all his work is austere, as some of his recent *Bulletin* stories demonstrate.

Edwards's method is telescopic. He extracts the essential core from commonplace incidents and presents it with economy of word and phrase in sharp-edged stories that leave nothing unsaid. Three fine stories are "The Woman from the Bend", "The House on the Cliff", and "Rendez-vous over the River". His stories are short, some extremely so. "My Mother Was Sitting Before the Fire", for instance, is told in about a thousand words; yet what a world of human significance it possesses—how powerfully it expands in

the mind to the emotional conflict its theme represents. The title-piece—one of the longest and best—is well-rounded and carefully written; yet it bears the marks of periodical literature upon it. This is true of some of the others: "Dopey", "On Her Shoulders", "Her Son Returns", "He Got a Job". These stories are good pieces of work: they are complete, well-balanced, sympathetically told; the writer's prose, if rather too sedate, avoids any tendency to force the idiom. The final impression one has is that Edwards is allowing the texture of his art to be shrunk by the demands of newspaper space.

BRIAN JAMES

(1892-)

OF the modern school of story writers, how many derive their inspiration from Henry Lawson? Casey, Margaret Trist, Edwards, we have seen, have done work which springs from a combination of talent, observation, and emotional power. They have in their turn been acknowledged forthright makers in this field. Yet I dare say that it would be alien to the justness of the critic's office to acclaim one of them the successor of Lawson in what may be granted his most characteristic literary activity. Rather does his mantle fall upon the shoulders of one who, although born when Lawson was actually at the blossom time of his genius, did not publish a single story until he was fifty.

Brian James, born near Mudgee in 1892, spent his early years on a farm and became a teacher in 1913. He took his Bachelor's degree in Arts in 1914, Master's degree in 1922. From 1922 to 1924 he was abroad, mostly in England, where he taught for some time. Thirty years of teaching and farming have helped to provide him with the background for his work.

The *Bulletin* is the only newspaper to which he has contributed. Of the twelve stories that comprise *First Furrow* (1944), seven, including "The Well", first appeared there. This little paper-covered volume is, among contemporary collections of short stories, the true companion to *While the Billy Boils*. Brian James is master of the tragic and the comic alike; the kinship between his work and Lawson's is illustrated in "The Well" and "Brosie", reprinted in *First Furrow*. To read in addition "Bungally", "Hawkins' Pigs", "River Odyssey", "Jacob's Escape", and "The Pisé House" is to become convinced of it.

Of the stories and sketches that go to make up *Cookabundy Bridge* (1946) those reprinted from *First Furrow* are the best. Most of the new material in this volume is of the order of the sketch rather than of the story. In it Brian James loses nothing of his ability to present a character in a few dry lines, neither does his skill in the creation of atmosphere show any sign of falling off. The narrow life of small country town or farming community is brought before us with a sardonic humour that is spontaneous, yet kindly rather than bitter. The harshness of the life the writer portrays—has perhaps felt in his own person—has not robbed him of sympathy for the people he depicts. You feel, for example, that, like Lawson, he "pities haggard women"; when you have read "Cheque Day" you know where his sympathies lie. Old Gant, mean and miserly as he is, has your heart as he stands watching the wreck of the horses he loved. You can understand the

sudden outburst of meek Enoch Rath, who shoots his wife and her lover and so "puts Templeton on the map".

Several of these sketches are so slight in content as to be almost thin. What makes them notable is the air of truth they possess; they are faithful vignettes of the life Brian James has observed, understood, and forgiven.

In 1950 Brian James brought out his first novel, *The Advancement of Spencer Button*.

R. S. PORTEOUS—"STANDBY"

(1897-)

A NATIVE of Melbourne, Richard Sydney Porteous served in the Eighth Australian Light Horse during World War I. He was shot through the jaw during the advance on Jerusalem and was three times mentioned in despatches.

On return to Australia he worked on a central Queensland cattle station, which he left for the sea. After service with the Adelaide Steamship Company he set up in the tourist trade for himself and when World War II broke out was running a launch on Barrier Reef cruises.

In World War II he was chief officer on a cargo vessel on the Australia-New Guinea run.

Porteous began writing at sea during World War II and has since published over a hundred stories and a prize-winning novel, *Sailing Orders*. His stories have appeared in the *Bulletin*, *A.B.C. Weekly*, and *Coast to Coast*.

APPENDIX

THIS is the fourth volume of a series of books calculated to introduce the reader to the best work in Australian fiction. The third volume, *An Introduction to Australian Fiction*, traced the main currents in the development of our prose story. Dealing as it does with the short story, this book is more self-contained than its predecessors could hope to be. I will not presume to affirm that it offers a complete picture of the development of the Australian story. Of the thirty-eight authors represented here, it is possible that half could be replaced with others whose work has at some time engaged the attention of the public. I dare say, nevertheless, that any anthology aiming at the same goal could not omit the other half without being misleading or uninformed. There are at least twenty story writers here who would demand inclusion in an anthology of smaller compass.

In the same way it is not to be expected that the particular story chosen to represent the writer can hope to meet with universal approval. In making the first choice I asked myself three questions. The first, does the story fairly represent the most notable literary qualities of the author? In other words, is it a fair example of his talent or the true expression of his genius? The second, does the story, and through it the author, contribute anything noteworthy to the stream of Australian story-writing. The third, what chance has the reader of enriching his literary experience by consulting other work from the same hand?

When it came to applying these principles, many difficulties arose, especially as I wished to avoid stories available today in other anthologies.

In the first place, it was no simple matter to obtain copies of the source-books; but for the assistance of librarians and private bookmen who appreciated the nature of the work, this anthology could never have come into being. The books written by Lang, Whitworth and Campbell McKellar, for example, existed in no more than three available copies. It would be easy to name a dozen source-books of which there are available to the Australian reading public generally but a like number of copies—a lamentable state of affairs. Many complaints have been heard of the lack of interest of Australian publishers in worthy books of a past generation. When Alfred Buchanan wrote forty years ago he found a mutual suspicion between publisher and writer which then redounded to the ill-fortune of Australian literature. That unwholesome atmosphere is today being dispersed by critics and publishers, who now see it their duty to republish good old authors as well as bring out new writers. Native criticism, relying on imagination, depth of culture, and wisdom, helps the publisher to assess with justice the value of individual contributions to our national literature. Lack of it was in the past one cause of reluctance on the part of the publisher to reprint old work. So the intelligent Australian reader had been starved of his cultural heritage; the student has been restricted in his research; the anthologist has had to slay lions to pass abroad. Access to source-books has been a sturdy lion. Contemporary publishers are looking into the reprinting of some of our older books, now fallen into neglect. I trust that some of those from which these stories have been taken will be reprinted.

In the second place, even when the book had been found and the story selected, there were times when identification of the owner of copyright was a baffling problem. In one or two cases, after a labyrinthine search, there yet remains doubt as to whether the true owner of copyright has been the one by whom permission to include the story was given. These are taken on trust borrowed from the ready acquiescence—except in one case—of all who were approached. This one lamented omission—of William Baylebridge's "The Duel" from *An Anzac Muster* (1922)—being laid aside, any responsibility for bad selection is mine alone. In extenuation I may plead that in all cases where the foregoing principles allowed it, no story which had already appeared in an anthology was admitted, except for weighty reasons. Roderic Quinn's story was taken from A. G. Stephens's *Bulletin Story Book* (1901) because it is the first book in which it appeared, and because that book ought to be better known by modern readers for its introduction. The text of Barbara Baynton's "The Tramp" is taken from the same book because the story was spoiled in being altered for *Bush Studies* (1902). I trust the stories will revive interest in those earlier collections. "Going Home" was taken from *Coast to Coast*, 1943 (1944), edited by Frank Dalby Davison, because Myra Morris's collection of short stories, *The Township* (1947), had not then appeared.

Besides the anthologies already mentioned there were examined several others representing Australian stories and sketches, sometimes interlarded with verse. The first of these was Archibald and Broomfield's *Golden Shanty* (1890), which contained verse and prose from the *Bulletin*. Important prose writers represented in it were Henry Lawson, Edward Dyson, and James Edmond. In the same year there appeared in London Mrs A. Patchett Martin's *Under the Gum Tree*. It is poor stuff in the main, the only names worthy of repetition appearing there being those of Mrs Campbell Praed and "Tasma". The work of the others has passed into oblivion. Mrs Martin followed this with a similar volume in 1891, in which women only were represented. In 1899 Lala Fisher edited *Creek and Gully*, in London, among the contributors to which were Douglas Sladen, E. W. Hornung, and Louis Becke. The appearance of the *Bulletin Story Book* in 1901 was a significant indication that Australian short-story writers had scaled the heights in a new and striking fashion. Here, among others of less note, were the names of James Edmond, Louis Becke, Ernest Favenc, Louise Mack, Albert Dorrington, Henry Lawson, Amy Mack, Edward Dyson, C. H. Souter, A. Rose-Söley, A. C. McCay, A. B. Paterson, Barbara Baynton, A. H. Davis, Roderic Quinn, Victor Daley, and E. S. Sorenson.

The student must pass on to a date almost thirty years later before he meets with an anthology of noteworthy literary quality and freshness of outlook. *Rowlandson's Success* (1907-8) relies on the old hands. Not until 1928 is a gleaming of stories contributed to newspapers considered worth while. Nettie Palmer collects stories by Katharine Prichard, Cecil Mann, Jack McLaren, Dowell O'Reilly, Lilian Goode, Charles Gilmour, Nina Lowe, H. E. Riemann, G. M. Turnbull, Zora Cross, Vance Palmer, Mary Simpson, Lance Skuthorpe, Bernard Cronin, F. T. Macartney, W. G. Brown, Horton Brooks, Myra Morris, W. D. Flannery, M. L. Skinner, J. H. M. Abbott, Randolph Bedford, and Henry Lawson. And again, it is the *Bulletin* which is the main source-book.

How omnipresent is the influence of this newspaper! Over and over again you select a story from a collection gleaned from various periodicals and trace it back to find that it was first printed in the *Bulletin*. This publication

is inseparably linked with the development of the Australian story. True, there are some writers who broke free from its restrictions to the salvation of their literary souls, and others who, being established writers, dealt only in books. But they are few. The *Bulletin*, after a short period of slighter influence, has today regained its leadership in the short story; its championship of Brian James, Margaret Trist and Cecil Mann is in line with its traditions in this field. Even as this appendix is being written the latest issue lies on one side open at a story by the first of these three writers, whom I have no hesitation in accepting as the most Australian of contemporary short-story writers. In one of the more recent anthologies published, Edith M. Fry's *Tales by Australians* (London, 1939), of fifteen stories selected from seven periodicals, eight came from the *Bulletin*. In *Coast to Coast, 1944* (1945), four stories selected by Vance Palmer had already appeared in it. The interest of its critics in any Australian literary work merits the fullest acknowledgment.

In 1928 George Mackaness's anthology also appeared, containing stories by J. H. M. Abbott, Barbara Baynton, Louis Becke, Randolph Bedford, John Le Gay Brereton, Marcus Clark, Zora Cross, Albert Dorrington, Edward Dyson, Margaret Fane and Hilary Lofting, Ernest Favenc, Henry M. Green, Beatrice Grimshaw, Mrs Gipsy Kelly, Henry Lawson, H. B. Marriott-Watson, Raymond McGrath, Myra Morris, Ernest O'Ferrall, Dowell O'Reilly, Vance Palmer, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Roderic Quinn, John H. Ramsay, "Steele Rudd", Mary Simpson, Gilbert M. Turnbull and Ethel Turner. This collection contains excellent stories, alphabetically arranged by authors. It has been issued in a French translation.

Nettie Palmer, in an illuminating preface, reveals the principle underlying the arrangement of her stories.

Ten writers only are represented in both anthologies: Abbott, Bedford, Zora Cross, Lawson, McLaren, Myra Morris, O'Reilly, Palmer, Katharine Prichard, Mary Simpson. Three stories appear in both: "The Cooboo" (Katharine Prichard); "His Photo on the Wall" (Dowell O'Reilly); and "Santa Claus" (Mary Simpson). Authors represented in both anthologies and in the present volume include all of these save Zora Cross. Stories in Mackaness's collection which are to be found in this book are "The Tramp" and "A Stripe for Trooper Casey".

Edith M. Fry's *Tales by Australians*, which is introduced with an alert preface by Sir Frank Fox, contains twenty-six stories by contemporary writers. Of the authors who appear also in the present work, Edith Fry selects Myra Morris ("To the Mountains"), Vance Palmer ("The Dingo"), Katharine Susannah Prichard ("The Flight"), and Margaret Trist ("The Flood"). The remaining contributors are Dorothy Cottrell, Eleanor Dark, Xavier Herbert, Kylie Tennant, Henry Handel Richardson, R. Wilkes Hunter, Mary Grant Bruce, J. Gaby, Dame Mary Gilmore, Frank Walford, Bartlett Adamson, Marjorie Aubrey, E. Dithmack, Vera Dwyer, W. M. Fleming, Edith M. Fry, Ada A. Holman, John Laffin, Catharine Lindsay, Mary E. Lloyd, Frank Middlemiss, and Roger Walford. The anthology is simply a collection of stories with no critical aim in its construction.

A. Lewis Clayfield's *Modern Short Stories* (Melbourne, 1940) contains Australian, American, and English stories in a somewhat haphazard arrangement. The Australian writers represented are "Steele Rudd" ("Baptising Bartholomew"), Vance Palmer ("The Jackass"), Edward Dyson ("A Golden Shanty"), J. Gaby ("The Tow-Rope" and "Off Gabo"), and Henry Lawson ("The Drover's Wife" and "The Loaded Dog").

Since 1941 a valuable selection of the year's stories has been published

annually (biennially since 1950) by Angus and Robertson under the title of *Coast to Coast*, which was inspired by the *Bulletin*. Although an analysis of the contents of those which have appeared does not belong here, something may be said of the 1944 volume (September 1945), edited by Vance Palmer. It contains work by twenty-four contemporary writers, including Gavin Casey ("Horse-power"), Don Edwards ("My Mother Was Sitting Before the Fire"), Brian James ("First Furrow"), Margaret Trist ("What Else is There?"), and Vance Palmer ("The Search"). The names of several new authors appear, whose stories, reflecting the stress of the age, catch the eye of the present generation. It cannot be seriously suggested that they will stand the test of time. Of stories that rise above the common level, Eric Lowe's "Harvest's End" and Frank Dalby Davison's "The Road to Yesterday" are most prominent.

It may not be inappropriate to mention here the two best volumes of short stories by individual authors that appeared in 1945. Cecil Mann's *The River and Other Short Stories* and Douglas Stewart's *A Girl With Red Hair*, which lie outside the scope of this anthology, contain work of noteworthy quality.

Three collections of short stories not referred to in the text came out in 1946. They are Jon Cleary's *These Small Glories*, anecdotes and sketches of war experiences, Alan Marshall's *Tell Us About the Turkey, Jo*, and Dal Stevens's *The Courtship of Uncle Henry*.

Of anthologies that have appeared since then, the 1951 World's Classics volume of *Australian Short Stories*, selected by Walter Murdoch and Henrietta Drake-Brockman, contains fifty-two stories, arranged according to the year of birth of the writers.

The opportunity taken in the present book to trace the development of the Australian story in the texts inevitably increases the range of selection. Not only must the truly popular *Bulletin* school of the nineties be amply represented; the part played by its forerunners must be indicated: the biographical remarks on each writer should give some notion of his achievement. The scarcity of good work from 1901 to 1918 is marked by the paucity of fresh names. The resurgence of the twenties and the abundance of the forties will be seen to add balance to the picture.

The book should be read in association with the other three in the series, which refer, where appropriate, to short stories written by novelists not represented in this volume.

I have not attempted synthesis or critical analysis: the book aims merely at acquainting the reader with the people who wrote the stories and with the sort of stories they wrote. It is big enough already. To write a critical history is quite another matter, to which I hope to give some attention in a more compact work.

The Australian story is today in a flourishing condition. A welter of influences pours in upon those who practise it. From America, Russia, England, France, Germany, literary fashions invade the Australian domain. It is significant that the most notable contemporary Australian short-story writers are undistracted by false values. The best of contemporary work bears witness to the perennial vitality of the spirit that breathed upon Henry Lawson.

The Australian short story has during the last few years entered upon a vivid phase in its development. Richness and variety, from the open-air life of farm and station to the intrigues of politicians and the exploits of black-marketeers, mark Australian life today. And the short story, no less than the novel, is a proper medium for artistic treatment of the multifarious themes it yields.