

SEATE SERIES

STEVE BROWN'S



BUNYIP

BY
JOHN
ARTHUR
BARRY



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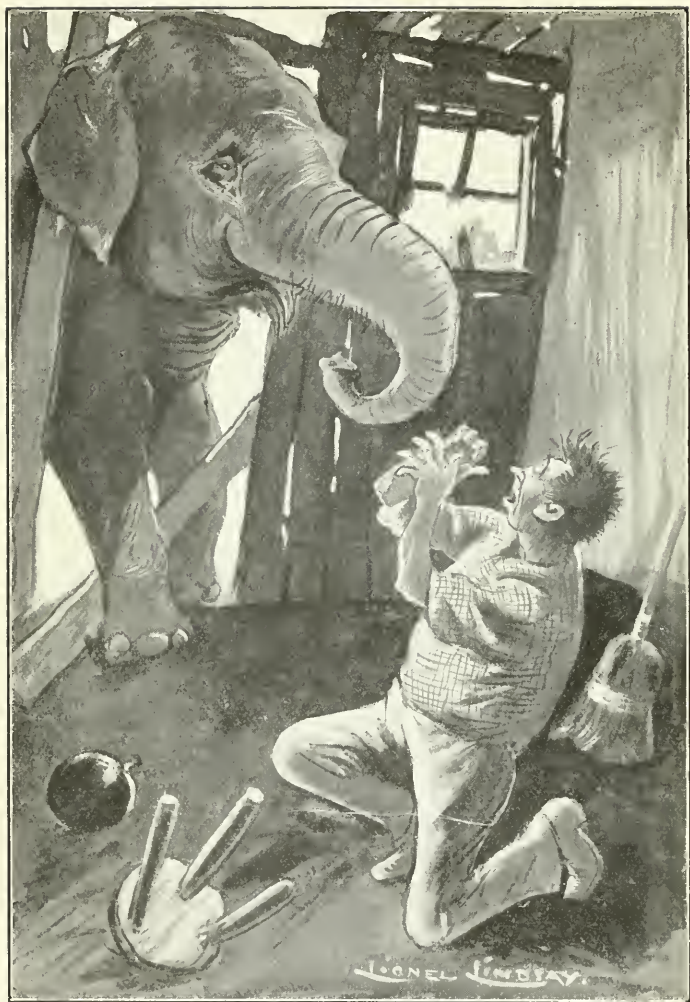
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'Oh! Good Mister Punyip,' he quavered, 'let's off this oncest.'
(Page 6.)

[Frontispiece

STEVE BROWN'S BUNYIP

And Other Stories

BY

JOHN ARTHUR BARRY

WITH INTRODUCTORY VERSES

BY

RUDYARD KIPLING

NEW EDITION

*Author of "In the Great Deep," "The Luck of the Native Born,"
"A Son of the Sea," "Red Lion and Blue Star,"
"Old and New Sydney," etc.*

N.S.W. BOOKSTALL CO.

SYDNEY.

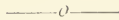
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AGAIN.

THERE have been occasions when, after long rest as a hulk lying in some land-locked cove, with little of its past history except the name left in people's memories, that once again the old ship has been brought forth, staunch as ever, to perform, it is hoped, faithful service on the outer seas.

Something of this kind has happened in the case of "Steve Brown's Bunyip." The book has been so long out of print as to perhaps render any apology for its re-appearance needless. All the more so, as from many quarters through the years that have elapsed since its retirement, there have been frequent and kindly enquiries after its welfare. Also, numerous requests have reached the author that the book might again be allowed to test the weather of popular opinion, and, if possible, hold its own as it did aforetime.

Thus, in a new guise, and in a new land, the old "Bunyip," rejuvenated and embellished, with, so to speak, colours flying and band playing, leaves its long rest at moorings, and once more sets sail in modest confidence that age will not have rendered its timbers less seaworthy, but rather have preserved and toughened them in such wise as may enable the old vessel to successfully compete with the modern craft of her class that have since appeared.

THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE dwells a Wife by the Northern March
And a wealthy Wife is she.
She breeds a breed o' rovin' men
And casts them over sea.

And some they drown in deep water,
And some in sight of shore ;
And word goes back to the carline Wife
And ever she sends more.

For since that Wife had gate or gear,
Or hearth or garth or bield,
She wills her sons to the white harvest,
And that is a bitter yield—

She wills her sons to the wet ploughing
To ride the horse o' tree,
And syne her sons come home again
Far spent from out the sea.

The good Wife's sons come home again
Wi' little into their hands
But the lear o' men that ha' dealt wi' men
In the new and naked lands—

But the faith o' men that ha' proven men
By more than willing breath,
And the eyes o' men that ha' read wi' men
In the open books o' Death.

Rich are they, rich in wonders seen,
But poor in the goods o' men :
And what they ha' got by the skin o' their teeth
They sell for their teeth again.

Ay, whether they lose to the naked life,
Or win to their hearts' desire,
They tell it all to the carline Wife
That nods beside the fire.

Her hearth is wide to every gust
That gars the dead ash spin—
And tide by tide and 'twixt the tides
Her sons go out and in.

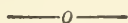
[Out in great mirth that do desire
Hazard of trackless ways,
In wi' great peace to wait their watch
And warm before the blaze.]

And some return in broken sleep
And some in waking dream,
For she hears the heels o' the dripping ghosts
That ride the long roof-beam.

Home—they come home from all the seas—
The living and the dead—
The good Wife's sons come home again
For her blessing on their head.

RUDYARD KIPLING.

Steve Brown's Bunyip.



STEVE BROWN'S BUNYIP.

THE general opinion of those who felt called upon to give it was that Steve Brown, of the Scrubby Corner, 'wasn't any chop.'

Not that, on the surface, there seemed much evidence confirmatory of such a verdict—rather, indeed, the contrary.

If a traveller, drover or teamster lost his stock, Steve, after a long and arduous search, was invariably the first man to come across the missing animals—provided the reward was high enough.

Yet, in spite of this useful gift of discovery, its owner was neither liked nor trusted. Uncharitable people—especially the ones whom he took such trouble to oblige—would persist in hinting that none knew so well where to find as those that hid.

All sorts of odds and ends, too, from an unbranded calf to a sheepskin, from a new tarpaulin to a pair of

hobbles, had a curious knack of disappearing within a circuit of fifty miles of the Browns' residence.

In appearance, Steve was long, lathy, awkward and freckled, also utterly ignorant of all things good for man to know.

Suspicious, sly and unscrupulous, just able by a sort of instinct to decipher a brand on an animal, he was a thorough specimen of the very worst type of far inland Australian Bush Native, and only those who have met him can possibly imagine what that means.

Years ago, his parents, fresh from the wilds of Conne-mara, had squatted on this forest reserve of Scrubby Corner. How they managed to live was a mystery. But they were never disturbed; and in time they died, leaving Steve, then eighteen, to shift for himself, by virtue of acquired knowledge.

Shortly after the death of his mother, he took unto himself the daughter of an old shepherd on a run adjoining—a fit match in every way—and continued to keep house in the ramshackle shanty in the heart of the Corner.

He had never been known to do a day's work if he could possibly get out of it; much preferring to pick up a precarious living by 'trading' stock, 'finding' stragglers, and in other ways even less honest than the last, but which nobody, so far, had taken the trouble of bringing home to him.

.
It was Sunday, and the caravan was spelling for the day.

Greg, having had his dinner—only a half ration, as feed was scarce—and feeling but little inclined for a chat with the tiger, or the lion, or the bear, or any other of the sulky, brooding creatures behind the iron bars, whom he saw every day, and of whose company he was heartily tired, took it into his great head to have a look at the country.

So, unperceived of Hassan Ali, who was fast asleep in the hot sunshine, or any of the rest dozing in the tents, Greg, plucking a wattle up by the roots to keep the flies off, sauntered quietly away. He was not impressed by inland Australia. In the first place it was hot and dusty, also the flies were even worse than in his native Ceylon. Nor, so far as he could discover, was there anything to chew—edible that is—no tender banana stems, no patches of young rice or succulent cane. All that he tried tasted bitter, tasted of gum, peppermint, or similar abominations. He spat them out with a grunt of disgust, and meandered on.

Presently the scrub grew thicker, and, heated more than ever by the exertion of pushing his huge body through an undergrowth of pine and wattle, he hailed with delight the sight of a big waterhole, still and dark, in the very heart of it. Descending the slope at the far side of the thickly-grassed, open glade, Steve Brown, driving a couple of 'lost' horses, paused in dismay and astonishment at sight of the immense beast, black, shining wetly, and sending up thick jets of water into the sunlight to an accompaniment of a continuous series of grunts and rumbling noises.

'*Hrrmp! hrrmp!*' blared Greg, in friendly greeting, as he caught sight of the figure staring fascinated.

And then he laughed to himself as he saw how the loose horses, snorting with terror, galloped off one way, and the horseman another.

But it was getting late; so, coming out of the water, and striking a well-beaten pad, he followed it. Supper time was approaching, and he kept his ears open for the shrill cry of Hassan Ali.

Meanwhile Steve had made a bee-line on the spur for home, with some vague idea surging through his dull brain of having caught a glimpse of an Avenging Power. It is mostly in this way that anything of the sort strikes the uneducated conscience.

'What's the matter now?' asked his wife as he entered, pale, and with hurried steps. 'You looks pretty badly scared. Did the traps spot yer a-plantin' them mokes, or what?'

'Traps be hanged!' replied Steve. 'I seen somethin' wuss nor traps. I seen the bunyip down at the big waterhole.'

'Garn, yer fool!' exclaimed his wife, who was tall, thin, sharp-faced, and freckled, like himself. 'What are you a-givin' us now? Why, yer gittin' wuss nor a black fellow wi' yer bunyips!'

'Well,' said Steve, fanning himself with his old cabbage-tree hat, and glancing nervously out of the door, 'I'll tell yer how it was. Ye knows as how I dropped acrost that darkey's mokes when he was camped at the Ten Mile. Well, o' course, I takes 'em to the water in the

scrub—you knows the shop—intendin' to hobble 'em out till such time as inquiries come this road. Well, jist as I gets in sight o' the water I seen, right in the middle of it, I seen—I seen—' but here he paused dead for want of a vocabulary.

'Well, thick-head, an' wot was it ye seed—yer own hugly shadder, I s'pose?' said Mrs Brown, as she caught up and slapped the baby playing with a pumpkin on the floor. 'Look better on yer, it would, to wind me up a turn o' water, an' it washin' day to-morrer, 'stead o' comin' pitchin' fairy stories.'

'It warn't,' replied Steve, taking no notice of the latter part of her speech. 'But it was as big—ay, an' a lot bigger'n this hut. All black, an' no hair it was; an' 't'ad two white tushes's, long as my leg, only crookt, an' a snout like a big snake, an' it were a-spoutin' water forty foot high, and soon's it seen me it bellered agin and agin.'

'You bin over to Walmsley's shanty to-day?' asked his wife, looking hard at his pale face and staring eyes.

'No, s'elp me!' replied Steve; 'not fer a month or more! An' yer knows, Mariar, as it aint very often I touches a drop o' ennythin' when I does go over.' Which was strictly true, for Steve was an abstemious rogue.

'Well, then, you've got a stroke o' the sun,' said his better-half, dogmatically, 'an' you'd best take a dose of salts at oncest, afore ye goes off yer 'ead wuss.'

'*Hrrmp! hrrmp! hrrmp!*' trumpeted Greg cheerfully, as at this moment, interposing his huge bulk before

the setting sun, he looked in at the back door with twinkling eyes.

With a scream the woman, snatching up her child, bolted into the bedroom, leaving Steve quaking in an ecstasy of terror, as Greg, spying the pumpkin, deftly reached in with his trunk and asked for it with an insinuating grunt.

But Steve, pretty certain that it was himself who was wanted, and that his time had come at last, tumbled off the stool and grovelled before the Unknown Terror.

Without coming in further, Greg could not get within a foot of the coveted article. To come in further would be to lift the house on his shoulders, so Greg hesitated.

For ten years—long ago in the days of his youth—he had been a member of the Ceylon Civil Service, and had learnt discipline and respect for the constituted authorities. Also, besides being chief constable of his fellows, he had been a favourite at headquarters, had borne royalty itself, and was even named after Governor Gregory. Therefore, hungry as he was, Greg hesitated about demolishing a house for the sake of a pumpkin; but Steve, now on his knees in the middle of the floor, with that curling, snake-like thing twisting and twitching before his eyes, knew less than nothing of all this.

Had he been able, he would doubtless have prayed in an orthodox manner to be delivered out of the clutches of the Evil One. Being unable to pray, he did the best he could, which was indifferent.

'Oh good Mister Bunyip,' he quavered, 'let's off this onces, an' I'll takes them mokes back to the nigger.

I'll give up them two unbranded foals as I shook off the carrier larst week, likewise the bag o' flour off his waggin. If yer'll go away, Mr Bunyip, I'll never plant nor shake nothin' no more. I wont—s'elp me! An' if yer'll go back quiet'—here the wall-plate began to crack, and Steve's voice to rise into a howl—'I'll promise faithful never to come next anigh yer waterhole over yonder to plant hosses.'

As he concluded, Greg, having at length jammed his big head in far enough to just reach the pumpkin with his trunk, withdrew, taking both doorposts with him.

'He's gone, Mariar,' said Steve, after a pause, wiping his wet face; 'but it wor the narriest squeak you ever seed. Took nothin', he didn't, only that punkin as was on the floor. Tell you wot,' as his wife came trembling out of the other room, 'we're a-goin' to shift camp. Neighbours o' that sort ain't ter be played with. Ain't it a wonder, bein' so handy like, as he never come afore? I knows how it was, now!' he exclaimed, a happy inspiration seizing him. 'It were all through them two larst cussed mokes! The feller as owns 'em's a flash black-feller shearer. I had a pitch with him the night afore an' he reckons as how he'd just cut out ov a big shed on the Marthaguy. So I sez to myself, "You're good enough, ole chap, fer a fiver, ennyhow."'

'What's that got to do with it?' asked his wife softly, regarding the crushed doorway with affrighted face.

'Don't yer see? The bunyip's the blackfeller's Devil. Ole Billy Barlow tell'd me oncest as he seen the head ov

one rise up out of a lagoon. I'll have to fossick up them mokes, Mariar, an' take 'em to that darkey straight away, afore wuss 'appens. S-sh, sh-sh! Wot's that?'

It was Greg, who wanted his supper badly, and was soliloquising at the other end of the hut. He had been down to a little fenced-in paling paddock on the flat, and, looking over, to his delight had seen a crop of maize, sweet and juicy and not too ripe, also more pumpkins.

But with the love of the law and the memory of discipline still strong in him, he had returned to ask permission of the owner—the stupid white man who sat in his hut and talked nonsense. And now he was holding council with himself how best to make the fool understand that he was hungry, and wanted for his supper something more than a solitary pumpkin.

Hassan Ali, he knew, had but dried hay and the rinds of melons to give him. Here, indeed, was a delectable change, and Greg's mouth watered as he gurgled gently in at the opening which did duty for a window, and close to which the family crouched in terror.

Why could not the stupid fellow understand? Could it be that he and his were deaf? A bright idea, and one to be acted upon, this last!

Therefore, carefully lifting up and displacing half the bark roof, Greg looked benignly down and trumpeted mightily until the hut shook as with an earthquake, and the whole land seemed to vibrate, whilst his audience grovelled speechless. Then, finding no resulting effect, and secure in the sense of having done his uttermost to

make himself understood, he went off with a clear conscience to the corn-patch and luxuriated.

'It ain't no bunyip, Steve,' wailed his wife, as they heard the retreating steps; 'it's the "Destryin' Hangel" as I heerd a parson talk on oncest when I was a kid, an' that wor the "Last Tramp"—the noise wot shows as the world is comin' to an ind. It ain't no use o' runnin'. We're all agoin' to git burnt up wi' fire an' bremston! Look out, Steve, an' see if there's a big light ennywheres.'

'Sha'n't,' replied Steve. 'Wot's the good? If it's the end o' the world, wot's the use o' lookin'? An' I b'lieve 'ere's yer blasted Hangel a-comin' agen!'

Sure enough, Greg, having had a snack, was returning just to assure the folk that he was doing well; that his belly was half full, and that he was enjoying himself immensely.

So he *hrrmped* softly round about in the darkness, and scratched his sides against the rough stone fireplace, and took off one of the rafters for a toothpick, and rumbled and gurgled meditatively, feeling that if he could only drop across a couple of quarts of toddy, as in the old Island days, his would be perfect bliss.

All through the hot summer night he passed at intervals from the paddock to the house and back, and all the night those others lay and shivered, and waited for the horror of the Unknown.

Then, a little after sunrise, a long, loud, shrill call was heard, answered on the instant by a sustained hoarse blare, as Greg recognised the cry of his mahout and keeper.

And presently Steve, plucking up courage in the light, arose, and, looking out, shouted to his wife triumphantly,—

‘Now, then, Mariar, who’s right about the bunyip! There he goes off home to the waterhole with a black nigger on his back!’

DEAD MAN'S CAMP.

ONE lurid summer, in 1873, I was crossing over from Saint George's Bridge, on the Balonne, to Mitchell, on the Maranoa. I had been to a rush at Malawal, N.S.W., but as it proved a rank duffer, got up by the local storekeepers in a last effort to keep the township in existence, I made back again by 'The Bridge,' on chance of getting a job of droving with some of the mobs of sheep or cattle always passing through the Border town, bound south from the Central and Gulf stations.

Queenslanders will remember that summer, on certain days of which men were stricken down in dozens, and birds fell dead off the trees in the fierce heat.

There is no drearier track in Australia than the one I speak of—all pine-scrub, too thick for a dog to bark in, and the rest sand and ant-hills.

There was nothing doing just then in 'The Bridge,' so I pushed on for the Maranoa. It was only the beginning of summer, and I reckoned on finding water twenty-five miles along the track, at a hole in the Wullumgudgeree Creek, known of aforetime.

It was a dismal ride, with nothing but walls of close-set scrub on each side, and sand, heavy underfoot, and glaring ahead. Even the horses seemed to feel its

influence as they ploughed along, heads bent down, coats black with sweat, and big clusters of flies swarming thickly at their leather eye-guards. Even one's own close-knit veil was but poor protection, for the pests gathered on it in such numbers as to almost obscure the sight. The flies and mosquitos were a caution that summer. However, shogging steadily on, with a pull at the water-bag now and then, I at length reached the creek, dry as a bone where it crossed the road. But, following it down through the scrub, I found the hole, pretty muddy and fast diminishing. Nor was it improved by the dog and the pack-horse rushing into it and rolling before I could stop them.

The sun was setting, a big red ball, over the tops of the pines as I hobbled out, pitched the tent on one side of the round open space, lit a fire, and slung the billy. There was not bad picking for the horses, and as I belled the pack I fervently trusted they would not stray far in such a God-forsaken spot.

After supper—damper, mutton and sardines, washed down by tea, boiled, skimmed and strained three times before coming to table—I felt pretty comfortable, and lay down with my head on one of the swags to enjoy a smoke and fight the mosquitos, who were beginning to sample freely. The sun had set, but the moon, big, yellow and hot-looking, hung in a hazy sky.

But for the buzzing of the insects and the snoring of the dog, fast asleep in a deep hole scratched in the sand, everything was very quiet. The thick scrub into which the horses had retreated deadened the sound of the bell.

Presently, however, evidently compassionating my lonely state, a little bird, after partaking of the remnants of my supper, came and perched on the ridge-pole of the tent, and piped forth at short intervals in a shrill monotone. 'Sweet, pretty creature! Pretty, sweet, little creature!' He was company of a sort, spite of his egoism. But there was other toward.

The flies had, ere this, gone to roost, but the mosquitoes were troublesome. They had also taken anticipatory possession of the tent. Burning some old rags, I cleared them out of that, fixed up the netting, and was preparing to turn in, when I heard the sound of hoofs coming thump, thump, down the dry creek bed. The dog, awaking, barked loudly, and in a minute or two a man and a woman rode into the bright firelight. They each had a big swag in front of them; and at a glance I saw that their horses were not only well-bred, but had come far and fast.

'Water!' exclaimed the man.

I gave him some; and he lifted the woman off and handed her the mug.

'We're travellin', mate,' said he, as I helped him to unsaddle. 'Got bushed atween 'ere an' the Maranoa. A bit o' damned bad country!'

He had not come from that direction at all; but in such a scrub all directions were much alike. And, anyhow, it was no business of mine. They had plenty of tucker, and I put the billy on again.

As the woman stood at the fire, holding up her riding-dress with one hand and with the other hastily fastening

some stray braids of long hair that had come adrift, I saw that she was a fresh-faced, pleasant-featured girl of about eighteen or nineteen. As she presently dropped her skirt, took off her hat, and used both hands to her hair, I noticed by the flickering light a red, angry-looking scar extending from the bridge of the nose up to and across the left eyebrow.

Her companion was a type I knew well. A cattleman all over, from the long, lean, curved legs of him to the sharp-eyed, tanned, resolute face. And from the swag I saw sticking out the curiously-carved handle of a stock-whip. They both seemed weary and thoughtful, and after supper I offered them the shelter of the tent. The man thanked me.

'The missus,' said he, 'll be only too glad of the chance. She ain't much used to campin' out.'

So they lugged their belongings inside, whilst, making up the fire, and throwing some green bushes on it to drive the skeeters away, I laid on my blankets, with the pack-saddle for a pillow, and the dog at my feet.

Awaking about midnight, as most bushmen do, I saw that big clouds were sailing fast across the moon. The air had become rather chilly, and, throwing more wood on the fire, I stood warming myself and filling my pipe. The dog, also getting up, yawned sleepily, and came and gazed into the blaze. The little bird from the ridge-pole still chirped its eulogistic call, but drowsily, and with effort, as of one who nods and winks. From the scrub came the faint tinkling of bells, showing that the horses were feeding steadily.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the peculiar long, rumbling whinny with which a straggling horse greets the presence of others. Then I heard the hobble-chains clanking as our horses galloped up to inspect the newcomer. Then ensued a short pause, followed by the sound of a wild snorting stampede as they crashed away, their hobbles jingling and bells ringing furiously through the scrub.

'Bother!' thought I, as the noise grew fainter and fainter, 'that means, most likely, a long walk in the morning. Hang all brombees!'

Preparing to lie down again, in not the best of tempers, I became aware of at least one horse steadily making towards the camp. As the steps approached, the dog, growling low, and with every hair bristling, backed towards the tent. A cold feeling of disquiet and nervousness took possession of me as I saw this.

Turning from watching the animal, my eye caught a dark mass between scrub and fire. Just then the moon shone out from behind a bank, and, not ten yards away, stood a horseman, his head drooping on his chest, his body rocking slightly in the saddle.

I gave a sigh of relief. Drunken riders are common enough in the Bush. And, with all trepidation vanished, I sang out gruffly enough,—

'Better get off, mate, before you fall off! Come and have a drink of tea!'

He would be a nuisance, of course, with the inevitable bottle of rum in his swag, and in his person all the loathsome imbecility inseparable from the sobering-up

process. But, as an institution, he had to be attended to.

And I repeated my invitation irritably to him, sitting there in the bright moonlight, one hand grasping the reins, the other resting on the wither, his chin on his breast, staring fixedly at me from under the broad-leafed hat.

'Oh,' I muttered, 'you drunken brute! I've got to lift you down, have I! About all you're fit for is to frighten people's horses away.'

The dog, only his head protruding from under the tent, kept up a long, snarling, choking growl, broken by gasps for fresh breath.

Advancing, I placed my hand upon the horseman's. It was like ice. Looking up, I saw a black-whiskered face, ashen-grey under the hat-leaf, and apparently leaning forward to gaze into mine out of wide-open, staring, glassy eyes.

Suddenly, realising the meaning of the thing, I ran to one side and shouted hurriedly—I know not what.

Then I heard someone in the tent cursing the dog, who yelped, as from a kick, and, presently, the stranger came out and walked up to the fire. Standing away, and in deep shadow, he did not see me. But, catching sight of that dread rider, sitting motionless, he went over and peered into its face.

Then with a tremendous oath he sprang back, and I could see his sharp-cut features working with emotion as he exclaimed, 'George! What game's this?'

Advancing again he stroked the horse, and, as I had

done, placed one of his hands on that other so cold one.

Apparently convinced, he ran into the tent, whence came in a minute an excited murmur of voices.

A heavy cloud was across the moon, but I could make out the pair fumbling for their bridles amongst a heap of saddlery at the foot of a sapling.

Meanwhile the horse was making ineffectual tugs at the bridle to get its head down to some dry tussocks growing near. But all its straining could not relax by one inch the steel-like grip of those dead fingers. Only the corpse at each jerk nodded in a ghastly cordial sort of fashion.

Presently, moonlight filled the little plain again, and the horse, growing impatient, turned and made off towards the sound of the distant bells.

Taking heart of grace, I ran up and caught it. As I led it back I noticed that the rider's legs were bound tightly to the saddle by straps passed from the front D's over the thighs to the ones on the cantle.

As I began to undo them I saw the man slinging off into the scrub with the woman at his heels. I shouted to them. But they took no notice.

Working away at the knots and buckles, the chin-strap slipped, the jaw fell, and the gleaming teeth showed in such an awful grin that I involuntarily stepped back.

Now the hat tumbled off, revealing the features of a young man with coal-black hair and moustache, and beard flecked with spots of dry white foam.

Even at its best, I should have called it a hard, cruel face. It was simply hideous now.

As I stood irresolutely staring, a voice behind me made me jump. It was the woman.

'Here,' she said, as with trembling fingers she essayed to loosen the dead grasp on the reins, 'I'll help you. He was a real bad un! But he couldn't scare me when he were alive, an' I aint goin' to let him do it now. See' (pointing to the cut on her forehead), 'this is the last thing he done. Slip your knife through them reins,' she continued. 'He's had a fit, or a stroke o' the sun, an' he'll never slacken his grip, no more'n he would my throat if he could ha' got hold on it. He was my husband; an' jealous of his own shadder. But I never minded much till he took to knockin' me about. I couldn't stand that. So I cleared with Jim yonder.'

By this, we had undone the saddle and breast-plate straps with which the man, feeling himself mortally struck, and wishful to avoid falling off and lying there to rot in that wild scrub, had, in perhaps his last agony, tied himself to the saddle. And between us we let him slide gently down on to the sand, whilst the horse shook itself, sniffed unconcernedly at the body, and wandered away to the others.

For a while she stood gazing on the thing as it lay there with stiffly curved legs and upturned glassy eyes.

Then she smiled a little out of a white face, set hard with horror and detestation, saying,—

'After all, perhaps, he thought a lot of me!' And, going to the tent, she returned with a blanket, and carefully spread it over the corpse.

Then, as the man came up with the horses and began to saddle them, she said, holding out her hand,—

‘So long! an’ many thanks. You’ve bin a real right bower. We’re a-goin’ into the Bridge, an’ we’ll send the traps out, all square an’ fair. So long! agen.’

‘So long, mate!’ shouted the man, with a tremor in his voice lacking in the woman’s. And then they rode away, two dark shapes against the moonlit scrub.

‘Died by the visitation of God,’ said the Coroner’s Jury.

‘Served him damned well right!’ said the district generally, who knew the story.

But travellers along the Maranoa track make a point of giving ‘Dead Man’s Camp’ a very wide berth.

THE SHANGHAI-ING OF PETER BARLOW.

‘YES, Peter, no doubt they’re a couple of fine colts, and should make good steppers. I hope you’ll have them well broken in for the drag by the time I return. Then, with the other pair of browns, they ought to turn out about the smartest four-in-hand in the district.’

‘Goin’ away, sir?’ asked Peter Barlow, Head Stockman and Chief of Horse at Wicklow Downs.

‘Yes, Peter; I’m thinking of taking a trip to the Old Country,’ replied Mr Forrest, owner of the big cattle station on the border. ‘I mean to take Mrs Forrest and the children, and be away twelve months; so you’ll have plenty of time to fix up a team. We start in three weeks from to-day.’

‘Well, sir,’ said Peter, ‘afore you goes I shouldn’t mind takin’ a spell down country myself, if you haven’t no objection.’

His employer turned sharply round from the horse-yard rail, and looked at the young fellow.

Twenty-five, born on the station, an orphan, fairly steady, very useful, the best rough-rider in the district,

never more than fifty miles away from home in his life. Such was the record of Peter Barlow, who chewed a straw, and smiled as he noticed his master's surprise.

'Why, what's bitten you, my lad,' said the latter, 'that you want to get away amongst the spielers and forties of the big smoke? Isn't Combington large enough for a spree?'

'Well, sir,' replied Peter, rather sheepishly, 'you see, they're always a-poking borack an' a-chiackin' o' me over in the hut because I've never seed nothin'. There's chaps there as has been everywheres, an' can talk nineteen to the dozen o' the things they've gone through, an' me a-settin' listenin' like a stuffed dummy.'

'I see, Peter,' said Mr Forrest, laughing, 'you want to travel. "Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits," eh, Peter? Believe me, my lad, for all that, you're better off as you are, notwithstanding the gas of those other fellows. However, you may take a month if you like. I think, though, that you'll be glad to get back in the half of it. But how would it do for you to come down with us? I shall be staying in town for a week or so, and could often see you, and that you didn't get into any mischief.'

But Peter shook his head sagely, saying,—

'You see, sir, I'd like to git back in about a fortnight or so. There's that lot o' calves in the heifer paddock to be weaned, an' that last lot o' foals 'll want brandin', an'—'

'All right, Peter, my boy,' interrupted the squatter, laughing again. 'Put money in thy purse, go forth and

see the world. Only, when you're tired, don't forget the track back to the old station.'

So, after a day or two, Peter rode 150 miles to the railway terminus, and, leaving his horse in a paddock, embarked on a very strange adventure, and one that will be handed down with ever-increasing embroidery to each generation of Barlows, until, in time, the narrative overshadows that of Munchausen. It would be tedious to attempt to depict Peter's astonishment at the first sight of steam. As a matter of fact, he was not a bit surprised—or, if he was, he didn't show it. It takes more than the first sight of an express train to upset the marvellous stoicism, or adaptability—which is it?—of the Native-Born. It takes all that subsequently befel to do so. Peter arrived in safety at the first large inland town. Here he tarried awhile and enjoyed himself after the manner of his kind. He stared into shop windows; went to a race meeting, and there lost five pounds to a monte man. With a dim notion percolating under his cabbage-tree that he had been cheated, he made a furious attack on both man and table. Sequel—five shillings or twenty-four hours. This, now, was something like life! Would he not soon be able to ruffle it with the loudest of them on his return?

After this exploit Peter decided to proceed on his travels.

His first emotion of expressed surprise was displayed at sight of the sea. As the train ran along the embankment, and the stretch of water studded with ships' masts caught his eye, he exclaimed,—

'By Jinks! that's a thunderin' big lagoon if yer likes.

But what's all that dead timber a-stickin' up in it? Must ha' been a good-sized flood hereabout !'

Then his fellow-travellers laughed ; and Peter, abashed, withdrew into himself, but stared steadily over that wondrous expanse of water whose like so far exceeded his imaginings.

At the port Fate led him—of all people in the world—to put up at a sailors' boarding-house. And here, for the first time in his life, he found himself an oracle.

Many sailors 'go up the Bush.' But those who get so far as where Peter hailed from seldom or never return to the sea.

Therefore, no one criticising, wondrous were the yarns he spun to an ever-shifting audience of all nations. Wondrous yarns of fierce blacks, of men perishing of thirst and hunger in the lonely bush, of wild cattle, of bucking horses, of the far inland life. And, in return, they told him tales of the stormy seas, and drank heartily at his expense. The port was busy, wages high, and men scarce. But Peter's audience never failed him. The fame of the 'Jolly Bushman down at Gallagher's' had spread about the shipping, and whole crews used to drop in of an evening to listen to Peter and drink his beer and rum.

It would have taken a longer purse than Peter's to stand this kind of thing.

He had put aside enough money to take him back, and now he resolved to travel no further. He had heard and seen sufficient ; and, above all, been listened to with deference and attention.

Besides, had he not been on board of ships and there

drank rum of such strength as made his very hair stand on end ; and eaten biscuits and salt junk.

Moreover, once his friends had taken him out and away upon the 'lagoon,' away so far, than when he looked for his native land he beheld it not. Then the water, hitherto smooth, gradually began to heave and swell into hills as tall as the Wonga Ranges, and, presently, he fell deadly sick and lay in the salt water in the boat's bottom, feeling as if the very soul-bolts were being wrenched out of him.

Afterwards his friends had apologised, and said something about 'a squall.' But Peter would venture no more.

These things, and many others, would he have to tell. Also the time was approaching for the weaning of calves and branding of foals. He had spent nearly all his money. But that did not trouble him. For the future he must be a bold man who, in the hut, or on the run, could snub Peter Barlow. One last jovial evening he and his sea-friends would have together, and then, hey for the far-inland scrubs and rolling downs.

So far as Peter recollected, it *was* a jovial evening. He had sung his famous ballad of 'The Wild Australian Boy,' applauded to the echo as he had never been at home. He had drunk healths innumerable in divers liquors ; had accepted as much strong 'niggerhead' in parting gifts—it was all they possessed—as would have stocked a tobacconist's shop, and seen the last guest lurch out into the night.

Then Gallagher had proposed one more drink, 'for luck !' After that—oblivion.

When Peter awoke, his first thought was that he must have fallen asleep in the saddle, as he had done before now when camping out with cattle from the back of the run.

But, on this occasion, his throat was hot and dry, and his head full of ringing bells. Raising himself, he bumped his nose sharply, and fell back to consider.

It was almost dark, and he could hear a noise of wind and of rushing waters. Also he felt a rocking motion which assuredly was not that of a feeding horse.

He had heard the same sounds and felt the same motion recently, but he could not recollect when. Presently a door slid open, and a flood of sunshine came in, with a black face in the midst of it.

'Ahi,' said a voice, as Peter blinked at its owner. 'You 'wake now, eh? Copper hot, I 'spect? Have drink?' and the speaker handed up a hook-pot full of water.

Peter drank copiously, and made shift to get out.

'Where the blazes am I?' he exclaimed, weak and trembling all over, as his feet touched the deck.

'Barque *John F. Harkins*, o' Boston, State o' Maine. I'm de doctor. Guess you've been shanghaied. Best come out afore de greaser gets mad.'

This was Greek to poor Peter. But, stumbling over the door-sill, he gazed about him with a wildly-amazed look, which made the negro cook grin more widely than ever.

All around was blue water, blue water from where it touched the sky-line to where, close to him, it rushed

swiftly past, curling, white-tipped. Above his head acres of snowy canvas bellied in graceful curves aloft into a blue sky ; everywhere a maze of ropes and gear, crossed and re-crossed like the threads of a spider's web.

Peter gasped. He was astonished and dismayed too deeply for words ; and at the expression of his face the darkey laughed outright.

The ship giving a sudden lurch, he staggered, slipped over to leeward, and clutched a belaying pin. Then he heard a bell strike somewhere. Then men came out of a hole in the deck near by, and one, staring hard, exclaimed,—

‘ Why, damn my rags, if this ain't the Jolly Bushman come to sea ! ’

‘ What ! ’ shouted the mate, walking for'ard to meet his watch. ‘ Isn't he a sailor-man ? ’

‘ Nary sailor-man, ’ replied the other. ‘ He's a fellow from the country—a good sort o' chap—but as green's they make 'em as regards o' salt water. ’

‘ Damn that Gallagher ! ’ exclaimed the officer. ‘ He brought the coon aboard, an' got the bounty, swearin' he was a shellback all over—blood Stockholm tar, and every hair on his head a rope yarn ! If ever we fetch Coalport again I'll skin that Irish thief ! ’

So also affirmed the captain of the *John F. Harkins*, who was out of pocket a month's advance, besides two pounds “ head money,” to the crimp who had netted poor Peter.

Luckily, very luckily for Peter, he had not fallen into the hands of a set of ‘ white-washed Americans, ’ half Irish, half anything, proficients in the art of sea-

bullying, and in the use of revolvers and knuckle-dusters.

The officers and most of the men of the *John F.* were genuine Down-Easters, natives of Salem, Martha's Vineyard, and thereabout, shrewd and kindly people; and, though all naturally indignant at the trick played upon them, too just to visit their wrath on its unfortunate object.

Presently Peter was recognised by the steward, who had tasted of his hospitality ashore, and who now, seeing the poor fellow still suffering from the effects of the narcotic administered in that last 'for luck' drink of scamp Gallagher's, put him to bed and brought him restoratives. So, in due course, Peter became his own man again, and got fine-weather sea-legs upon him, and would have been comparatively happy but for thoughts of those far-away calves and foals, and the clumsy fingers of a certain assistant stockman. They taught him how to sweep decks, coil up ropes, and make sinnet. They also coaxed him aloft; but he never could get further up the rigging than the futtock-shrouds. There he stuck helplessly, and over them he never went. He was young and light and active; but, somehow, he couldn't bend his body outward into empty air and trust its weight to a little bit of rope no thicker than a clothes-line. It didn't seem natural. One cannot make a sailor at twenty-five.

The *John F.* was bound for Colombo, thence to Hamburg, and, so far, everything had been fine sailing. But one day a dead-ahead gale arose and blew fiercely for three days.

Then it was that Peter began to realise earnestly what he had before but dimly suspected, viz., that on such an occasion one foot of dry land is worth ten thousand acres of foaming ocean. Easier by far would it have been for him to sit the roughest colt that ever bucked than to stand a minute erect on the barque's deck.

Of such jumping and rearing, plunging and swerving, Peter had possessed no conception before, except in the saddle. There, however, he would have been comparatively safe. Here he was tossed about apparently at the pleasure of the great creature beneath him—one minute on to the back of his head, the next in the lee-scuppers. When he arose, dripping and grasping blindly for support, the rushing past of big seas, the wild, stern hum in the strained rigging, the roar of the blast in the bellies of the tugging topsails, and the swirling of green water round his legs, so bewildered him that he was unable to distinguish one end of the ship from the other.

Under the circumstances, he did the wisest thing he could, and turned into his bunk. There he lay, and wondered with all his might why men should go to sea.

On the fourth day, the gale moderating, they made sail again. During this operation an unfortunate A.B. fell from the main-yard, and broke his leg. The captain did his best, but he was, like the rest, quite unskilled, and the poor fellow lay in agony. Two days after this, when nearly a calm, the mate roused the skipper out of a nap with,—

'Here's one of them big packet boats a-overhaulin' us, sir.'

'Well,' replied the skipper sleepily, 'what about it? Let her rip. I don't want her. Wish we had her wind, that's all.'

'Poor Bill's leg, sir,' answered the other.

'Why, of course; I forgot,' said the skipper. 'Stop the beggar, by all manner of means. She'll have a doctor, an' ice, an' all sorts o' fixin's on board. Run the gridiron half-mast, Mr Stokes. They packets don't care much about losin' time for sich a trifle as a broken leg, but thet oughter ease her down.'

And so it did. No sooner was the American flag seen flying half-way up the signal halliards than the steamer kept away, and came thundering down upon the barque.

'What's the matter?' shouted someone, as she slowed nearly alongside.

'A doctor!' roared the mate. 'Man very bad with a broken leg!'

'Send him on board, and look smart,' was the reply.

So a boat was lowered, and amongst its crew was Peter Barlow, who, from the first, had been told off to attend the injured man, and who assisted to carry him up the gangway-ladder of the R.M.S. *Barcelona*.

'Umph, umph,' said the surgeon; 'he'll have to stay here if he wants to save his leg.' Then to Peter, 'Off you go back, my lad, and get his kit and what money's coming to him. It'll be many a long day before he sails the sea again.'

But Peter, whose eyes had been roving over the sur-

rounding crowd, suddenly, to the medico's astonishment, shouting,—‘The boss, by G—d!’ rushed through the people, and, regardless of appearances, seized a gentleman's hand and shook it frantically, exclaiming,—

‘Oh, Mr Forrest, sir, don't you know me? I'm Peter, sir—Peter Barlow, from the ole station. I've been shanghaied an' locussed away to sea, an' I wants to git back home again!’

Mr Forrest was more astonished than Peter at such a meeting. Matters, however, were soon arranged.

Peter went on to Colombo in the *Barcelona*, and, in a fortnight, joining another boat, duly arrived at Wicklow Downs, whence he has never since stirred.

And, if the reader chance one day to journey thither, he may hear at first hand this story, embellished with breezy Bush idioms and phrases that render it infinitely more graphic and stirring a version, but which, somehow, do not read well in type.

‘EX SARDANAPALUS.’

‘MAKE it eight bells! Go below, the starboard watch!’

A few minutes later, and eight men sat on eight sea-chests, looking hungrily across at one another. Between them lay an empty meat-kid.¹ In a box alongside were some biscuits, black and honeycombed with weevil-holes. Dinner was over in the *Sardanapalus*’ fo’c’stle, but still her starboard watch glared hungrily at each other.

‘I’ve lost two good stone since I jined this starvation hooker!’ presently growled one. ‘I ain’t never full, and I kin feel them cussed worms out o’ the bread a-crawlin’ about in my stummick like so many snakeses.’

‘Same ’ere, matey,’ chimed in another. ‘A mouthful o’ salt horse an’ a bite o’ rotten bread for breakfus, ditto for dinner, an’ a soldier’s supper;² with lime-juice an’ winegar chucked in, according to the Hack,³ ain’t to say fattenin’.’

‘That’s wot’s the matter, when the skipper finds the ship,’ remarked a third. ‘Yer gets yer whack, an’ ye gits nae mair, as the Scotchies has it.’

‘We doesn’t even get that itself,’ put in another, who

¹ Small wooden tub.

² A smoke and a drink of water.

³ Merchant Seamen’s Act.

was sitting on the edge of his bunk. 'That yaller hound of a steward gives short weight all round. 'Lord!' he continued, 'only to think that, this time last year, I was a-smackin' my chops over mutton uns; an' full and plenty of everythin' in the Hostralian Bush. What a hass I was to leave it! One'd think there was some sort o' damned magic in the sea to be able to draw a feller a thousand miles down from good times, good tucker, good pay, an' all night in, with a spree whenever you felt fit.'

'Too good, Billy, altogether,' piped up a grey-headed old chap. 'An' that's what's the matter. You gets up the Bush, you gets as fat as a bacon hog, you lives like a gentleman, an', in the long run, it don't agree with your constitooshun. You gets the boil,¹ an' your liver turns a sort o' dandy-grey, russet-colour, and you misses the gravy-eye² trick at the wheel, an' you misses the jumpin' out o' a wet bunk, all standin' in wet clothes, and the hissle o' the gale in your ears, an' the woof o' the cold water over your boot-tops, an' down the small o' your back as ye comes a-shiverin' an' a-shakin' on deck. You've bin used to this sort o' thing all your life, Billy, an' your liver an' all the other innard parts gives notice when they're a-tired o' the soft lyin' an' the good livin' up-country, an' drives ye back to the old life an' the old ways agin. That's where the magic comes in, my son.'

After this there was silence for a while. Each man's face poked over his bunk with a short clay pipe in its

¹ Bile.

² Four till six a.m.

mouth. Strong, rank fumes of tobacco filled the place.

'I say, boys,' suddenly exclaimed one, 'what's this hooker got in her?'

'General,' replied the old man, whose name was Nestor. 'I heerd the customs officer at Gravesend say as it was one o' the walluablest general cargers as 'ad ever left the docks.'

'Well then, mates,' said the other, 'all I've got to remark is as we're the biggest an' softest set o' fools as ever left the docks, to go a-starvin' in this fashion, when t'other side o' that there bulkhead's every sort o' tucker you can mention.'

.
'Make it eight bells! Go below, the starboard watch!'

The same eight men sat on their respective sea-chests.

Between them stood their allowance of beef and biscuit. But it was untouched. Yet the meal had been in progress an hour.

Alongside of him every man had one or more tins of some kind of preserved provisions, out of which he was keeping his plate supplied to an accompaniment of plain and fancy biscuits.

'Try a little o' this 'ere fresh herrin', Jim,' said one to his neighbour very politely; 'I kin recommend it as tasty.'

'Thank ye, Billy (looking at the label, and passing his own tin), and 'ere's some sheep's tongues with tomaty sauce, which p'haps 'll remind you on the Bush of Australier.'

'Ah, if we'd only a drop o' good stuff now, to wash these 'ere tiddlewinks down with,' exclaimed Nestor, 'I'd feel happy as a king—an' as full!'

'All in good time, dad,' remarked Billy; 'this 'ere's only what the swells'd call a hinstalment—a triflin' hinstalment o' what the *Sardinapples* owes us for a whole month's out-an'-out starvin'. Just wait awhile till we gets to the bottled ale an' porter, which 'll likely be in the lower tiers, an' then we'll begin to live like gentlemen-shellbacks oughter.'

'I votes as how we should let on to the port watch,' presently said a man, as he finished off his repast with a handful of muscatels and blanched almonds.

'Ay,' responded old Nestor. 'It do seem mean, us livin' high, an' them a-drawin' their belts tighter every day. Besides,' added he, meditatively, 'company is pleasing; an' there'll be all the more for Pentridge. Not that I thinks it needs come to that if we're careful. But (with a doubtful shake of the head) I'm afraid the grog 'll be too much for some of us when we gits to it.'

A word here as to the *Sardanapalus*.

She was one of the old-fashioned frigate-built ships—somewhat slow, but comfortable. Carrying, as per owner's advertisement, 'a first-class milch cow and surgeon,' she was rather a favourite with that description of passengers who, obeying a doctor's prescription, were obliged to take 'a long sea voyage.' The passage money was very high. There were no 'intermediates,' no subdivisions. A very good table was kept, and the 'dog-basket' and 'menavelings' from it alone would have

supplied the fo'c'stle twice over. But for these leavings a host of ill-fed, brass-bound apprentices, boys, and petty officers were ever on the watch—the former knowing as crows, sharp as kites. Foremast Jack had not the ghost of a chance with them.

Ever since she slipped along the ways the *Sardanapalus* had borne the reputation of being a 'hungry ship.' More than half-a-dozen times had she hauled into dock with a collar of clean picked beef bones around her figure-head. It was currently understood that the skipper 'found' the ship. He was an Orkney man, owned a part of her; and probably did so. She was a regular trader at that time. She is now a custom-house hulk in an East Indian harbour.

The chief officer was a native of Vermont, U.S., and, with regard to the crew, a bit of a bully. As he was wont to often inform them, with the national snuffle intensified,—

'I'm a big lump of a horse—a high-bred stepper—an' when I kick bones fly.'

He came out a loser by this gift, as will be presently seen.

Long before the opening of this yarn the crew had remonstrated with their superiors about their food. The captain had laughed at them, and the mate inquired whether they imagined the *Sardanapalus* had been specially fitted out as a cook-shop for their pleasure.

Perhaps it was this that now made them linger joyfully over their stolen meals; and, occasionally, explore with naked lights the 'general' when they ought to have

been sleeping on empty stomachs in their watch below.

It being an article of faith with the crew that the chief mate was responsible for the cargo, they felt a thorough pleasure in its total destruction. Nestor, old sea-lawyer that he was, had told them that, although a parcel might be opened and the contents abstracted, yet, could the smallest portion of the case, cask, or whatever it chanced to be, be produced, the mate would be held blameless. But, on the other hand, if not a vestige of anything were to be found to correspond with the item in the manifest, then would the chief assuredly be mulcted in the full value of the missing article. With this devoutly-wished-for end in view, any light package was dragged for'ard, handed up, and given a free passage. This was criminal and indefensible. But they hated the Yankee with a very hearty hatred. Had they not been able to discharge some of it in this manner there would have surely been a mutiny, and possibly bloodshed, before the termination of the passage.

In his character of 'horse' the mate had one day broken a poor submissive German sailor's ribs by repeated kicks from his heavy sea-boots. Such things create antipathies, even on board ship. Consignors and consignees alike would have danced with wrath and anguish could they have witnessed that night's jettison.

The forecastle was what is known as a 'lower' one. A bulkhead separated the two watches. This partition was composed of very heavy hardwood planking, on the after side of which was the fore-hatchway, filled up to

within six feet of the deck by a collection of sails, rope, water-tanks, bundles of hay for the cow, etc. Aft of these, at about the same height, stretched the cargo. It will thus be noticed that the *Sardanapalus* was not a 'full ship.'

The starboard watch had removed two of the broad massive bulk-head planks. The port watch two also. At such times as a fresh supply of provisions was needed, four men from each watch in turn exploited the cargo. The others kept a look-out aft, and stood by the scuttle to receive and give things 'a passage.' As time passed, the crew, under the new regimen, began to grow fat and jolly-looking. They worked with a will, and as a pleasure to themselves. Also, to the utter astonishment of their superiors, they sang and skylarked in the second dog watch.

'And these,' exclaimed the captain, 'are the scoundrels who growled about their food!'

He visited the galley, and sniffed and peered into the fo'c'sle coppers, and also cross-examined the cook and the steward.

'Give the beggars more rice,' said he to the latter official—a sleek, oily quadron. 'Let 'em have "banyan day" three times a week. We'll have enough meat left then for the trip home without buying any in port.'

The crew grinned, but said nothing. The skipper was bothered.

'Had the fore-hatch off yesterday, didn't you?' he asked the mate.

'Yaas, sir,' snuffled he.

'Everythin' seem all right? No cargo shifted or broached?'

'Naw,' replied the mate; 'seems 'bout the saame as when we left dock; an' I oughter know, for I hed a sight o' trouble fixin' that deadweight so's to trim her forrard. I wonder, naow," he continued with a chuckle as at some joke, 'how *It's* a-gettin' on down below thar?'

'Damn *It!*' answered the captain shortly, as he turned away. He was in a bad temper that night. He hated to hear the men jolly; and instead of lying moodily about, silent and depressed, as of yore, in the six till eight watch, here were both watches on the t'gallant fo'c'stle putting all the strength of their united lungs into 'Marching through Georgia.'

Such a thing had never happened to Captain Flett before, and he took it as a personal insult. The mate, snubbed, went down on the main-deck and put a stopper on the singing with a yell of 'Lee fore-braces there, and chuck yourselves about a bit!' The yards didn't want trimming in the least. So the men, who knew this, pulled slowly and silent, each with his mouth full of choice sweetmeats discovered the night previous.

As yet they had found no strong liquors. But they had found nearly everything else. 'Dry goods' of every description, jewellery, clocks, firearms, stationery, patent medicines, etc. They had commenced operations, in the first place, under the main hatch, leaving all the fore part of the hold untouched. Without a purposeful search, no one would imagine cargo to have been broached. The throwing things, except *débris*—empty

cases, bottles, baskets, etc.—overboard had been discontinued. It took up too much time, and the labour was too heavy. Besides, reckoning by Nestor's calculation, the mate's pay-day was worth already some hundreds of pounds less than nothing.

But one night, coming across a case of toilet soaps, pomades, scented oils, etc., the temptation proved irresistible, and a stock was laid in. The love of personal adornment runs strong at all times in Jack's heart. On the following Sunday morning the t'gallant fo'c'sle resembled a barber's shop in a big way of business. Jack clipped and shaved and anointed himself until he fairly shone and reeked with the produce of Rimmel. Never had fore part of ship smelled so sweetly. The passengers staggered about with their heads well up, sniffing delightedly.

'Oh, captain,' said one—a gushing widow whose age was uncertain, but mourning fresh—'we really must be approaching some tropical climes. These are the lovely "spicy breezes," you know, "blowing soft o'er Ceylon's isle."'

The skipper didn't know, but, sniffing also, answered,—

'Very likely, ma'am. But there's no islands nearer 'n Tristan da Cunha, an' I don't think that there's much spice about that one. I expect,' he continued, glancing for'ard, 'that it's some of the hands titivatin' themselves up. You see, ma'am, these scamps get all sorts of rubbishy oils and essences on an eastern voyage. One of 'em's evidently found a bottle or two in the locker of his chest; and, now, he and his mates are swabbing themselves down with it.'

'Dear me, how very interesting,' replied the widow blandly, with a languishing glance at the skipper. 'But (as a burst of hoarse laughter came on the scented wind) 'they're a terribly rough set, are they not, captain? I'm sure, but for yourself and your brave officers, I shouldn't feel safe for a minute. I think I heard someone say, too, that they actually complained about their food at the beginning of the journey.'

This was touching the skipper on a tender spot.

'At first, ma'am, at first," assented he severely, after a sharp suspicious look at the somewhat faded features. 'But they've found me out, now, ma'am. They know John Flett's up to 'em and their little games. The less food you give a sailor, ma'am, the better he works. Full an' plenty's a mistake. Give 'em a belly full an' they'll growl from mornin' till night, an' all night through. They'll growl, ma'am, I do assure you, at the very best of beef and pork, the whitest of biscuits, an' the plumpest of rice. Growl! They'd growl if you gave 'em toasted angels!'

'What horrible wretches!' exclaimed the widow sympathetically. 'And what a lot of worry you must have with them, captain!'

'No one but myself can imagine it, ma'am,' replied the skipper, as he moved off, meditating on the possibility of stopping the usual dole of treacle for the Sunday duff. That laughter from for'ard annoyed him beyond endurance.

Presently the cuddy went to luncheon; and the star-board watch to its dinner.

The lump of dark unleavened dough and hook-pot full of molasses were there, but untouched, and awaiting the ocean sepulchre which had been their fate for many past Sundays.

'I ralely don't know what this is,' said Bill, as he helped himself to a *paté de foie gras* out of a dozen which lay on the deck. 'But whatever it is, it ain't to be sneezed at. Somè sorter swell pie, I reckons. Talk 'bout jelly, lor! 'What you got there, Ned?'

'Looks like soup an' bully 'ithout the bully,' answered the man addressed, who was pouring a steaming mixture out of a tin which he had just taken from over the big slush lamp—'But it says on the paper "Ju-li-enne." Sounds as if some woman had a hand in it. It don't go very high,' he resumed, after a few mouthfuls, 'seems thinnish-like—no body—give us some o' your meat to mix with it, Nestor.'

'Taint meat,' said the old man. 'It's what they calls jugged 'are, and there's no bones in it.'

'Pity we couldn't manage to hot this duff up,' sighed one, cutting a huge slice off a big plum pudding; 'but they'd smell it all over the ship.'

'The cake for me!' exclaimed another, attacking one of Gunter's masterpieces. 'I ain't seen a three-decker like this since I was a kid, an' used to hang about smellin' at the tip-top cook-shops in the Mile-End Road!'

'Wade in, my bullies, an' line yer ribs,' croaked old Nestor. 'It's the spiciest Sunday's feed I've 'ad in forty year o' the sea. I kin do three months chokey at the end o' this trip, flyin'; an' kin live on the smell of an

oil rag all the time! If we on'y 'ad a few nips a-piece, now, it would be perfect!

.
Midnight in the hold of the *Sardanapalus*. Four red spots moving slowly about in the thick gloom. From the irregular, tightly-packed mass proceeds all sorts of eerie creakings and groanings. The ship is pitching into a head sea and, at times, a wave catching her a thunderous slap, makes her seem to fairly stand still and shudder all over. The atmosphere is thick, and stuffy with an indescribable stuffiness. Presently the four points of light clustered together.

'What is it, I wonder?' said Billy, sticking his candle into a crevice, and pointing to a long, square, narrow case embedded in a pile of others.

'Don't know,' replied another, stooping. 'Got no marks, only "*Ex Sardinapples*—With great care." Had any luck, you two?'

'Try this,' answered one, holding out a bottle which old Nestor immediately clutched.

'Wine o' some sort,' was his verdict. 'Poor stuff—got no grip o' the throat—sourish. Let's see what it sez on the bottle. "Chat-oo Mar-goox," read he, straddling, with legs wide apart, and bottle and candle close to his nose.

'Ay, ay,' he continued, 'I thought's much. Dutch, I reckon. Much the same kind o' tipples as ye gets at the dance-houses in Hamburg. We wants a warmer drink for these 'ere latichudes—not but what it's a cut above that sarseperiller, an' 'op bitters, an' such like slush as we bin livin' on lately.'

'Well,' asked Billy, tapping the case, as he spoke, with a short iron bar, 'shall we see what's in this?'

'Not worth while,' replied Nestor, who had finished the claret, not without many grimaces—

'It's only china crockery, or somethin' o' that. They always put "With great care," an' "This side hup" on sich. Blast the old hooker, how she do shove her snout into it!'

This last, as a tremendous forward send of the ship nearly carried him off his legs.

Billy, however, appeared determined on seeing the contents of the case, whose peculiar shape had aroused his curiosity, and started to break it out by himself. Finally the others came to his assistance, and a quarter-of-an-hour's work hove it up from its nest. To their surprise it was locked and hinged. Curiosity took hold upon them. They prised and hammered, and strove, until, with a crash, the top flew back.

'Kind o' cork chips!' exclaimed Nestor, taking up a handful and putting it to his nose. 'Poof! smells like a chemist's shop, full o' camphor an' drugs.'

'Ere's another box inside this un,' said Bill, who had been groping amongst the odoriferous mass. And so it proved; another long, narrow case, also locked and hinged, made of some polished wood whose surface reflected dimly the faces bending over it.

Subjected to similar treatment with its outer shell, it, too, soon yielded.

As the lid, which was thickly padded, flew off under the pressure of the iron levers, the four men shrank away

as if they had stumbled on a den of venomous serpents.

On a strip of soft black velvet lay the shrouded corpse of a man. The grizzled head rested on a pillow, and the hands were crossed on the breast. Thin slats fitting athwartships kept the body in position. Although the eyes were closed, the features looked unnaturally natural. There even seemed to be a tinge of colour in the dead cheeks. But the artist had failed with the lips. The upper one had shrivelled and curled up over the white teeth, imparting a sardonic, grinning semblance to the whole face, unutterably ghastly to look upon, especially just then.

This it was, and the life-like seeming of *It*, that frightened the cargo broachers so badly. And they *were* terribly frightened. They were too frightened to run, even had running been practicable. But the man who attempts such tricks in a ship's hold at night, and with a heavy head sea on, comes to rapid grief at the second step. So they just stood still, gripping each other's arms, and swearing under their breath, as is the wont of the British seaman when badly scared.

The old man, Nestor, was the first to speak. In quavering tones he said,—

'It's only a wax himmidge.'

'Nothin' o' the kind,' replied Bill, the boldest of the group, letting go his hold and coming a little closer. 'It's a 'barmed corpus, that's wot *It* is. I was shipmates with one on 'em afore. A soger officer he were. He were lashed under the mizzen-top, an' labelled "Combust-

tibles; do not touch!" in big black letters. One fine mornin' he come down by the run an' busted the case. He was just the same's this un, only they hadn't put that howdacious grin on to him. It were in the old *Euryalus*, man-o'-war, so we had to suffer him; an' a most hunlucky trip it were. Run her ashore twice. Took the sticks out on her twice. Lost four men overboard. No wonder *we've* had three weeks o' head winds. But this joker 'll get a free passage without much delay, if I've got to give it him single-handed.' So saying, he advanced, picked up the lid, and began to fasten it down.

.
The next morning dawned bright and clear; but the head wind still stood, and there was a nasty lump of a sea on. For the comparatively high latitude the air was warm and comfortable.

Most of the passengers came up on the poop after breakfast. Presently, with the assistance of the skipper's arm, the widow began a promenade.

'What an exhibition she's making of herself! Her husband, if she ever had one, can't be six months dead yet, by her mourning. She ought to be ashamed of herself—the sly thing!'

If the widow did not exactly hear all this, she felt it, and cast looks of triumphant defiance at her female friends, clustered in groups, most of them holding on to something unassisted. Elderly unmarried convalescents, and very spiteful, the majority.

'Something—on—the—lee-quarter, sir!' came down from aloft.

The skipper called for his glass, without quitting his companion.

'Keep her away a couple of points,' he commanded, as he brought the instrument to bear.

'Can't make it out at all,' he went on, after a minute's focussing. 'Something white, jumping up and down. Bit of wreckage, spar, or the like, I expect. Keep her away another point. Take a peep, ma'am. Your bright eyes 'll perhaps distinguish it.'

The widow bridled coquettishly and, supported by the skipper, put herself in what she fancied an appropriate and elegant position.

'Oh!' she squealed presently, 'I see it, captain; it's coming this way. How very interesting! "A message from the sea," "Strange tale of the ocean," and all that sort of thing, you know, that one reads about in the papers. What an exciting adventure!' The widow had taken the glass from her eye whilst speaking.

Suddenly a passenger cried,—

'I see it! Look! On top of that wave!' But even as he spoke it disappeared.

The starboard watch had been called aft by the second mate to try and jam the main-yards still further into the s'ack of the lee-rigging. The men now remained together with the eager knot of passengers staring over the quarter.

All at once, and with startling unexpectedness, there bobbed up on a sea almost level with the taffrail, a nude figure, nearly upright. One arm, by some eccentric working of the water, was jerked backwards and forwards

from the face with an awfully grotesque motion of throwing kisses to the horrified watchers.

The notion was intensified by the grin on the lifelike features, startlingly distinct in the sunlight, as the embalmed figure, kept erect by the greater weight of its extremities, rose up and down, now in a hollow, now on a crest, not ten yards away.

'It's IT, by G—d!' shouted Nestor, who happened to be at the wheel.

But no one took any notice of him in the general confusion.

The male passengers stood stock still, fascinated by the spectacle. The female ones shrieked, and a couple fainted. But louder and higher than any of them shrieked the widow, who had got both arms around the skipper's neck, to which she hung, half choking him, whilst her feet rattled frantically on the deck.

'Let go, ma'am!' he gurgled. 'Damn it, let go, can't you?'

'It's his ghost!' she screamed, taking another horrified glance at the bobbing, grimacing thing as it travelled slowly across the broad wake. 'What have I done, James, that you should appear like this?' she moaned. 'I'm sure I thought you'd be comfortable down there!' And here she began to laugh hysterically; and, held forcibly on the deck by the sorely-trying skipper, went off into a succession of violent fits.

'Main topsail braces there, some of you!' roared the mate, who, aroused by the cry of 'Man overboard!' uttered by one of the boys, had rushed on deck. 'Come here, four hands, and clear away the life-boat.'

'Don't be a fool, Mr Sparkes!' shouted the skipper, still struggling with the widow, who had got one hand in his long beard and was pulling it out by the roots.

'Never mind the boat!' he panted, for the real state of the case had broken upon him. 'But come and take this she-devil away! Let *It* go to blazes as fast as it likes! It's got a fair wind, seemingly, and that's more'n we have!'

.
Anchor watch off Geelong, Victoria.

Apparently the whole thing had quietly blown over. When the mate, with a terribly long face, had reported to the captain, as nearly as he could, the amount of cargo missing, and proposed as a set-off, to put one-half of each watch in irons until arrival, the skipper had only laughed.

He obviously enjoyed the responsible man's dismay.

'Nothing of the sort,' he replied. 'We can't do without 'em. We're bound to get a good blow or two 'tween here and Port Phillip Heads, and where would we be with half the men in irons, and the rest sulking? You're a fool, Sparkes. I'm goin' to smooth 'em down. They'll have cabin biscuits and plum-duff three times a week from this out. And you knock off hazing 'em about so much'—chuckling heartily at the other's stare of amazement—'till we get abreast of Sandridge Pier. Then up goes the police flag. I'll surprise the varmin, or my name ain't John Flett! Meanwhile, let a couple of the hard-bargains¹ sling their hammocks in the after-hold.

¹ Apprentices.

That'll stop any more larks with the cargo. Has she been up in your watch since?'

'Never seen a rag of her,' answered the mate, who knew well to whom the skipper referred. 'Kept her cabin ever since, I do believe.'

'Damned good job too!' said his superior, as he tenderly felt his face. 'Who'd have thought that *It* was hers anyhow!'

But 'hard-bargains' have long ears. One of them overheard the above conversation, and, reporting it to the crew, they got ready.

Also, on making the land, everything went wrong. Twelve hours vain signalling for a pilot made a big hole in the skipper's temper. So when, at last, one came off, and, to his astonishment, got soundly rated, with a promise of report, he, in revenge, box-hauled the *Sardanapalus* about until dark, and then brought-up with every link of hawse out, in a particularly muddy spot opposite Geelong.

Anchor watch had been set; and as old Nestor struck four bells in the chill morning and croaked hoarsely out his 'All's well!' the stars saw a crowd of men in stockinged feet, and bearing bundles, slipping silently aft.

The gig was hanging at the stern-davits. Noiselessly as greased falls could slide over greased sheaves she was lowered without a creak or a splash.

The man who had been standing over the cuddy companion with a handspike joined his fellows. Fortunately—for themselves—no one had shown up. The

boat pushed off, Bill sculling. The *Sardanapalus* was crewless.

Half-an-hour afterwards, the great Australian Bush took to itself sixteen hairy-breasted able seamen and this story.

‘MO-POKE!’

‘YES, I’m from out back,’ said a dark, wiry little man, as he dismounted from his horse at a Queensland frontier-township hotel, in answer to a question from one of a knot of bushmen and drovers assembled in the verandah. ‘Out back beyond the Warburton, an’ a nice warm time I’ve had of it, too!’

‘My eye!’ exclaimed the first speaker. ‘Been right away in that new country we been hearin’ of, eh? What like a shop is it, mate?’

‘Oh, the country’s right enough; lots o’ grass an water,’ replied the newcomer, as, giving his horse to the groom, he strode into the bar, ‘only the mopokes is so cussed bad an’ thick in them parts that there’s no livin for a quiet man. Roll up, lads, an’ give it a name! It’s a long time since I felt so dry!’

‘What did yer mean by “mopokes,” just now, mate?’ queried an elderly, grizzled overlander, as, lighting their pipes, the party sat down on the wide wooden bench. ‘Was it snakes?’

‘No, friend, it weren’t snakes. Wusser—a heap’ Howsomever—I reckon it’s a hour or more till supper, so I’ll just tell you how it all happened. Gosh! he

exclaimed emphatically, 'what a comfort it is to git into a Chrischin place agin!'

'Well, boys,' commenced the stranger, 'last April, I 'greed with ole Davies—him as owns "Tylunga," not far from this—to go out an' herd cattle for him on his new Adelaide country. Wages was good, three notes a week—I reckoned it were worth thirty afore I left—but as for the tucker, well, a feller never knows what he can live on till he tries it.

'Howsomever, out we goes—him an' me an' three others; an' in time we gets there all right, an' musters the cattle, which was bein' tailed at the head station—as they calls 'arf-a-dozen bark humpies on a waterhole. Then we drafts 'em into four mobs, an' each on us takes one away out to blazes into the bush, where the old chap shows us our runs, which was about six or seven mile apart.

'Us herders had each a little hut to himself; so you see, mates, a feller warn't likely to quarrel with his neighbours.

"Now, Wilson," sez old Davies, as he gits ready to start, arter puttin' the things out o' the waggonette at my hut—sez he, "Now, Wilson, take good care of them cattle in your charge, an' mind none o' them black rascals corne sneakin' about 'em. If you sees any, pepper 'em well. You've got a gun, an' lots of ammunition."

'You'll obsarve, mates, that, like a good many more of his sort, he never thinks o' the man. It's only the dashed stock as troubles 'em.

'Howsomever, off he drives, an' presently I catches a horse, as it was gettin' close to sundown, an' roun's up the mob an' puts 'em on camp, ties the dog up, lights a fire, an' tries to make myself at home 's well 's I could.

'So a week or two slips away quiet enough, an' I was gettin' awful tired of the game. The cattle didn't hardly want any lookin' after, an' all I could find to do was cuttin' up green-hide an' plaiting whips. I thought that the month 'd never go by till rations—such as they was—was due from the head station on Wild Horse Lagoon, nigh on thirty miles away.

'Up to this I'd never heard a bird singin' out after dark. But one night, as I was just a-fallin' off to sleep, mopokes begins cryin' like anything in the scrub close to the clear patch where the hut was. Suddenly the dog starts barkin' like mad, an' I gets up an' gives him a cut with the whip. Back I goes to the bunk, an' lies down a-listenin' to them birds, an' thinkin' to myself as all the mopokes in Australy had got roun' the hut that night. Well, I cussed an' swore at 'em no end for kickin' up such a shine ; an' Towzer a-growlin', an' a-snappin', an' pullin' at his chain all the time. In a bit, up I gets agen, and catches hold of the ole gun, opens the door, an' lets her off, both barrels.' It was a moonlight night, an' I could see the backs of a few of the cattle from where I stood, as, scared by the row, they gets off their camp, an' I hears the horse-bell just over in the scrub. No more mopokes that night. But the next, at it they goes agen. Now one'd call, it seemed like close to the

chimbly, then another, right at the head o' my stretcher—outside, o' course—"mopoke!" "more-pork!" "mopo!" till I'm blessed if I didn't get properly on my tail, an' takin' the gun, I lets Towzer off o' the chain, and runs out an' bangs away, as fast as I could load her, at the scrub, where I reckoned them blasted fowls was a-roostin'. An' Towzer, he tears away into the bushes, barkin' most furious. No more mopokin' that night, but Towzer he never comes back agen. Thinkin' he'd took arter a kangaroo-rat, I goes inside, makes up the fire, boils a quart o' tea, an' waits for daylight, which I know'd couldn't be long.

"I never did hear yet," I says to myself, "of a feller bein' harnted by a pack o' birds; but I'm blessed if this game don't 'pear somethin' like it."

'You see, mates, I never dropped to the meanin' o' the racket; for though I've been stock-keepin' an' drovin' pretty near five-an'-twenty year now, I never had no experience afore o' the kind o' gutter-snipes as was disturbin' me these last two nights.

'At bird-twitter, out I goes, 'spectin' to see Towzer under his sheet o' bark. I seen no Towzer; an', what's more, I seen no cattle neither. They never moved off camp afore sunrise; an', fearin' les' they'd made a clean break of it, I runs into the hut, collars my bridle, an' off after the mokes.

'When I gets into the scrub, I hears the bell just ahead, an' I hears, too, a few o' them cussed birds a-strainin' their throats, callin' about, as if they hadn't done enough through the night.

'Well, I follers the bell back'ards an' for'ards, without seemin' to get any nearer to the horses, till I was nigh sick o' stumblin' over logs; an' o' swearin' what I wouldn't do to 'em when I gets 'em, an' o' singin' out for Towzer.

'All of a suddent, the bell sounds not ten yards away in a patch o' thick dogwood scrub, an' as I makes off full trot, I nearly falls over somethin' soft. Lookin' down, I sees poor ole Towzer lyin' there with his head caved in, and a bit o' broken spear stickin' in him.

'My Colonial, mates! I tumbles fast enough then, when it were too late. Jumpin' through the scrub to where I last heard the bell, I runs slap up agen six ugly black beasts o' niggers, an' one on 'em was just a-startin' to shake the dashed bell, which was hangin' roun' his neck. Close to 'em lies my best horse, ole "Cossack," dead's a herrin'.

'I takes it all in in a flash; an' afore you could say "knife" I'd slung the bridle in their faces, and was makin' tracks for the hut at the rate o' sixty miles a hour—leastways it seemed so to me.

'Whizz, whizz! come the spears; but the scrub was too thick, and ne'er a one touches me. Yellin' like ole Nick, after me they tears, full split, but I show's 'em good foot for it till I comes in sight o' the hut, a-standin' there so quiet-like, with the chimbley smokin' away, an' the door wide open.

'Now, mates, what should make me, insted o' rushin' in an' gettin' the gun, an' lettin' the darkies know what

o'clock it was, rip right past the hut an' shin up a big gum tree about twenty yards away? I can't make out what come over me to do sich a thing. But so it were. An' up I swarms to nearly the top limb as the murderin' willians comes out on to the open. In another minute eight or nine others tumbles out o' the hut, where they'd been waitin' on chance I might git away from the fust gang, an' they all gathers roun' the ole gum, a-lookin' up, for all the world like a lot o' hungry dogs at a 'possum.

' "Mo-poke, mo-poke!" sings out one, an' another lot comes runnin' up from the back scrub, just about where I should ha' hit if the Lord hadn't put it into my mind to take the tree for it.

'But this pitchin's terrible dry work, lads,' suddenly broke off the narrator. 'Come inside, an' let's have another long-sleever apiece, an' then I'll finish the yarn. Spite o' them "mopokes" I've got a bit o' stuff left yet.

'Well, mates,' went on Wilson, as the party resumed their seats, 'the darkies throwed their spears, an' slings their bommerangs, but it weren't no use, I was too high up for 'em, and the nighest spear as come out of a couple o' dozen, sticks in a good six foot below my limb. Seein' this, one beggar gets the axe from the wood-heap. But she were old an' blunt like her owner, ole Davies, an' I soon see by the way they shapes as it'd take 'em a couple o' years to fall me. For a while they niggles away at the big butt, turn an' turn about, then jacks the contract, gruntin' like a lot o' pigs.

'Next move were, one gets the gun out o' the hut, an' I scwoushes down into a six-inch heap, till I remembers she weren't loaded; an' I didn't give 'em credit for knowin' how to do that.

'The mopoke as got her points her most careful, with the stock agen his belly, an' with a grin at his mates, as much as to reckon, "You watch me pot him," he shouts "Bung!" an' as true's I'm sittin' here, I bursts out larfin' to see them black fools a-starin' up so hard, and wonderin' why I didn't fall down dead man.

'Presen'ly, 'bout half way up my tree, they spots a good-sized pipe, an' bringin' a fire-stick from the hut, up one comes like a lamplighter. I knowed the ole gum was sound an' green enough at the butt, but I sees by the pipe that some of the top limbs must be holler, an' I didn' fancy this last move a little bit. So, as he's busy straddled-out, a-blowin' and a-puffin' to raise the flame, I nips down, pulls out the spear, an' lets drive at him 's hard 's I could. You never see such a thing in your lives! It hit him just acrost the loins, an' goes more'n half way through him. He just gives a wriggle or two and twists over into a fork and lies there, a proper stiff 'un.

'You bet, lads, I was proud's a dog with a tin tail; an' sez I, "One for poor Towzer, you pot-bellied willian!" By gosh! didn't they yell, an' dance, an' carry on when they sees this, an' me safe agen back in the ole perch.

'Runnin' to the hut, they tears out the slabs in a

wink, piles 'em up at the butt of the ole gum, and sets fire to 'em.

'In a minute or two, I couldn't see a stem for smoke; out, as they was green belar, not a blaze could they get out of 'em.

'Well, I was squattin' up there, a-peepin' down through the smoke for the next feller as wanted to show off his climbin' abilities, when I hears a noise of horses gallopin', an' men shoutin', an' shots a-poppin' off like Billy-ho.

'Down I comes through the smoke, an' just clear o' the tree was five darkies a-lyin stretched out as would never cry "mo-poke!" no more. Not another soul, dead or alive, could I see. But presen'ly back canters ole Davies, an' says he, cool as you like, "Hello, Wilson," says he, "is that you? Where's the rest o' the cattle? There's eight head short yet!" Darn his ole skin, an' all bosses like him, as thinks more of a few head o' stock than a man's life!

'You see, lads, when the cattle, disturbed by poor Towzer a-barkin', and me a-firin', moves quietly off afore daybreak, one lot of nigs follers 'em up, an' one lot stops to 'tend on me.

'Them with the cattle, after they'd gone a little way, starts a-spearin' 'em, an' the mob breaks, an' never stops till they gets to the fust seven-mile hut, where the other lot was; and the chap there, seein' some with spears stickin' in 'em, gallops off to the head station, and out comes ole Davies an' all hands.

'No; no more new country for me—not if I knows it!

I'm a-gettin' too old now for such a little game as they played on me out there. Is that the supper-bell a-ringin'? Well, it's the finest sound I've heard for five 'underd miles an' more.'

KEEPING SCHOOL AT 'DEAD FINISH.'

A REMINISCENCE OF 'THE RIVERS.'

THE people at Dead Finish had never applied for such a thing, nor dreamt of, nor wished for it, neither they nor their children. These latter were mostly of an age now to be of use about the house or in the field. They had imagined themselves, these half-a-dozen or so of scattered families hidden in the gloomy recesses of coastal scrubs, quite secure from any officious interference with their offspring by the Government. And, without exception, they took it as a most uncalled-for act of tyranny, this proposed establishment of a school and a teacher in their midst, and well within the two-mile radius from all.

Here was the corn just ready to be pulled and husked, and got ready for Tuberville, and who was to do it with Tom, Jack and Bill wasting their time at a school?

'If Mr Gov'ment was here,' growled 'Brombee' O'Brien, the largest selector of the lot, 'I'd give 'im a bit o' my mind. Wot bizness he got, comin' an' takin' the kids just as they're a-gittin' handy? Why didn't he come afore, when they was bits o' crawlers, an' no use to no one? Anyhow, me an' the missis niver 'ad no schoolin';

an' why should they? Will learnin' cut through a two-foot log? Will 'rethmetic split palin's or shingles? Will readin' an' writin' run brombees, or drive a team o' bullocks, or 'elp to plough or 'arrer? No; it ain't likely. Then wot's the good of it? Garn? Wot they givin' us?'

Thus Mr O'Brien, at a meeting of neighbours specially convened to confront the unlooked-for emergency, and whose own ideas he voices to the letter.

And when, later, the Inspector (taken at first for the 'Gov'ment') puts in an appearance, the case is set before him precisely as above. But, instead of listening to reason, he only rated them, told them they ought to be ashamed of themselves, and dilated largely on the beauty and advantage of a State education at only three-pence per week each child, and one shilling for seven or over. A paternal Government, he said, had long mourned over their degraded and benighted condition; and, at last, having, after much trouble, and at great expense, secured a most accomplished gentleman as a teacher, resolved that one of his first tasks should be that of making Dead Finish an ornament, in place of a reproach, to the district.

This was, so the Inspector thought, putting the thing neatly indeed. But it was all of no avail. They not only unanimously refused to have anything to do with the erection of the school, but also to receive the teacher when he arrived. They swore, too, that their children should not leave work for education, and in the end, used language unrecordable here, and such as the Inspector had never in all his life heard before. But he

persevered; and, bringing a couple of men from the township fifty miles away, set them to work.

Dead Finish was situated at the extreme head of one of those short Australian coastal rivers whose existence begins in boggy swamps and ends in a big sand-bar.

The country was mountainous and scrubby, abounding in 'falls,' springs, morasses, giant timber, dingoes, ticks, leeches, and creeks. The wonder was, not that anybody should ever have settled on it, but that, once there, they should ever manage to get out of it, as they did once in six months.

But for these few families on Dead Finish Creek, the district was totally uninhabited. It was hard to say where they came from originally. They were not a communicative people; but they were a hard-working, hard-living one, whose only wish was to be left at peace on the little patches they had hewn for themselves out of the mighty primeval forest that, dark and solemn, walled them in on every side. The spot chosen by the Inspector as the site of the new school was on the extreme edge of one of the lesser falls that ran sloping swiftly down three hundred feet or more into a small valley, generally full of mist and the noise of running waters.

A mile away lived a settler named Brown, who, after an infinity of coaxing and persuasion, and to the utter disgust of his neighbours, had consented to receive and board the teacher on trial. As with the rest of the Dead Finishers, ready money was so rare that the thoughts of that proffered twelve shillings a week tempted him, and he fell, and became a Judas to his fellows, and a mark

for the finger of scorn—he and his wife and their ten children.

But the Inspector was jubilant; and after a last look around the little hut, smelling of fresh-cut wood, with its three forms, one stool, and bright, new blackboard, he departed, congratulating himself on the satisfactory finish of the campaign. Also he indited a minute and two memorandums to his Department with the intimation that 'Provisional School No. 28,890, Parish of Dead Finish, County of Salamanca,' was completed and ready for occupation. Whereupon, an animated correspondence took place, which, after lasting six months, was at last closed by the announcement that a teacher had been appointed. Then both sides rested from their labours, and the Inspector, feeling that his annual holiday had been well earned, took it.

Meanwhile, the little building perched on the brink of the gulf grew bleached and weather-beaten with wind and rain and fog, and the Dead Finishers derided 'ole Gov'ment,' and the Brown family emerged from coventry, and all was once more peace along the creek.

The winter passed, and a young man with thin legs and body, red hair, and freckled face, appeared in Tuberville and remarked to the residents generally that he would like to get to Dead Finish. He also added that he was the 'new teacher' for that place. He at once became an object of interest. People stared at him in much the same way as did those others, of whom we read, at Martin Chuzzlewit and the faithful Mark Tapley on their departure for Eden.

The Tuberville people—the majority of them at least—knew of the Dead Finishers only by repute. These latter came in but twice a year to exchange corn and hardwood for stores, potatoes, and a little cash. At these times the programme was invariably the same. Their business done, the long-haired, touzly-bearded men drove their teams outside the town, and, leaving the bullocks in charge of the wild, bare-footed, half-clad boys, returned, and, clubbing their money, drank solidly as long as it lasted—generally two days.

They kept well together, and no one molested or interfered with them. It was not worth while. Their especial house was a short distance out, and when, borne up on the wind, came the roar of bush revelry, strange and uncouth, the townspeople merely remarked one to the other that 'Them Dead Finishers must be in again down at Duffy's.'

Hence the interest taken in Mr Cruppy.

The Dead Finishers all drank 'rum straight,' and about two gallons was their respective allowance. That safely stowed away, they took their long whips out of the corner of the bar, called their rough cattle-dogs, lying beside them, and made off to the wilderness again for another fight with fire and axe against the stubborn forest, and to raise corn enough for the next trip to market.

That half-yearly or so excursion was their one treat, such as it was; and the toiling, hard-featured women at home, who never got away, acquiesced tacitly in the liquid wind-up of it. They never looked for any money on their men's return. What was the good of money at



But presently there was a report, a cloud of smoke, and a flash out of the little window. (Page 68.)

Dead Finish? No wonder the people laughed when the Inspector talked to them of 'school fees.'

At last Mr Cruppy drifted into the 'Bushman's Home' in search of information. Could Mr Duffy tell him how to get to a place called Dead Finish? No; Mr Duffy was sorry, but he really couldn't. All he knew about it was that it was up in the mountains, and a rough, long road to travel. The new teacher, was he? Well, he was pleased to hear it, but opined that he'd find some pretty hard cases amongst the kids up there. Did he know Mr Brown at Dead Finish? Yes, he thought he did, and a very strong cup of tea he was. Going to stay there, was he? Well, he hoped that Mr Brown would make him comfortable. But, somehow, he was doubtful. As to getting there, he would have to trust to Providence. After a little more talk, however, Mr Cruppy discovered that Providence, in this case, meant the sum of £4 sterling, for which the publican expressed his willingness to do his best to find the Dead Finish.

They were four days on the road, got bogged twice, capsized twice, and broke the pole of the buggy before they found Brown, who received them with more surprise than cordiality. Foreseeing ostracism again, he wished to go back from his agreement, and was surly to a degree.

He said he should get his head caved in. If no one else did it, 'Brombee' O'Brien would. A week's payment in advance mollified him somewhat. But, if Mr Cruppy had not been an orphan, friendless, and on his first appointment, he would have returned with Mr

Duffy, who, very much to his surprise, had by the time he reached home, fairly earned his money.

The teacher's bedroom was a bark lean-to; his bed sacks stuffed with corn husks—and cobs. The food was hominy and pork, washed down with coffee made from corn roasted and ground. He ventured to remark that the accommodation was rough.

'It are,' replied Mr Brown. 'We's rough. Take it or leave it. We niver arst fer no schoolin'. I'll get stoushed over this job yet. Brombee's got it in for me. So's the Simmses, an' all the rest ov 'em.'

With much difficulty the teacher got one of the boys to show him the way to the school. They had to cross Dead Finish Creek fourteen times to get there. Regarding the youngster as his first scholar, Mr Cruppy endeavoured to detain him, but with a yell he fled down the mountain; and, figuratively, the fiery cross was sent round.

Each day the teacher went up and waited in vain. No one came near the school. Then he essayed a journey of remonstrance from farm to farm, got bushed, was out for two nights, and would have been left out altogether only that Mandy Brown, who pitied him, went away and brought him in after running his tracks for a whole day. Then he simply sat down and waited despairingly. Then the Inspector came back from his holiday and visited Dead Finish, expecting to find everything in full swing. In his wrath he took out summonses against the whole settlement. No notice was taken of these until four troopers paid it a visit. Then it went into Tuber-

ville in a body, and was promptly fined and admonished. Returning, it sent its children to school—a horde of young barbarians, unkempt, unwashed, almost unclad, but stout and sturdy. And it was the time of the pulling of the corn! Therefore the elders had to work double tides to make up for the lost labour of their offspring, stolidly glaring at poor Cruppy as he tried to beat into their shock heads the mystery of A B C.

Amanda Brown was eighteen, buxom, bare-footed, curly-haired, red-cheeked, could ride as she put it 'anythin' with hair on,' use an axe like a Canadian, and was reckoned the best hand at breaking in a young bullock to the team of anyone about. And she, since her finding of Cruppy in the ranges, leech-infested and draggled, had taken him under her protection. But even she was powerless to influence the feeling of public indignation, daily growing stronger, against the Inspector, the teacher, and the 'Gov'ment,' and which ended in Cruppy being requested to clear out from Brown's. As the latter put it, 'Mister,' said he, 'it ain't no good shenaneckin!' I dussent keep you no longer. It's as much 's our lives is wuth. Brombee an' them's gittin' madder an' madder. Ef you won't slither complete, you'll 'ave to go an' camp in the schoolhouse up yonder. We'll sell you a pot an' a bit o' ration, an' ye'll have to do the best ye can.' So Cruppy went, seeing nothing else for it, and Mr Brown once more held up his head amongst his fellows.

Despite his lack of physique, Cruppy had a certain amount of stubborn resistance and endurance within

him, often observable in red-headed people. He was, in short, plucky, and unwilling to give in. And Mandy, out of the largeness of her heart, helped him all she knew how.

For instance, when Tom O'Brien (eldest son of 'Brombee') made his intention known of scaring the teacher out of Dead Finish, from Mandy came the few words of warning and the present of the old gun and some ammunition. Thus it happened that one night, when awakened by eerie yells from his lonely slumber, the teacher looked out and saw a wild figure clad in skins, and with a pair of bullock's horns spreading from its head, he felt no whit dismayed. Capering and shouting round the hut under the dim moonlight went the weird thing, enough in that desolate spot to make even a brave man shudder with the uncanny grotesqueness of it.

But presently there was a report—a cloud of smoke, and a flash out of the little window, and with a scream the thing dropped, then got up again, and ran swiftly out of sight.

'Caught him fair smack, ye did,' said Mandy, afterwards. 'Them pellets o' coarse salt touched 'im up properly. He don't set down now without lookin' fer pillers. Tom won't try no more gammonin' to be a yahoo. He's full 's a tick ov sich sport, he is.'

Other attempts were from time to time made to frighten Cruppy out of the district, but they were of no avail. The holidays were approaching, and he had made

up his mind to hold out at least until then in hopes of getting a shift from Dead Finish.

But one night, in melancholy mood, watching a piece of salt beef boil, and leaning over every now and again to take the scum off the pot, he heard the tramp of horses outside. Opening the door cautiously, he saw Mandy riding her own pony *en cavalier*, and leading another one ready saddled.

'Come along,' she said, without dismounting. 'They're on their tails proper now. Wanter git the corn shelled for Tuberville. No more schoolin' fer the kids. They're a-goin' to put the set on ye to-night, hut an' all. Pap, and Brombee, an' the Simmses, an' Pringles, an' the whole push is out. They got four teams o' bullocks an' all the ropes an' chains in the country, an' they're a-goin' to hyste school an' you over the sidin'. It'll be just one! two! three! an' wallop ye all goes! Roll up yer swag slippy an' come along.'

Cruppy, seeing at once that a crisis, not altogether unexpected, had arrived, did as he was told.

'Now,' said Mandy, leading the way into a dense clump of peppermint suckers, 'le's wait an' see the fun. They reckoned as how, sleepin' so sound, you wouldn't know nothin' till you struck bottom in the crik. But they're euchred agin.'

As the night wore on noises broke its stillness, and dark forms moved athwart the little open space, whilst from far below in the gully came the faint clank of chains and the muffled tramp of cattle.

'Look,' whispered Mandy admiringly, 'ain't they

cunnin'? There's Pap, an' ole Brombee, an' young Tom, a-sneakin' the big rope roun' the hut. You'd niver ha' woke, sleepin' sound as ye does.'

Even as she spoke a shrill whistle was heard. Then from below came a tremendous volleying of whips, accompanied by hoarse yells of 'Gee, Brusher! Darling up! Wah Rowdy! Spanker! Redman!' As the noose tightened, the school first cracked, then toppled. The din below redoubled, and with a crash the building disappeared bodily over the brow of the hill.

'That's domino!' remarked Mandy calmly. 'There won't be no more schoolin' at Dead Finish. Come along; I'll set ye on the track. Ye kin leave the horse an' saddle at Duffy's when you gits to the township. I shook 'em from ole Brombee. Won't he bite when he finds it out. But you,' she went on, 'needn't be scared. You seen him to-night doin' his best to break your neck. Well, so long! Give us a cheeker afore ye goes; an' don't forget Mandy Brown o' Dead Finish.'

‘NUMBER ONE NORTH RAINBOW.’

‘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’s 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 or greenhide; when every meal is eaten on gruded 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 an 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 overhanging 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 the 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 gold-field to ourselves. Just think of it! "Lords of the fowl and the brute"—Eclipse and *Kálee* and the bralgas. 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 inaking merry amongst them.

She ought, according to her merits, to hold pride of place here. But she was 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 *Kdlee* 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 corporal 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 ?'

'O, 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 fine 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,' *i.e.*, 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 groves 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 Brobnignagian 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 the 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, as usual, make a preliminary survey, I presently heard a splash and a cry of 'Heave-up!' Up he came, a regular Laocoon, 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 viret*, and our friend of the curiously-patterned skin might not be *always* innocuous.

We took three ounces out of a 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 were inclined to be cordial. There was nothing particularly remarkable about the new-comer, 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 new-comer, 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 theer knows Brummy. I'm goin' to do a bit of fossickin' now I got this far. Ain't a-thinkin' o' interferin' 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 Bruin 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 and 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 to-morrow 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 mullock 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 hidjot; an' if anybody was to offer me a thousand 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 to-day,' 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 every-

thing 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 of 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 häänted 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 miscalcula-

tion, has been known to produce curious effects in adjoining claims. Not that, just then, I bothered myself with any such speculations. 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 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 fore part

of the skull had been smashed completely in. Near by 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 the 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 in 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 sun-

shiny 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,—

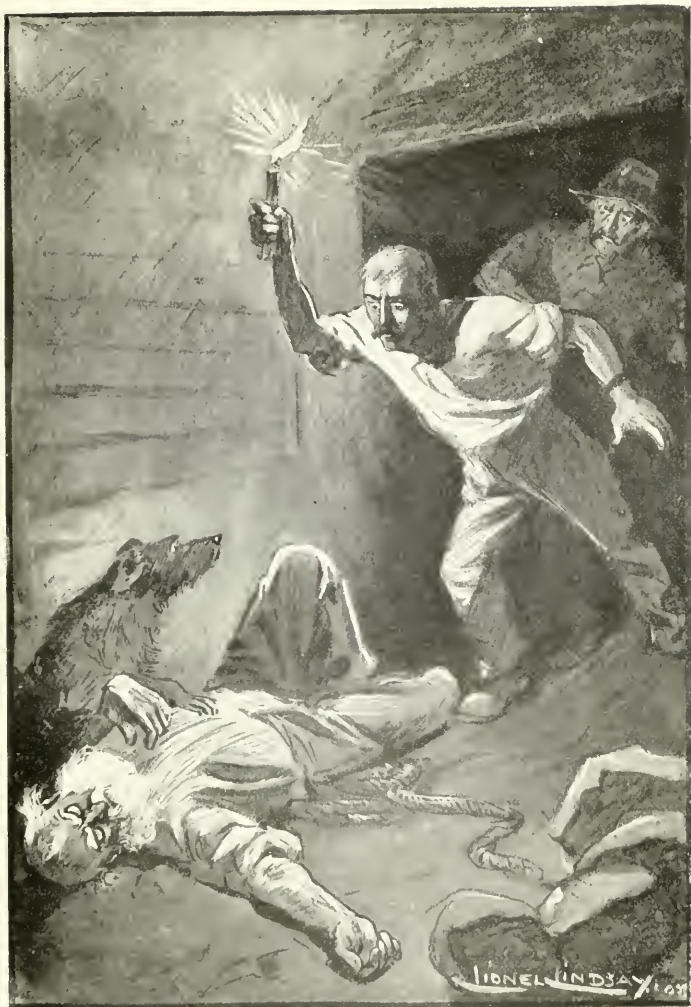
'Why, you fool, for the big lump, o' coorse! A 'underd an' eighty ounces! Too big to share, I reckon. I'd a-smashed a dozen men for it in them days, let alone a poor softy like Jim.'

'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 theer 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



Upon the rope coils lay ' Brummy,' quite still. (Page 87)

eyes, and breathed stertorously, whilst *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 contrived to get up this shaft again with the gold.'

Quietly as he spoke, Brummy heard him, and muttered—

'Would ye 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 háánt 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 bellowings.

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.

As for the gold that 'Jim' had lain by so quietly, and watched so patiently through the years, we never got any of it.

The three nuggets figured in the police-court inquiry, with other things, under the title of 'Exhibit A.'

That was the last glimpse we had of them.

Departmental red tape enwrapped them so closely that no amount of solicitation could render them visible again—to us.

Easier would it be to draw leviathan from the waters with a bit of twine and a crooked pin than to draw 'treasure trove' from the coffer of a treasury—colonial or otherwise.

To this day they are possibly accumulating dust, pigeon-holed with the depositions in the case. But I doubt it, I doubt it.

THE PROTECTION OF THE 'SPARROWHAWK.'

MANY people have their special antipathies. There are instances on record of one fainting at the scent of heliotrope ; of another becoming hysterical at the mewing of a cat ; and so on, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The Scotch, as a rule, are anything but a nervously susceptible nation, taken either collectively or individually. Nor have I heard that those members of it who follow the sea as a calling are more so than their shorekeeping compatriots.

Still, to the present day, and probably to the day of his departure, John M'Cracken, retired master mariner, of Aberdeen, becomes signally and powerfully moved by the cry of the domestic duck, rendered universally and approximately as 'Quack !' His red face grows redder, his light blue eyes glower menacingly, and his hands open and close nervously, as if longing for some missile wherewith to annihilate the unconscious fowl—or its human imitator.

The *Sparrowhawk*, barque, M'Cracken master, was chartered to convey returning Chinese passengers from Singapore to Amoy.

I think the regulations as to space, numbers, etc., etc., could not, in those days, have been very strict. Be this as it may, Skipper M'Cracken filled up until he could fill no more. The 'tween deck was like a freshly-opened sardine tin ; on the main deck they lay in double tiers. Many roosted in the tops. The boats on the davits and the long-boat on the skids swarmed with the home-going children of the Flowery Land. The better class, merchants, tradesmen, etc., had secured everything aft, from the captain's cabin to the steward's pantry, for which accommodation fabulous sums found their way into the pockets of M'Cracken and his mates. For'ard, the crew had vacated the forecastle in consideration of sundry handfuls per man of dollars, which they had subsequently discovered to be 'chop.'

The mild-eyed heathen in his leisure moments had amused himself by punching pellets of good silver out of them, and filling the holes up with lead. From taffrail to bowsprit-heel, from waterways to keelson, the *Sparrowhawk* seethed and stank with a sweltering mass of yellow humanity. Every soul had a square of matting and a water-jar, also an umbrella. They also all had money—more or less. The fellows aft, with the flowing silk gowns and long finger-nails, owned chests of it, all in silver specie, stowed snugly away in the lazarette. The herd carried their little fortunes, hardly earned by years of incessant toil as *sampan* men, porters, or what not, in the great border city on the sea, hidden upon their persons.

The vessel looked grotesque to a degree. She was flying light, and towered loftily out of the water. Upon

her deck, amidships, rose two big arrangements after the nature of boilers. These were for cooking rice, and were occasionally the scenes of fierce fighting, during which the Europeans would clamber into the rigging, leaving a clear field, and applaud vociferously. They were a harmless people, and fought like sheep-dogs, rarely doing one another much harm.

From the barque's side protruded curious cage-like structures connected with the sanitary affairs of the multitude. This last lay everywhere, pervaded everything. If you wanted a rope you had to dislodge half-a-dozen grunting, naked bodies. Trimming the yards o' nights the watches tripped and fell amongst the prostrate ranks.

The passengers, however, bore it all placidly. They had paid M'Cracken so many dollars per head for a piece of his deck, and the situation of it was quite immaterial. Moreover, were they not homeward bound after years of separation from wives and little ones with fortunes made beyond the sea? Men in such circumstances are apt to be good-tempered. A heavy squall would probably have caused the loss of the *Sparrowhawk* and all on board. But Captain M'Cracken took the risk—and the dollars. He slept on an old sail folded across the cuddy skylight. His mattress he had leased along with his state-room to one of the merchants who, he understood, was a convert to Christianity. The wind kept light, with showers at intervals. At the first drop, up would go every umbrella; and, looking from aloft, the sight was a queer one.

On leaving Singapore the skipper had been warned

that pirates were still to be met with in Chinese waters, and, short though the passage was, advised to arm, at all events in some sort, his ship and crew. This he did. At a marine store he bought, second-hand, a couple of cannon—three pounders—also several dozen of grape shot. In exchange for a worn mizzen-topsail and the fat saved by the cook (of usage the latter's perquisite) on the passage out, he procured some old Tower muskets, a few boarding-pikes, and three horse-pistols for his own and his officers' especial use. These last had flintlocks and mouths like a bell. Thus equipped, he declared himself ready for any piratical attack.

The ship's agents smiled meaningly, and winked at each other; but, knowing their man, forbore further advice, well recognising the inutility of it. A Scotchman who owns a full half interest in his ship, who hails from Aberdeen, and habitually comes ashore in latitude 0 with a Glengarry cap on, no umbrella, and naked feet, is not a being to stand argument.

One night the moon rose full, and right aft. She rose, too, with a big black spot in her disc that had no right to be there.

There was too much *sams'ho* aboard for a very sharp look-out to be kept for'ard. That native spirit gets into men's eyes and weakens them. But aft the skipper caught sight of the object.

'It'll be a junk, I'm thinkin'!' he said presently, after working away for a while with his glass; 'an a muckle ane at that. She's fetchin' a breeze wi' her, whilk 's a comfort.'

Some of the long-nailed aristocrats were lounging about the poop. They needed no glass to make out the approaching vessel. Gathering in a group, they cackled noisily, pointing and gesticulating among themselves.

Then, coming up to the captain, one—it was his Christian friend—plucked him by the arm and uttered laconically, with extended digit, 'Prat!'

'Weel, Johnnie,' replied old M'Cracken coolly, as he gathered the other's meaning, 'pireet, or no pireet, gin he come a wee closer, we'll just pepper the hide o' him wi' cauld airn.'

Without more ado, the Chinaman dived into his cabin and in a minute or two reappeared with a most hideous idol and a bundle of perfumed paper. Placing the thing right under the skipper's nose, he lit a yard of paper and began to screech an invocation. As of good Presbyterian stock, M'Cracken was irritated and shocked.

'Mon, mon,' he exclaimed, 'what wad ye be at! Hae ye niver been tauld that a' graven eemages is an abomination in the sicht o' the Lord? An' I thocht ye was a Christian.' So saying, he seized the joss and flung it far overboard into the silvery water, just rippling under the coming breeze. The worshipper uttered a yell of dismay. But there was no time to lose, and, rushing below, he brought up another god, ten times as hideous as the first one, and, descending to the main deck, aroused the ship with his devotions.

Then arose the sound of a multitude waking in fear—an impressive sound and a catching. Up the open hatchways from the steaming, fœtid 'tween decks they

streamed in hundreds, like disturbed ants, with cries of alarm and grief, and strong callings upon their gods. In a minute the ship was alive with lights burning before idols of every description. A thousand half-naked figures crouched cowering from the break of the poop right for'ard. Aft, a handful of rugged Scotch seamen gazed quietly at the black spot over the water. Presently the two little guns were crammed half up to the muzzle with powder and grape, and placed each in a socket cut out for it after leaving Singapore. The remainder of the weapons were, with a stock of ammunition, divided amongst the crew. Hot irons were put in the galley fire; and the skipper, having thus placed his ship in a thorough state of defence, felt complacent, and half-inclined to shorten sail, wait for the pirates to come up, and then give them a lesson. Old seaman though he was, he was a new hand in these Eastern waters.

Confiding his notion to the second mate, who was also carpenter, also sailmaker, a grizzled ancient shellback of much experience and endless voyaging, the other laughed aloud, but not mirthfully.

'If,' said he, 'yon's a "prat," as Johnnie there ca's it, we'll a' be meat for the fishes afore the sun's risen!'

'Hoots!' exclaimed the skipper angrily, 'whaur s yer pluck, Davie, mon! I didna think ye'd be for showin' the white feather a'ready, an' ye a Newburgh lad as weel's mysel'! What's a handfu' o' naked salvages like yon, in compare wi' us an' oor arteelery?'

'An' hoo mony men nicht she carry yonder, div ye think?' queried the other, taking a squint at the junk,

whose huge oblong sails shone whitely under the moonbeams.

'Mebbe a score or sae,' replied M'Cracken, 'airmed maistley wi' spears, an' skeens, sic, as I've been tauld, bein' their usual weepens.'

The other chuckled hoarsely as he said, 'If she's a pireet, she'll hae at the vera leest a guid twa 'unnered aboard, a' airmed wi' muskets an' swords, forbye things they ca' gingals, takin' a sax-ounce ball, to say nothin' o' stinkpots an' ither deviltrees. Mon, I've seen 'em wi' guns they cannonies there wadna mak' rammars for. But if that chap has ony, I doubt we sud ha' heard frae him ere the noo.

'I was ance,' continued he, 'lyin' in Hongkong Harbour, when they cut oot the *Cashmere*, a bouncin' ocean steamer, in the braid daylight, an' murdered ivery soul on boord o' her. Na, na, skipper; let her but get a haud on us, and ye'll see the deil gang o'er Jock Wabster sure aneuch.'

The skipper listened silently. Then, wetting his finger and holding it up, he said,—

'Perhaps, after a', Davie, mon, ye might 's weel set they t'g'nt stun's'ls, gin ye can get them up, wi' sic an awfu' rabble as is about the deck.'

The breeze had died away again. There was only just enough of it to keep the sails full. The fresh canvas, however, sent the *Sparrowhawk* through the water half a knot faster, and she was beginning to perceptibly leave the junk astern, when suddenly out from her sides flashed a long row of sweeps, under

whose impulse she recovered her lost ground very quickly. If there had been any doubt about the character of the stranger, there remained none now; and the uproar, which had partially ceased, arose with tenfold vigour.

Some of the passengers went down into the lazarette and commenced to stow as many dollars as they could about their clothing. Others divided their attention between their idols and the skipper, running frantically from one to the other. Curiously enough the junk appeared satisfied to maintain her distance, although, had she so desired, she could with her sweeps have easily overhauled the barque.

Now, from away on the port hand, where lay the outline of the Chinese coast, black beneath the moon, came a gentle mist hanging low and thick upon the water. As it gradually enveloped the ship, hiding all but close objects from view, she was kept away three or four points. But, presently, with the haze, what wind there was left her, the sails gave a few ominous flaps, and then hung limply down. At this moment a Chinaman, uttering a loud yell of fright, pointed over the starboard quarter. There, close aboard, loomed up a dark mass almost, high as she was, on a level with the *Sparrowhawk's* poop-railing. It was the junk.

'The het poker, quick!' shouted the captain. Some one brought it and, unheeding the skipper, dabbed it straightway on the touch-hole of the little cannon pointing directly, as it happened, at the pirate.

The powder being damp, fizzed for a minute, and,

just as M'Cracken sung out, 'More pouter; she's fluffed 'i the pan!' with a roar the thing went off. Off and up as well, for it sprung six feet in the air, and descended with a crash into the binnacle.

'Fetch the ither ane,' shouted M'Cracken, an' gie 'em anither dose i' the wame. Hear till 'em,' he continued, as a most extraordinary noise arose from the junk now just abreast of the mizzen-rigging. 'Hear till 'em scaighin', the thievin' heathen pireets. They havena muckle likin' for sic a med'cin'. It gives them the mirligoes. Pit yer fut on her, Tam Wulson, whiles I send her aff,' he went on, addressing a sailor, as the other gun was brought over and shipped.

'Pit yer ain fut on her, captain,' answered the man. 'I dinna a'thegither like the notion. She'll lat oot like ony cuddy, judgin' frae her mate.' But the skipper was too excited to argue, and, applying the hot iron, spit—fizzle—bang, and the piece went up, and, this time, clean overboard.

A thousand capering madmen were yelling at the top of their voices on board the *Sparrowhawk*; but high and shrill above even that clamour could be heard the screech from the junk at that last discharge. The fog was still thick around the latter, and the ship's sails being aback, she was making a stern board towards the enemy, to whom M'Cracken, exulting, determined to administer a *coup de grace*.

'Noo then, a'thegither,' he cried, and the old muskets and the bell-muzzled pistols roared and kicked and sent a leaden shower somewhere, while, amidst an in-

describable medley of yells and cheers, the defeated pirate vanished into the mist.

Someone cried out that she had sunk. But presently the sound of her sweeps could be heard in the distance.

Then the skipper, flushed and elated with victory, snapped his fingers in the second mate's face, as he exclaimed,—

'That for yer Chinese pireets, Davie M'Phairson! Whaurs a' their muskets an' gingals an' sic-like the noo? Gin they had ony, they were ower frichted to make use o' them I expeck! But,' growing serious, 'my name's nae Sandy M'Cracken gin I dinna chaarge Tam Wulson two pun ten shillin'—whilk is the price o' her at cost—for lettin' the wee bit cannonie gang overboord. I tellt him to keep her down wi' his feet, and he wadna.'

Swatow at last; and the *Sparrowhawk* surrounded with a thousand *sampans* whose occupants welcomed their returned friends and relatives by trying to emulate Babel.

M'Cracken was deified. His cabin could not hold the presents—mostly in kind—that he received. Also, his grateful passengers, having set apart a day for special rejoicing and thanksgiving, returned, and, willy nilly, decorated the *Sparrowhawk* after the manner of their land with banners and lanterns, and had a high old time on board under the leadership of the convert, who bewailed his backsliding, and privately asked M'Cracken to baptise him anew.

The story of the fight ran all up and down the sea-

board. Hongkong heard of it, or a version of it, and the *Gazette* published a long story headed in big caps: 'Another Piratical Outrage.—The *Sparrowhawk* turns on her Pursuer—Conspicuous Bravery of the Captain and Crew—The Pirate Beaten off with Great Loss.' Singapore heard it, and the *Straits Times* followed suit with 'Four Junks and Terrible Slaughter.' This latter item, as we shall presently see, being pretty near the mark.

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But what cripple is this that, in a couple of days, comes staggering up to the Swatow anchorage with her mat sails full of holes and her decks covered with scarcely dry blood, and whose crew dance and screech a wild defiance at the *Sparrowhawk* as she passes on to the inner harbour?

Presently off comes a mandarin and a guard of soldiers and hales M'Cracken ashore, protesting and threatening.

The British Consul is just dead of enteric fever. There is, however, a French one, and in his room the complaint of Sum Kum On, master of the *Delight of the Foaming Seas*, is heard. The tribunal is a mixed one, consisting of two mandarins and the Consul. The first witness called is Sum Kum On. He states that his vessel is a coaster, engaged mostly in the poultry trade. That, on the present trip, he left Kin Fo, a small port four days' sail from Swatow, laden with a deck cargo of ducks for the Swatow and Chee Foo markets. Had on board one passenger, a wealthy tea-grower of Honan, who, carrying with him many dollars, was naturally nervous, and afraid

of pirates. Sighting the big vessel, the tea-grower, now in court, and prepared to give evidence, prayed him (Sum Kum On) to keep close to it for protection from said pirates.

He did so. But in the calm and mist he unwittingly, and without evil intent (being, as their Highnesses could see, only a poor trader) came too near, when to his amazement showers of bullets and great cannon balls tore his sails to pieces; and, but for the coops being piled high on deck, assuredly every soul must have perished.

In spite of explanations and shouts for mercy he was repeatedly fired into, all his cargo killed, sixty new coops of the best bamboo knocked to atoms; one of his crew desperately wounded, his vessel irretrievably damaged. His claim was for five hundred dollars; and he retired, secure in the knowledge that the Heaven-Born Son of the great foreign nation who, that day, with the Twin Lights of Justice, occupied the judgment-seat, would mete out compensation with an unsparing hand.

The dealer gave evidence much to the same effect. Then the wounded sailor, whose scalp had been furrowed by a ball, ghastly with bandages and the gore which he had liberally smeared over his features, told his tale. To wind up with, the unlucky jumping cannon, which had pitched on to the deck of the junk, was produced as evidence of identity. Outside, in piles, lay other witnesses—hundreds of fine fat ducks, stiff and 'high.'

Around the building the fickle crowd could be heard raging for the blood of the unfortunate M'Cracken, so

lately their hero. The Consul, who spoke English well, was obviously ill at ease. The two mandarins glared sourly at the poor skipper.

'I think, captain, you'd better pay at once,' said the Consul. 'Evidently a most unfortunate mistake has been made; and that is the only way out of it that I can see.'

'I'll see him dom'd afore I do!' exclaimed the skipper. 'Five hundred dollars! Why, it's a hundred pun sterlin' o' oor money! An' a' for a wheen dukes an' a crackit heid! Na, na! Tell the skirlin' fule I'll gie him fifty dollars, and that's mair than a' his gear's worth. I'll gang to preesin suner than pay as muckle siller as he's askin'!'

Outside the 'Children of far Cathay' could be heard yelling louder than ever for the heart, liver, and entrails of the white devil. The Consul's face grew graver as he listened to the wounded sailor, just below the open window haranguing the crowd.

'What's a' that claver aboot?' asked the skipper.

'They are demanding,' replied the Consul, 'that these gentlemen'—indicating the mandarins—'should have you crucified at once. And, upon my word, captain, if you don't soon make up your mind, they'll do it. I am powerless to assist you in any way beyond finding you the money.'

M'Cracken turned blue. It was like parting with his life, the parting with that hundred pounds. But he could see no escape. As the Consul quickly told him, this was no question of imprisonment, but one of cash

down. So he paid ; and, presently, followed by a coolie carrying the little cannon, made his way to the boat between lines of grinning soldiery, over whose shoulders the rabble, derisive now, quacked itself hoarse. And amongst the noisest of them he caught sight of his Christian passenger.

The *Sparrowhawk* took no freight from Swatow. She sailed for Rangoon speedily ; but there it was just as bad. The joke was too good not to circulate. In every eastern port she and her people were greeted with volleys of 'quacks' by the native population both on land and water. Legions of imps, black and copper-coloured, and all quacking with might and main, formed the skipper's retinue if he went ashore anywhere between Yokohama and Bombay.

Native masters of country *wallahs*, lying within hail, would grin, and ask him for the protection of the *Sparrowhawk* to their next port of call. It became unbearable. India, China and Japan seemed to turn into duck-pens at his approach.

So he took the *Sparrowhawk* out of those waters altogether, and shortly afterwards gave up the sea. But, although there are no ducks within a mile of his house on the Aythen, there are urchins—Scotch urchins—and he has not perfect peace. The story is too well known.

As for his crew, even yet, if one should, with intent, imitate the cry of that fowl disastrous where two or three of them happen to be foregathered, they will come at you with the weapons nearest.

THE DUKE OF SILVERSHEEN.

Quæ amissa, salva.

THE parlour of the 'Woolpack' was full of men in from their stations for 'Land Court Day.' A babel of talk was toward—mostly 'shop.' 'Footrot!' shouted a small energetic looking man, 'I'll tell you how I cure my sheep! You boil vinegar, and arsenic, and blue-stone up— No, Polly, I ordered lager. And then—' 'Worms,' my dear fellow, another was saying, 'You can't cure 'em! Don't tell me! You go and make an infernal chemist's shop of your sheep's stomach, ruin the wool and constitution; and, after all your trouble, up bobs the little worm serenely as ever.' 'Strike,' came from another corner of the big room. 'No fear! No strike this year if we hang together like we mean to do. I think we're pretty right in this district, anyhow. Everybody's joined, bar M'Pherson, and he'll come-to presently. By jingo, here he is! Touch the bell, Bob, and let's have 'em again.' As the speaker finished, a burly, grey-whiskered man entered with, in his wake, another person who had evidently been closely pressing his com-

panion with argument and persuasion, for the latter was saying irritably,—

‘Once for a’, I tell ye, no. I’ll nae join. I’ll just stan’ on my ain bottom, an’ employ wha I like. When I want my wool aff, aff it comes; an’ wha takes it aff I dinna care a damn, so it’s taken off to my satisfaction! Will that do ye?’

‘The gospel of selfishness according to M’Pherson,’ said a voice from out the smoke-clouds. ‘The assessment ’d drive him mad.’ ‘Bang went saxpence!’ sang out someone else, as the Scotch squatter turned angrily round with a dim idea that he was being baited.

But the older men quietened the youngsters who threatened to break bounds.

They still hoped—stubborn and untouchable, except by way of his pocket, though he was—to gain M’Pherson to the cause.

He was the largest sheepowner in the district, and that was saying a good deal when the smallest shore 40,000. Palkara shed was one of the shearing prizes of the colony, and the A.S.* Union officials viewed the defection of its owner with joy.

‘So I hear you bought the “Duke” down at the sales, Mac?’ said one presently, as the old man, his wrath subsiding, sipped his whisky and water.

‘Ay,’ responded he, ‘it was a stiff price to gie, but I’m no regrettin’ it. He’s a wonnerfu’ fine beast.’

They were sitting with their backs to the open

* Australian Shearers’.

windows, which gave on to a many-seated crowded verandah, and from this came,—

‘That you may lose him before you’ve had him a week, unless you join the Association!’

‘If I do, I’ll join, and ask it to help me find him,’ retorted M’Pherson angrily into the hot outside night, and would fain have risen and gone in search of the speaker, but that his friend, whose name was Park, a neighbouring squatter, pulled him back, saying,—

‘Never mind these youngsters, Mac. They’re getting a bit sprung, I fancy. It’s no use making a row. When’ll the “Duke” be up?’

‘He’s due here on Tuesday,’ replied the other, ‘an’, if ye’ll be in, ye can see him. He’s weel worth the lookin’ at. He’ll come by rail to Burrstown, an’ then by coach on.

Two bachelor brothers, the Blakes, who owned a run not far from Palkara, were close to the window at which the pair sat.

The younger brother it was who had fired the remark inside about losing the great ram for which M’Pherson had just paid 700 guineas.

.....
‘Well, Jack, what passengers to-night?’ asked the overseer of Blake’s Tara Station, as Cobb & Co.’s coach drew slowly up in the pouring rain close to the home-stead door.

‘Nary one, bar a cussed ole brute of a ram,’ replied the driver, as he stiffly dismounted, and handed out the mail. ‘I got him at the railway, and I’ve bin more cautious with him than if he’d bin a Lord Bishop.

He's for M'Pherson up at Palkara. Hold the light please, Mr Brown, till I see if the beggar's all serene.'

'He's right enough,' said the overseer, after a glance at the aristocrat, resting luxuriously on pillows, half buried in hay, and with his legs tied by silk handkerchiefs. 'Now,' he continued, 'slip inside and have a snack and a drop of hot grog. I'll stand by the horses.'

'You're a Christian, Mr Brown,' remarked the driver gratefully, as he pulled off his gloves and blew on his numbed fingers. 'It's the coldest rain for this time o' the year as ever I felt.'

Scarcely had his dripping figure entered the open kitchen door, when, from behind a clump of bushes, came two figures bearing something between them. Lifting the 'Duke' with scant ceremony out of his couch, they deposited their burden in his place, and after a few whispered words to Brown, still at the horses' heads, disappeared. Presently the driver returned, and, with a cheery 'Good-night,' started the coach rolling once more through the forty miles of mud and water between Tara and Combington.

.
'Coach in, Edwards?' asked M'Pherson the next afternoon as he drove up to the 'Woolpack,' accompanied by his friend Park.

'Yes, sir. It's a bit late, though,' replied the landlord. 'Roads terrible heavy after the rain. I had the ram untied an' put in the stable, an' gave him some green stuff.'

‘That’s right, Edwards,’ said the squatter. ‘How does he look after the trip—pretty well?’

The other hesitated before answering,—

‘Why, yes, sir; he seems hearty enough. But I’m no judge of sheep.’

‘S’pose ye wouldna care about givin’ 700 guineas for him, eh, Edwards?’ chuckled M’Pherson.

‘No, sir,’ replied the landlord with emphasis, ‘I’m damned if I would.’

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed the other, as he drove into the yard, ‘and yet, mon, I wouldna swap him for the auld “Woolpack.” Come,’ he added impatiently, ‘unlock the door an’ let us hae a look at His Grace.’

By this time there was quite a crowd on the scene. A couple of stock and station agents, a bank manager, the P.M., some drovers, everybody, in fact, who thought they knew a sheep from a goat, had assembled to have a look at ‘the big ram.’

‘Keep awa’ frae the door,’ quoth M’Pherson. ‘Ye’ll all be able to hae a good sight o’ him presently. Let him come right out into the yaird, Edwards.’

As he finished, up the lane of spectators stalked a nondescript kind of animal, at which M’Pherson just glanced, and then sang out to Edwards, appearing in the doorway,—

‘Ye never tauld me there was twa. Whaur’s the ither?’

‘There’s only the one, sir,’ answered the landlord. ‘That’s he.’

‘What!’ and M’Pherson fairly gasped as he stared at

the brute, which — from the muleish head, down the sparsely ‘broken woolled’ back, and slab-sided flanks, to the bare, kangaroo-like legs—bore the impress all over of ‘rank cull.’

Then turning to the grinning landlord, and with accent intensified by excitement, he shouted, ‘What’s yon thing? Whaur’s my ram? D’ye think I ped my money for sic a brute as that? What ha’ ye done wi’ the “Duke”? If this is a wee bit joke o’ yer ain, Mister Edwards, time’s up, I do assure ye, sir.’ And he advanced threateningly towards the publican, who nimbly retreated into the crowd, whilst protesting,—

‘I can swear to you, sir, that’s the very same sheep Jack Burns brought in the coach this mornin’. I helped to take him out, an’ I sez to Jack, “Well, he ain’t much to look at, Jack;” and Jack, he sez, “No, that he ain’t. I think the trip must have haffected him; he seems to have felled away sence we put him in at the railway.”’

‘Tak’ me to the villain,’ groaned M’Pherson, ‘till I get to the bottom of this de’il’s cantrip!’

Followed by quite a procession, they passed to a little room, where the driver lay sleeping off the fatigues of the previous night.

‘Hi!’ yelled the squatter, shaking him. ‘What ha’ ye done wi’ my ram, ye rascal?’

Jack, sitting up, half awake, replied sulkily,—

‘Damn your ram! He’s in the stable. What d’ye want, rousin’ people like this for?’

‘I’ll rouse ye, ye scamp!’ roared the other. ‘Whaur’s

my ram—my “Duke,” I say? D’ye think that I dinna ken a coo frae a cuddy; an’ that I’m to be imposed on wi’ a blasted auld cull in place o’ the “Duke o’ Silversheen” that I ped 700 guineas guid cash for? D’ye imagine I’m daft, ye coach-drivin’ fule, ye? If ye dinna confess wha’s led ye astray, I’ll give ye in chairge this vera meenit. I’ll let ye ken that I’m Jock M’Pherson o’ Palkara; an’ I’m goin’ to mak’ it het for ye for this wee jobbie!’

This tirade effectually awakened the driver, and said he, with an earnestness there was no mistaking,—

‘By G—d, Mr M’Pherson, I’m on the square. I never took much notice o’ the ram at the railway. It was dusk, too, when the agent put him in. I seen him two or three times along the road, an’ thought he looked fust class. Nobody could ha’ touched him without me knowin’ of it. But, at the best o’ times, I can’t tell one sheep from t’other, never havin’ had any truck with ’em. Anyhow, if there’s cross work ’bout this un, all I can say is, as I ain’t in it: An’ now you can send for the traps if you likes.’

The man’s manner carried conviction with it, and for a few minutes M’Pherson was silent.

At last he said,—

‘Come awa’, some o’ ye, an’ catch the creature till I have a look at him.’

But when caught, nothing was ascertainable beyond the one patent fact that he was a broken-mouthed, miserable old cull, who ought to have gone to market as a wether years ago. Earmarks, out of their own district,

are of precious little use as a means of identification nowadays.

It will be noticed that Jack forgot all about his twenty minutes' stay and chat with the cook in Tara kitchen. The coach had been very much overdue.

'Surely you're not going to take the thing home, Mac?' said his friend, as the former lugged the 'Duke's' *locum tenens* towards the buggy. 'He's only fit to have his throat cut.'

'Never mind,' replied M'Pherson moodily, 'he'll mebbe turn out o' some use yet.'

Not that the old Scotchman was at all inclined to sit down quietly and suffer his loss. Very far from it. But he was no favourite, and public sympathy was absent. Unfeeling people averred that, at the time of the sale, he had been under the influence of hypnotism, etc., etc.; in fact, laughed at, and enjoyed the thing as a good joke. Therefore he was disinclined to blazon his misadventure throughout the Colonies. Also, he thought it would be bad policy to make too much noise.

Nevertheless, he quietly strained every nerve, and spent money freely in endeavours to discover the missing animal. Private detectives and the local police took the matter in hand, and with exactly the same amount of success.

.

Meanwhile the 'Duke' was thriving. At Tara a big underground cellar, lit by skylights, had recently been excavated. This was his home. There, waited upon by the only three in the secret, the great merino lived on

the fat of the land. Some nights the Blakes would let him out into the garden for a pick, themselves or Brown securing him in his quarters again before they turned in.

It was a lot of bother, doubtless. But what of that, if they could only 'bring old Mac to his bearings,' and secure Palkara for their Association!

As for the risk of discovery, they laughed at it. From the minute the agent (who was ready to swear to the 'Duke's' identity) put him in the coach at the Burrstown terminus, everything seemed vague and exceedingly doubtful respecting the spot at which the transfer could possibly have been effected.

The coach stopped at some half-dozen stations along the road, besides mail stages, and at none of these places could the slightest clue be obtained. In common with the rest, Tara was subjected to official visits.

'Certainly, Sergeant, happy to show you through all the paddocks. Like to see the rams? Yes, of course. We've got some very fine Havilahs you'll be pleased with, I'm sure. Yes; terrible affair about poor M'Pherson's "Duke"! Have another nip before we start?'

So, sheep galore did the unhappy police inspect, and carefully did they compare, stags, wethers, and ancient 'horny' ewes with photos of the 'Duke' until, at length, quite dazed with the apparently endless quest, to say nothing of the whisky, they audibly cursed the whole ovine race back to the days of the first breeders.

Only once did the brothers feel a doubt. Driving into town, they met M'Pherson and a black-fellow following

the old cull, who was steadily tramping along the road Tara-ward.

‘What’s all this about, M’Pherson?’ asked one, as they pulled up. ‘Have you taken a droving contract?’

‘Ay,’ replied the old fellow, glaring suspiciously at the pair. ‘Just that. I’m wantin’ to see whaur Beelzebub, here, gangs. If he’s gotten a hame, which I muckle doot, mebbe he’ll mek back.’

But a couple of miles on, Beelzebub struck a patch of clover, and stuck to it.

The darkey watched him for three days, and, after he had finished every vestige, the old ram paused irresolutely, scratched his ear with his hind foot, and meandered calmly back to the township.

So M’Pherson returned with him to Palkara. A bit of the garden was fenced off, and here he used to sit and smoke and stare for hours at Beelzebub, until his friends began to think his loss had affected his brain.

Like many of his countrymen, M’Pherson was superstitious, and, deep down in his heart, was a lurking suspicion of *diablerie* that would not be exorcised.

‘It’s no earthly use watching that beast, Mac,’ said Park, riding up one day, and finding his neighbour at his usual occupation. ‘Look as hard as you like, and that won’t turn him into the Duke. Now, take my advice, and I think you stand a show of getting him back again. You remember you said that night at the Woolpack, that, if you lost him, you’d join the Association and trust it to recover him for you, or something to that effect.

Well, my notion is that some of the boys have had a finger in the pie. And I solemnly believe that, if you don't soon make your mind up, you'll never see the Duke any more. Come, now's the time! Shearing will start presently. Besides, I know you want him badly for those Coonong stud ewes.'

Park, himself a prominent member, used all his powers of persuasion, and to such good purpose, that in the next issue of the local paper appeared the announcement,—

'Palkara will start shearing on ——— under Conference rules.'

.
A morning or so afterwards, M'Pherson going out for his before-breakfast smoke and usual look at Beelzebub, to his astonishment saw him not. He had gone. But in his stead stood a stately, almost perfect animal, the *beau ideal* of what a 'Champion' should be. Around his neck he bore a card, on which the old squatter presently read,—

'I am a fully paid-up member of the Pastoralists' Association of Australasia.

(Signed) SILVERSHEEN.'

THE OFFICER IN CHARGE.

A FAR INLAND SKETCH.

‘A RISING township of some four hundred inhabitants, situated on the Trickle Trickle River. Distance from Sydney, north-west, six hundred and fifty miles.’

Thus the *Australian Gazetteer*, speaking of the far-inland village of Jillibeejee. For days you shall have ridden over bush roads, fetlock deep in dust, through monotonous open forest, or over still more monotonous plain, ere, far away on a dry brown ridge, you catch the glitter of something in the bright, hot sunshine. This proceeds from the first roof in Jillibeejee. Then, making your horse stride carefully over the Trickle Trickle, whose banks are apt to crumble, you breast the ridge and take a bird’s-eye view of the township as it lies frying in the sun.

This ridge must be fully fifty feet above the level of the surrounding country, and is probably the ‘rising’ referred to by the jocular *Gazetteer*.

The first building is deserted ; so is the second. As you ride along you come to others, dilapidated but, from

sounds within, peopled. There are altogether forty houses in Jillibeejee, which, by the *Gazetteer's* reckoning, gives us an average of ten inmates to each one.

I am afraid the *Gazetteer* has never been to Jillibeejee.

In fact, very few people ever do seem to go there. Those that do, either depart again very shortly, or stay until theirs makes one amongst a collection of rudely-fenced enclosures on the banks of the Trickle Trickle, inside which sleep the pioneers of the place.

Perhaps the first emotion that arises in the visitor's mind is of wonder that any pioneer, no matter how hard up he may have been, should have thought it worth while to commence pioneering at Jillibeejee. The second, that any others should ever join him in such a speculation. Neither tree nor any other green thing meets the sight. All is brown, barren, desolate—apparently a 'waste land where no one comes, or hath come since the making of the world,' except that intrepid band in possession.

Why do people live here? How do they live? I must discover this, if possible, before leaving. Having no time to spare, I begin at once.

He is six feet in his stockings, broad, massive, hirsute, and tanned. The insignia of office in such a place would be an absurdity. Therefore his raiment is nondescript, and mostly slouch hat. This is the man who rules the official destinies of the settlement—the 'Officer in Charge.' To him I propound my conundrum.

'Ah,' replies he; 'ye shud jist come aroun' whin ut's a wet saison, an' thin ye'd see the differ av ut.'

Yes,' I remark. 'And when may that time be due?'

'God knows,' says he piously, and with a sigh. 'I've bin here four year, an' I've seen ut wanst. Ye cudn't see the counthry for a week bekase av the wather. Thin, afther, comes the grass an' the clover six feet high. Ut's a great counthry, them times, so it is, sorr.'

It is high noon as I and my friend stroll along the fiery, dusty track amongst the iron-roofed ovens large and small.

Everybody seems asleep, save that now and again we catch a glimpse of women, wan and prematurely old-looking.

In the sun's eye a man lies in the brown dust. He is on his back, his hat off, and snoring stertorously up at a cloud of mosquitoes, sandflies, and other abominations hovering and buzzing about his face.

With a look of solicitude my guide exclaims,—

'Sure, now, that's Tim Healy, come in from Out Back, an' his cheque gone already! Lend a hand, will ye, sorr, wid the other ind av him. The poor devil 'll be sthrukk intirely here, so he will.'

So, one at each 'ind,' we bear the man from Out Back into the comparative shade of a verandah, where the constable takes off his boots, loosens his shirt collar, and props his head up, saying,—

'There, the cratur, mebbe he'll waken wid nothin' worse nor a sore head, an' a limekiln in the throttle av him.'

A fit man and a proper, this one, I reflect, to be Officer in Charge of this half-forgotten fragment of a people.

So, presently, I am not surprised at hearing that, in addition to that title, he bears the important ones of Clerk of Petty Sessions, Registrar of Small Debts Court and Births, Land Bailiff, Inspector of Slaughterhouses, Curator's Agent, and others equally pertinent to his surroundings, but which I have forgotten.

Entering the parlour of the one public-house, silent and deserted but for clouds of humming flies, a drowsy landlord, booted and spurred for riding, answers our knock.

'I was goin' over the river an hour ago,' he explains, rubbing his bleary eyes, 'to run a beast in; but two or three of the boys was here larst night, an' they kep' it up; so I lays down on the sofy an' drops right off. What 'll ye have, gents?'

I ask for beer. My companion smiles and 'takes' rum.

'Lor bless yer!' exclaims the landlord, 'there ain't bin no beer here this twelvemonth or more! I got some, somewheres, on the teams. But, the way things is, it 'll be another twelvemonth afore they show up. Dry time, ye see, sir.'

'Well, then,' I say, 'have you any whisky?'

'There was a bottle or two, but the boys—' he commenced, when,—

'What's the use av batin' about the bush that way?' puts in my companion. 'Why don't ye tell the gint at

wanst that sorra a dhrop 'll he get in Jillibeejee, bar the rum utself. I've dhrunk worse in Port Mackay. Ut's a wholesome dhrink, in moderation, an' wid jist a suspicion o' Trickle Trickle at the bottom av the tumbler.'

So rum it is. The Officer in Charge takes his, I notice, very nearly pure, and without winking. We help ourselves, and the price is one shilling each.

It is still terribly hot.

'It must be a long way over one hundred degrees in the shade,' I remark.

'Come acrost to the station,' says the Officer in Charge, 'an' we'll see. There's no shade whatever in Jillibeejee. But there's the best that is. Sure, ut's weatherboard an' lined—the only wan in the town. There's a thermomether there as tells how big a hate's on.'

So we go over. The place is like a furnace, and the glass registers one hundred and twenty-seven degrees.

'And you've been here some years!' I gasp, sliding off my chair, a wet, limp heap, on to the floor, and staying there.

'I have, indade, sorr,' replies he. 'The first summer I was minded to blow me head off wid me pistol. The second was near as bad; but I don't fale 'em so much now. Whin the wet do come, ut's almost as thryin'; for the san'-flies an' miskitties bangs Banagher. Ay, ut's dull an' lonesome like, sure enough, till the b'ys comes in for a change; an' thin, if ye'll belave ut, Jillibeejee is as ructious a townen as is on God's earth.'

'Come in from where? Where the deuce can anybody come in from? And who in the world would come

to such a hole as this 'for a change?' I ask irritably, whilst wringing my pocket handkerchief, as the heat proves too trying.

'Whisht!' replies my host placidly. 'Ye'll mebbe have noticed that there's not many min in Jillibeejee, knockin' aroun' like?'

'Only the fellow,' I answer, 'that we put in the verandah.'

'Ay, he's iver wan o' the fust, is Tim Healy,' says the Officer in Charge. 'Whin the others are comin' in, he'll be afther going back, stone bruk, so he will, poor divil!'

'In from *where?* Back to *where?*' I cry impatiently.

'To an' fro the big stations on the border, over yander,' replies he, with a wave of his hand westward. 'To the back av beyant, where they digs dams, an' sinks wells, an' fences an' fights wid the naygurs, an' herds cattle, an' gathers up a cheque, and thin comes back like pili-cans to their women and children on the edge o' the wiltherness here. Good b'ys, in the main,' he continues; 'just a little rough, perhaps, when the rum's in. Ye see, sorr, ye can't expeck much else from the cratur, for, iv this is bad, ut's Hell utself out yander in the new cuntry, where there's no law, no polis, no nothin'. D'ye wander at the b'ys, now, wantin' a change out av ut wanst an' agin?'

'Well, perhaps not. But what must that other life be like?'

So, in the gloaming, hot and close, with a hot-looking moon hanging in a hazy sky, I depart from Jillibeejee,

leaving its Officer in Charge—strong man, and a very fit—stroking a great black beard meditatively, and possessing his soul in patience for the stirring times which herald the advent of his charges from the ‘Back av Beyant.’

'SOJUR JIM.'

BRIGHTLY blazed the watch-fires into the still night air, brightly from within the circle formed by them gleamed thousands of sparkling eyes, and fell on the ear a low, continuous sound, like the soft distant murmur of some summer sea on a shingly beach, as twelve thousand sheep peacefully chewed their cuds after the long day's travel.

The weather was close and sultry. So, feeling indisposed to sleep, I had left my hot tent and was walking round the whitish, indistinct mass of recumbent figures, when I nearly stumbled against the watchman, who, as one of the fires flared up, I saw was the eccentric individual known in the camp by the nickname of 'Sojur Jim'; and, in pursuance of an idea I had long borne in mind, first assuring myself that all was right with my fleecy charges, I lit my pipe, stretched myself out on the short, thick grass and sand, and said, whilst looking at my watch,—

'Now, Jim, spin us a yarn that will help to pass away the time.'

But my companion is well-deserving of a more particular description. 'Sojur Jim' was the only name by which he was called, and this he had gained by an

extraordinary mania he possessed for destroying those small terrors of the Australian bush, familiar to all dwellers therein as 'Soldier' or 'Bull-dog' ants; insects fierce, intractable and venomous. These, then, seemed objects of especial aversion to Jim; and many a time, whilst travelling along, would one of the men sing out, 'Jim, Jim, sojurs!' The effect was electrical; Jim, leaving his flock, would bound away towards the nest, and, dexterously using the long stick, flattened at both ends in rude shovel shape, which was his constant companion, he would furiously, regardless of innumerable stings, uproot and turn over the 'sojurs' stronghold, and, having exposed its inmost recesses, complete the work of destruction by lighting a great fire upon it, and all this he would do with a set stern expression on his grim face, as of one who avenges never-to-be-forgiven or forgotten injuries.

He was indeed a remarkable looking man, strong and athletic, and, in spite of his snow-white hair, probably not more than fifty years of age. Part of his nose, the lobes and cartilages of his ears, and one eye were wanting, whilst the rest of his face was scarred and seamed as if at one time a cross-cut saw had been roughly drawn to and fro over it. And as I watched him sitting there on a fallen log, the flickering blaze playing fitfully on the white hair and corrugated, mutilated features, I felt more than ever sure that the man had a story well worth the hearing could he but be induced to tell it.

Amongst his fellows in the camp he was taciturn and

morose, never smiling, speaking rarely, apparently always lost in his own gloomy reflections. My request, therefore, was made with but faint hopes of success; but, to my surprise, after a few minutes silence, he replied,—

‘Very well, I’ll tell you a story. I don’t often tell it; but I will to-night. If at times you feel disinclined to believe it you have only to look at my face. I’m going now to tell you how I got all these pretty lumps and scars and ridges, and how I partly paid the men who made me what I am. “Sojur Jim” they call me, and think I am mad. God knows, I fancy so myself sometimes. Well,’ he went on, in language at times rude and unpolished, at others showing signs of more than average education, ‘Did you ever hear of Captain Jakes?’

‘Of course,’ I answered, for the notoriously cruel bushranger had, after his own fashion, helped to make minor Australian history.

‘Yes,’ muttered Jim abstractedly, ‘he’s accounted for. So is his mate—the one who laughed the loudest of any. But there were three of them, and there’s still another left somewhere. Not dead yet!’ he suddenly exclaimed in a loud voice. ‘Surely not! My God, no! After all these years of ceaseless search! That would be too hard!’ And here he stood up and gazed excitedly into the outer darkness.

‘But the story, Jim,’ I ventured to remark, after a long pause.

‘Right you are,’ he replied, as he again sat down, and calmly resumed. ‘Well, it was the year of the big rush,

the first one, to the Ovens. I was a strapping young fellow then, with all my life hopeful and bright before me, as I left the old mother and the girl I loved to try my luck on the diggings. Three years went by before I thought of returning to the little Victorian township on the Avoca, where we had long been settled; but then I struck it pretty rich, and made up my mind to go back and marry, and settle down alongside the old farm; for a pair of loving hearts were, I knew, growing weary of waiting for the return of the wanderer.

'Like a fool, however, instead of sending down my last lot of gold by the escort, I all of a sudden got impatient, and, packing it in my saddle-bags, along with a tidy parcel of notes and sovereigns, I set off alone. The third night out I camped on a good-sized creek, hobbled my horses, and after planting my saddle-bags a hollow log, I started to boil the billy for supper. Presently, up rides three chaps, and, before I could get to my swag, I was covered by as many revolvers; while one of the men says, "Come along, now, hand over the metal. We know you've got it, and if you don't give it quiet, why, we'll take it rough."

"You've got hold of the wrong party, this time, mates," says I, as cool as I could. "I'm on the wallaby, looking for shearing, and, worse luck, hav'n't got no gold."

"Gammon," says the first speaker. "Turn his swag over, mates."

'Well, they found nothing, of course. Then they searched all over the bush round about, and one fellow

actually puts his hand up the hollow of the log in which lay hid my treasure; and I thought it was all up with it, when he lets a yell out of him and starts cutting all sorts of capers, with half-a-dozen big sojurs hanging to his fingers.

‘Jakes (for he was the leader of the gang) now got real savage, and putting a pistol to my head, swore that he would blow my brains out unless I told where the gold was. Well, I wouldn’t let on, for I thought they were trying to bounce me, and that if I held out I might get clear off, so I still stuck to it that they’d mistaken their man.

‘Seeing I was pretty firm, they drew off for a while, and, after a short talk, they began to laugh like madmen; and one, taking a tomahawk, cut down a couple of saplings, whilst another gets ready some stout cord; and Jakes himself goes poking about in the saltbush as if looking for something he’d lost. Before this they had tied my arms and legs together with saddle-straps and greenhide thongs; and there I lay, quite helpless, wondering greatly what they were up to.

‘Presently the three came up, and tying me tightly to the saplings—one along my back, and one cross-ways—they carried me away a short distance to where I had noticed Jakes searching around, and then laid me down face uppermost, partly stripping me at the same time. I lay there quietly enough, puzzling my brains to try and guess what it was all about, and those three devils standing laughing fit to split their sides.

“Tell us now, will you,” said they, “where that gold’s planted? How does your bed feel? Are you warm enough?” and such like chaff, till I began to think they must have gone suddenly cranky, for I felt nothing at all. Perceiving that was the case, one of them took a stick and thrust it under me into the ground; and then—oh, God! it was awful!’

Here Sojur Jim paused suddenly, and a baleful light gleamed from that solitary bright eye of his, whilst a spasm shook his whole frame, and his scarred features were contorted as if once more undergoing the agonies of that terrible torture.

The wind sighed with an eerie sound through the tall forest trees around us; the cry of some night-bird came mournfully through the darkness, whilst black clouds flitted across the young moon, filling the sombre Australian glade with weird shadows—making the scene, all at once, dismally in unison with the story, as with a shiver I stirred the fire, and patiently waited for its narrator to go on.

‘Yes,’ he continued at length, ‘I dropped down to it quickly enough then. I was tied on to a sojur-ants’ nest, and they swarmed about me in thousands—into my nose, ears, eyes, mouth, everywhere—sting, sting, sting, and tear, tear, tear, till I shrieked and yelled for mercy.’

“Tell us where the gold is planted,” said one of the laughing fiends—I heard him laugh again years afterward over the same story—“and we’ll let you go.”

“Yes!” I screamed, “I’ll tell you. But for God Almighty’s sake take me out of this!” “Not much,” replied he. “Tell us first, and then you can jump into the creek and give your little friends a drink.” “Look in the big log,” I groaned at last. Then, one of them, remembering the sojurs, gets a stick and fossicks about till he felt the bags, when he shoves his arm up and drags them out.

“A square thing, by G—d!” says Jakes, and turning to me, he said, “Mate, you’ve given us a lot of trouble, and as you look as if you were comfortably turned in for the night, it would be a pity to disturb you. So long, and pleasant dreams!” And, with that, away the three of them rode, laughing loudly at my screams for mercy. As you may think,’ went on Jim, ‘I was by this time nearly raving mad with pain. Thousands of those devil-ants were eating into my flesh, and me lying there like a log. Hell! hell will never be as bad as that was!

‘Six months afterward I came to my senses again. It was a sunshiny spring morning, and I heard the magpies whistling outside the old humpy on the Ovens, as I tried to get up and go down to the claim, thinking that I’d had the nightmare terrible bad. But when I got off my bunk I fainted clean away on the floor, and there my mates found me when they came home to dinner. Good lads they were true men, who had nursed me and tended me through all the long months of fever and madness that had passed since the Escort, for which I should have waited, had by the merest

chance come across me and sent me back again to die, as everyone thought.

‘But,’ and here, for the first time, Jim’s voice faltered and shook, ‘there was another and a gentler nurse who—God bless her—helped me back to life; the little girl who loved me came up—my mother was dead—and would have kept her word to me, too, and taken my half-eaten carcass into her keeping wholly, had I been mean enough to let her do it. But that was more than I could stand the thought of. So one morning I slipped quietly away to begin my man-hunting; for I had vowed a merciless retribution upon my undoers if I had to track them the wide world over. That’s close on fifteen years ago. I can account for two, and live on in hopes of yet meeting with the third.

‘You’ve heard how Jakes pegged out?’ asked Jim abruptly.

‘Yes,’ I answered, ‘Sergeant O’Brien shot him in the Long Swamp.’

‘So most people think,’ was his reply. ‘But I know who was first in at the end; and when, crouching up to his neck in the mud and long reeds, with my fingers grasping his throat, I think, as he turned his bloodshot and protruding eyes on mine, I think, I say, that he knew me again, all changed as I was. He never spoke, though, and I let him die slowly, for I was sure that the sergeant was a long way behind. I held him there, I tell you, and watched him as he tried to blow the bubbles of blood and froth from out his pale lips, and at last I told him who I was, and how I had tracked him

down, and was now about to send his vile soul to perdition. Then, as I heard the galloping tramp of the trooper's horse, I smothered him in the stagnant ooze of that foul swamp. Truly a dog's death, but one too good for him! O'Brien, coming up soon afterward, found the body, put a couple of pistol bullets into it, and received the Government reward and promotion, whilst I set off in search of the others.

'One I came across four years afterwards on the Adelaide side. I had taken a job of shepherding up Port Augusta way, when, one night, who should come to the hut but Number Two, the one who laughed the longest and loudest of the three, as I lay in agony on the sojurs' nest. I knew him in a minute and heartily welcomed him to stop that night. "Just put those sheep in the yard, matey," I says, "while I make some bread for our supper."

'Well, I makes two smallish johnnycakes, and we had our tea. Then we starts smoking and yarning, and at length I turned the talk on to ants, saying I couldn't keep nothing there because of them. With that he falls to laughing, and, says he, "My word, mate, I could tell you a yarn if I liked 'bout ants—sojurs—that'd make you laugh for a week, only you see it ain't always safe, even in the bush, to talk among strangers."

'All of a sudden he turned as white as a sheet, and drops off the stool, and twists and groans. Then he sings out, "I'm going to die."

'You see,' remarked Jim, with the cold impassiveness which had, almost throughout, characterised his manner,

'the strychnine in the johnnycake that had fallen to his share was beginning to work him, and as I laughingly reminded him of old times, and asked him to go on with his story about the sojur ants, he also knew me, and shrieked and prayed for the mercy that I had once so unavailingly implored at his hands. He was very soon, however, too far gone to say much. A few more struggles and it was all over, and then I dragged the dead carrion out of my hut and buried it eight feet deep under the sheep-dung in the yard, where, likely enough, it is yet. So much for Number Two!' exclaimed Jim, as I sat looking rather doubtfully at him. Not that I questioned the truthfulness of his story—that was stamped on every word he uttered—but that I began to think him rather a dangerous kind of monomaniac to have in a drover's camp. 'And now, sir,' he went on presently, 'you've had the story you asked me for, and if ever we meet again after this trip, maybe I'll have something to tell you about Number Three; that business it is that brought me down about these parts, for I heard he was working at some of the stations on the river. And as God made me!' he exclaimed, with a subdued sort of gloomy ferocity in his voice, 'when we do meet, he shall feel the vengeance of the man whose life and love and fortune he helped to ruin so utterly. I could pick him out of a thousand, with his great nose all of a skew, and his one leg shorter than the other.'

.
The watch-fires were glimmering dimly. The cool air

which heralds the Australian dawn was blowing, and the sheep were moving silently out of their camp in long strings as I rose to my feet. In the white tents all was silence. Thanks to Sojur Jim, their occupants had passed an undisturbed night. Absorbed in his gruesome story—that dark tale of torture and retribution, with just that one little trait of woman's constancy and devotion shining out like some bright star from a murky sky—the time had slipped away unheeded. Sending him to call the cook, I put the sheep together, wondering mightily to myself, as the man, with his bent-down head and slouching gait, moved away, whether he really could be the same creature who through the silent watches of the night had unfolded to my view such a concentrated, tireless, and as yet unsatiated thirst for revenge, such a fixed and relentless purpose of retaliation, unweakened through the years, but burning freshly and fiercely to-day, as, when with the scarcely healed scars still smarting, disfigured, ruined, hopeless, forsaking all, he went forth alone into the world to hunt down his persecutors.

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A few days after Sojur Jim had related to me the story told above, one evening, at dusk, a swagman entered the camp and asked the cook for a piece of meat and some bread. Instead of eating it at once with the accompanying offered drink of tea, he turned away, and, a few minutes later, we saw his fire burning brightly a little further along the lagoon, the banks of which formed our resting-place for the night. Evidently, as

the men remarked amongst themselves, our visitor was a 'hatter.'

Next morning, when Sojur Jim was called out to take his flock, he was missing. His blankets and few belongings still lay as he had arranged them in the tent the night before, ready for turning in; and I at once ordered a search to be made.

It was of very short duration. Just in front of the swagman's fire, in the shallow water of the lagoon, we found the two bodies. The stranger's throat was grasped by Jim's fingers in a vice-like clutch, that, even in death, we long strove in vain to sunder. When parted at last, and we had washed the slimy mud from the features of the dead traveller, a truly villainous countenance was disclosed to view; the huge mouth, low, retreating forehead, and heavy, thick-set jaws, all betokened their owner to have belonged to the very lowest order of humanity. But what struck me at once was that the nose, which was of great size, had, at one time, been knocked completely over to the left side of the face, and as we straightened the body out, it could plainly be seen that one leg was much shorter than its fellow.

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Was this, then, indeed 'Number Three,' and had Sojur Jim's vengeful quest, his vow of bitter retaliation, ended at last? I believed so. But, as I gazed down upon the poor, scarred dead clay of a wasted and ruined life lying there, now so calm and still, all its fierce desires and useless repinings, all its feverish passions

and longings for dread retribution at rest, forcibly came to my mind the words of the sacred and solemn injunction—'Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord; I will repay.'

FAR INLAND FOOTBALL.

‘FRIGHTFULLY dull, isn’t it?’ said the Doctor.

‘Dull’s no name for it,’ said the Clerk of Petty Sessions; ‘this is the awfulest hole I ever was in.

‘Never knew it so bad,’ chimed in the Chemist and the Saddler, who were on this frosty night drinking whisky hot in the snug parlour of the Shamrock Inn in the little township of Crupperton.

‘I tell you what,’ said the C.P.S. presently; ‘I see by the paper they’ve started a football club at Cantleville. Why shouldn’t we do the same? It’ll help to pass away the time, anyhow.

The Doctor pricked up his ears with interest. The Chemist seconded the motion enthusiastically.

‘A capital idea,’ said he, ‘and, although I never have played, I’ll go in for it. It’s simple enough, I should imagine.’

‘Simple!’ said the C.P.S., who had once seen a match in Sydney. ‘It’s as easy as tea-drinking. There’s no expense, except the first one of the ball. It’s not like cricket, you know, where your always putting your hands in your pockets for something or other.’

'I'll give ten shillings, Mr Brown,' said the Doctor softly.

'Same here,' said the Chemist.

'How do you play it?' asked the Saddler, and the Blacksmith, and the Constable, who had just dropped in for a warm and a yarn that chilly evening.

'Well,' explained the C.P.S., who had ideas, 'first you get your ball. Then you put up a couple of sticks with a cross one on the top of 'em. Then you measure a distance, say one hundred yards by, say, fifty, on a level bit of ground, and put up another set of sticks. Then you get your men, and pick sides, and pop the ball down in the middle, and wade in. For instance,' he continued, 's'pose we're playing Saddle-strap. Well, then, d'ye see, we've got one goal—that's what they call the sticks—and they've got the other. We've to try and block 'em from kicking the ball over our cross-bar, and do our best, meantime, to send it over theirs. It's just a splendid game for this weather, and nothing could well be simpler.'

More men came in, the idea caught; a club was formed, and that very night the C.P.S. wrote to the capital for a ball 'of the best make and the latest fashion.'

But it was a very long way to the capital. So, in the interval, the C.P.S., who was an enterprising young Native, procured and erected goal-posts and cross-bars of barked pine; and very business-like they looked with a little pink flag fluttering from the summit of each.

At last the new ball arrived. But, to the secret astonishment of the C.P.S., in place of being round it was oval. However, he was not going to expose his ignorance and imperil the reputation already earned as an exponent of the game, so he only said,—

‘I sent for the very best they had, and I can see we’ve got our money’s worth. I’ll take her home and blow her up ready for to-morrow.’

For a long time the ball seemed to go in any direction but the right one, kick they never so hardly; whilst, as a rule, the strongest and most terrific kickers produced the least effect.

They tried the aggravating thing in every position they could think of, and, for a considerable period, without much success.

It was a sight worth seeing to watch the Blacksmith, after scooping a little hollow in the ground and placing the ball perpendicularly therein, retire and prepare for action. Opening his shoulders and spitting on his hands, he would come heavily charging down, and putting the whole force of fifteen stone into his right foot, deliver a tremendous kick; then stand amazed to see the ball, after twirling meekly up for a few yards, drop on his head instead of soaring between the posts as it should have done.

‘I’m out of practice myself—haven’t played for years, in fact,’ said the C.P.S. when explanation as to this erratic behaviour was demanded. ‘It’s simply a matter of practice, you know, like everything else.’

But all the same for a long time, deep down in

his heart, there was a horrible misgiving that the thing was not a football at all—that it should have been round. At last, by dint of constant perseverance, some of the men began to kick fairly well—kick goals even from a good distance.

The first difficulty arose from a lack of side-boundaries. Hence, at times, a kicking, struggling, shouting mob might be seen half-a-mile away, at the far end of the main street, whereas it should have been in front of the post-office.

To remedy this state of affairs, the C.P.S. drove in pegs at what was voted 'a fair thing' to serve as guides. When the ball was sent beyond the pegs no one pursued, and little boys stationed there kicked it back again. Also, the cows, pigs and goats of Crupperton, who must have imagined that a lunatic asylum had taken possession of their feeding grounds, returned, and henceforth fed peacefully about the grass-grown streets and allotments at the lower end of the township. Presently, to vary the monotony, the Cruppertonians got up a match amongst themselves for drinks—East *versus* West was the title of it. But it never went beyond the first scrimmage, if that can be called a first where all was one big scrimmage, caused by two compact bodies of men fighting for the possession of a ball. Out of this quickly emerged the Chemist with, as he averred, a fractured wrist. Anyhow, he wore a bandage, and played no more.

Then the Blacksmith accused the Saddler of kicking him on the shins, wilfully and of malice prepense. For

some time past there had been bad blood between these two, and the fight that ensued was so gorgeous that the game was quite forgotten in the excitement of it.

Presently, the village of Saddlestrap, a little lower down the river, in emulation of its larger neighbour, started football also.

The Saddlestraps mostly got their living by tankmaking, were locally known as 'Thicklegs,' and were a pretty rough lot. So that, when a match was arranged between the two places, fun was foretold.

The rules of the Saddlestrap club were, like those of the Crupperton one, simplicity itself, consisting, as they did, of the solitary axiom—'Kick whatever or wherever you can, only kick.'

Therefore, as remarked, fun was expected. The C.P.S. chose his team carefully, and with an eye to weight and size. Superior fleetness, he rightly imagined, would have but little to do with the result of the day's sport.

With the exception of half-a-dozen of the townspeople, the Crupperton players consisted of young fellows from a couple of stations adjoining. Therefore, the Saddlestraps somewhat contemptuously dubbed their opponents 'Pastorialites.'

The Doctor pleaded exemption on account of his age, and was, therefore, appointed 'Referee.'

For a while the play was somewhat weak and desultory, and lacking in effect. The ball was continually being sent outside the pegs, and the urchins stationed

there were kept busy. But, at length, to the delight of the spectators, consisting of the entire population of the two townships, there was a hot scrimmage. 'For all the world like a lot o' dorgs a-worryin' a 'possum!' as one excited bystander yelled, whilst the crowd surged around the mixed-up heap of humanity, the outside ring of which was frantically kicking and shoving at the prostrate inner one, serving friend and foe alike.

'A very manly and interesting game,' remarked the Doctor, placidly ringing his bell for 'Spell, oh!' whilst the Chemist ran to his shop for plaster and bandage.

Presently, the undermost man of all was dragged out, torn and gory, and spitting teeth from a broken jaw.

Him the Doctor caused to be carried to the nearest house, and, after attending to his wounds, returned hurriedly to the field, where his coadjutor was looking to the minor casualties, and both teams were refreshing themselves with rum, and boasting of their prowess.

The Doctor rang his bell, and play was resumed. It was, he explained, unhealthy to dawdle about in such weather and after severe exertion.

As the C.P.S. pointed out very eloquently that night at the banquet, football was a game in which people must learn to give and take, and that, until this had been fully understood and practised, the game would never get beyond an initial stage.

This was probably the reason that on a Saddlestrap in full pursuit of the ball being deliberately tripped up by a 'Pastorialite,' and sent headlong to mother earth, which

was hard and knobby, in place of rising and going on with the game, he began to punch the tripper.

Five minutes afterwards might be seen the curious spectacle of a ball lying neglected in the centre of the ground, whilst outside raged a big fight of thirty.

For a time the trouble was strictly confined to the two teams. But when it was observed that Crupperton was getting the worst of it, partisans quickly peeled off and took sides ; so that, directly, both townships were up to their eyes in fight, and the Doctor seriously contemplated sending for professional assistance to Cantleville.

For some time victory hovered in the balance. But men fight well on their own ground, and at last the Saddlestraps broke and fled for their horses and buggies. Those who stayed behind did so simply because there was no doctor in their native village.

A banquet for both teams had been prepared at the leading (and only) hotel. But there was only a remnant of one side that felt like banqueting, so the gaps were filled by residents who had been prominent in the fray.

The C.P.S., with a couple of beautifully blackened eyes, took the chair. At the other end of the table presided the Constable, whose features presented a curiously intricate study in diachylon, many of the Saddlestraps having seized a mean opportunity of wiping off old scores.

Speeches and toasts were made and drunk, and football enthusiastically voted the king of all games.

As the Blacksmith—whose arm was in a sling—observed, 'It was a fair an' square game. A man know'd what he'd got to do at it. There wasn't no tiddleywinkin' in the thing.'

The Doctor had been too busy to come early; but he dropped in for a minute or so during the evening, and with great fire, and amidst much applause, made a splendid speech. In its course he quoted Gordon's well-known lines—'A game's not worth a rap for a rational man to play,' etc.; and also adapted that saying of the 'Iron Duke's' about the battle of Waterloo being won upon the British football grounds.

It was decidedly the 'speech of the evening,' and was greeted with hearty cheers as, concluding, he retired to look after his patients.

But Crupperton was very sore next morning; and for a whole week there was no more football. Then they looked about them for more victims to their prowess. But they found none at all near home.

At last, in despair, and in defiance of the advice of the C.P.S., the executive challenged Cantleville itself—agreeing to journey thither. In due course, and after the C.F.C. had recovered from its surprise, and consulted a 'Gazetteer,' it accepted.

Cantleville was a very long distance away. Moreover, it was the 'City' of those inland parts, and the headquarters of the Civil Service therein. Therefore the C.P.S. and the Constable discreetly refused to accompany their fellows. One of the pair, at least, had

doubts as to whether Cantleville played the Crupperton game.

So the Blacksmith was elected Captain. 'You'd better stay at home,' said the C.P.S., 'the chaps over there are regular swells, up to all the latest dodges, and they wear uniforms. Besides they may not quite understand our rules.'

'Then we'll teach 'em,' said the Blacksmith. But the question of a uniform troubled him. So he took counsel with his now fast friend the Saddler, and the result was that everyone packed a stiffly-starched white shirt and a pair of black trousers into his valise.

'How about your uniforms now?' said the Blacksmith, 'nothin' can't be neater'n that.'

So they went forth to battle, accompanied by the good wishes of the populace; but neither by Doctor nor Chemist. There were plenty of both at Cantleville. Also they were wise in their generation, and had doubts.

Communication in these days was limited. Cantleville news arrived *via* Sydney, and the newspapers were a week old when delivered. So that the team brought its own tidings home. They had not had a good time. They had also been heavily fined, and they proposed to go afield no more. The Blacksmith and the Saddler, who had 'taken it out,' were the last to appear.

'I suppose you play Rugby rules?' had asked blandly the Secretary of the C.F.C., as he curiously surveyed the 'Bushies' on their arrival.

'No, we don't,' said the Blacksmith. 'We plays

Crupperton,' and no more questions were asked. But when it was seen what Crupperton rules meant, backs, half-backs, forwards, and all the rest of it, struck and refused to continue. Instead, they took to chaffing the 'black and white magpies.'

Whereupon, Crupperton, putting the question of football on one side, went at its opponents *à la* Saddlestrap. Their places, however, they presently found taken by policemen. These latter every man handled to the best of his ability, and had to pay for accordingly.

'Shoo!' said the Blacksmith, as he finished. 'They're nothin' but a lot o' tiddleywinkers up there. Let's have another match with Saddlestrap.'

ON THE GRAND STAND.

A PIONEER SKETCH.

THERE was a lot of men from up-country staying at the Kamilaroi. One could easily tell them by their bronzed hands and faces, and creased or brand-new clothes, from the city members of the well-known Pastoralists' Club.

'Hello,' suddenly exclaimed a fine-looking man, whose thick moustache lay snow-white against the deep tan of his cheek, 'here's Boorookoorora in the market! H'm, one hundred and sixty thousand sheep (so they've got the jumbucks on it at last). . . . Capital homestead . . . stone-built house . . . splendid garden and orchard. How things must have changed out there since Wal Neville and Jimmy Carstairs and myself took that country up, and lived for months at a time on damper, bullock and pigweed in a bark humpy. Stone house and orchard! Well, well,' he concluded, laying down the newspaper with a sigh, 'I hope they haven't disturbed the boys. I left them there sleeping quietly enough side by side over five-and-twenty years ago.'

'Shouldn't have gone home and stayed away so long,

Standish,' here remarked a friend. 'You're out of touch altogether with our side now. That's the worst of being rich. D'rectly a fellow gets a pot of money left him, off he must go "home." But here's Hatton.—Hatton, let me introduce Mr Hugh Standish to you. He's interested in your place. First man to take it up; early pioneer, and all that sort of thing.'

'Yes,' said Mr Hatton presently, 'I was the first to put sheep on Boorookoorora, and they do well. Yes, the two graves are untouched at the old homestead still. Carstairs and Neville! I've heard the story, or a version of it. Poor fellows! I had their graves freshly fenced in a couple of years ago. And so you were the third partner. Will you tell us the story of your escape? I should much like to hear it at first' hand.'

'Do you know the Grand Stand?' asked Standish,' without replying directly.

The other shook his head.

'What is it?' he asked.

'Why, the big rock, close to the Black Waterhole, on your own run,' replied Standish.

'Oh,' said his new acquaintance, 'you mean Mount Lookout. That's just at the bottom of the orchard now. You see, we've shifted the head station from where you and Warner and Adams and the rest had it.'

'Well, well,' replied the other, 'Grand Stand, or Mount Lookout, or whatever you like to call it, I had a very rough time on its top.'

'Ah,' remarked the owner of Boorookoorora, 'I've had the top levelled and an anemometer erected on it;

also a flight of steps cut. In fact, it is a sort of observatory on a small scale.'

'The devil it is!' exclaimed Standish. 'Well, if you'll listen, I'll tell you what I observed once from its top.'

.
'There were three of us. We were all young and healthy, and each had a little money. Foregathering (the first time was in this very room), we determined to become partners, and take up country. We would go out in person—far out, beyond even, as poor Neville put it, the "furthest paling of civilisation."

'There we would acquire a territory, expressible not in poor, miserable acres, but in square miles—thousands of 'em.

'There we would breed sheep and cattle, increasing yearly in multitude, so that the sands upon the sea-shore shouldn't be a circumstance to them. We would plant in that far country our own vines and our own fig-trees, and sit under their shade in the good days to come—we and our children, and our children's children after us—in that wide and pleasant heritage of our founding. Alas, the glamour of youth and confidence, and health and strength over a bottle or two of good wine! Five-and-twenty years ago, gentlemen, in this same old room!

'So we went. And the days grew into weeks, and the weeks into months, as we rode, searching hither and thither, to the right hand or to the left, but always with our faces to the falling sun. Over stony ridges and over

rolling downs ; over deserts of cruel spinifex and barren sand ; through great scrubs, thick and gloomy ; along rivers, tortuous and muddy. At times drenched with rain, at others suffering from heat and hunger and thirst, but ever westward. At length, after many disappointments, emerging from a broad stretch of sterile country and ascending a range of low hills, our eyes beheld something resembling the Canaan of our dreams. Track of horse or beast we had not seen for weeks ; therefore we knew that the land was, if we so willed it, ours.

‘For a long time we gazed over the timber-clumped, wide expanse, emerald-swarded after some recent fire, and through which ran a creek whose waterholes shone like polished steel under the mid-day sun.

“Here we rest?” said one ; and another,—“The Plains of Hope lie before us !”

‘So we rested from our wanderings ; and one, journeying backwards, secured the country, defining its boundaries, not by marked trees, but by parallels of latitude.

‘Shortly a homestead arose, rude but sufficient. Mob after mob of cattle came up from stations to the south and east, and Boorookoorora became itself a station.

‘We got the name from a black fellow. We understood him to signify that the word meant “*No place beyond.*” This pleased us, for we were, so far, proud of being the “farthest out”—the *Ultima Thule* of settlement. We may have been altogether mistaken, for the fellow was wild as a hawk, and, at the first chance, gave us the slip. But I’m glad, all the same, that the old name still holds.

‘Of the blacks we had seen very little. They appeared to decline all communication with us. Now and again the stockmen would bring one in; but he came evidently under strong protest, and refused both food and gifts of any description. However, we cared nothing for that, so long as our cattle remained unmolested. They were doing splendidly; and we soon began to talk about sending a mob to the southern markets, with which, in those days, there was little or no communication. We intended to pioneer that trade. There was plenty of room as yet. Our nearest neighbour was a hundred miles away; the nearest township, five hundred. One Sunday morning I went for a ride, leaving Walter and Jimmy alone. The two white stockmen and a couple of black boys, who made up the head station staff, were away on a round of the out-stations.

‘I had intended to be back for the dinner, which I had left the pair busily preparing. Unfortunately, when about five miles from the homestead on my return, my horse put his foot in a hole, stumbled badly, and directly afterwards went dead lame.

‘The day was a roaster for a tramp; but there seemed no help for it. So, planting the saddle and bridle, also, in a most unlucky moment, my heavy Enfield rifle, I set out through the long, dry grass, which reached at times over my head, and made walking hard and disagreeable work.

‘As often as I paused to rest and wipe my dripping face did I curse our remissness in not having “burnt off” before this, and vow to soon have a right royal

blaze amongst the thick reed-like grass-stalks that hampered my progress towards shade and dinner.

‘I had got about two miles along, and was just thinking of having a good drink at the Black Waterhole, which I knew to be close to me, when I suddenly came upon the dead body of a fine young heifer.

‘A couple of broken spears stuck out of the carcase—so freshly killed that even the crows had not yet found it. It was, indeed, still warm. By the tracks I could see that the niggers were in force. They had evidently run the beast up from the water, and slain it merely for sport, as it was untouched. My first impulse was to return for the rifle. Second thoughts determined me to make for home as quickly as possible.

‘I had kept my shoulder-belt, to which was attached a heavy metal powder-flask. Thinking that I should travel lighter without these things, I started to unbuckle, when a tomahawk hurtled past one side of my head, whilst a spear went sailing by the other. The grass was full of blacks coming at me sideways—that is, between me and the station.

‘Turning, I ran for the water, the whole pack, now in full cry, after me.

‘Close to the banks of the Black Waterhole stood a tall rock we had named (I don’t know why, for it was as much like one as this tumbler is) the Grand Stand. I daresay it must have been quite one hundred and fifty feet high, if not more—’

‘One hundred and seventy-five six,’ put in Mr Hatton,

who, in common with, by this time, a small crowd, was listening interestedly.

‘Thanks. You’ve evidently had more leisure than we could manage. Anyhow, it was sheer on three sides, only accessible, in one part, on the fourth.’ (‘Just where I had the stairway cut,’ murmured Mr Hatton. But no one took any notice).

‘Many a time I had climbed it to look for cattle across the plains on which it formed such a landmark. If I could do so now, very quickly, there might still be a chance.

‘I could tell by the sound of the spears that I was gaining. They didn’t come slipping quietly past, but whizzed and sung angrily, a sure sign that the throwing sticks were being used; at least I found it so. It was wonderful how they missed me. If the grass had been burnt I was a dead man fifty times over. Presently, I struck a cattle pad, and, at the same moment, caught sight of the Grand Stand. Now they saw what I was after, and put on a spurt, yelling harder than ever. As they arrived at the foot of the rock I was half-way up the narrow, almost perpendicular, track, going like a goat, whilst spears, tomahawks and nullahs hit all around me. One spear grazed my leg, sticking in the breeches, and a stone tomahawk knocked my hat off. I afterwards made use of that spear. It was hot work while it lasted, which, luckily, wasn’t long. The top of the Grand Stand measured about twenty feet each way, and sloped gently inwards, saucer-shape, to a depth of four. There had been rain lately, and a good pool of water was collected

in the basin, which was strewn with stones and big boulders, remains of a former top, which had broken off and lay around the base. Being in a hurry, I hadn't time to pull myself up, so tumbled headlong into the water. However, the bath refreshed me much, and, everything below having all at once become silent as the grave, I peeped over.

'Well it was I did so!

'Four big fellows were climbing up, one behind the other.

'Lifting a stone, just as much as I could manage, I rolled it to the edge, and, forgetting to sing out "Stand from under," let go.

'It caught the first fellow fair on the chest, and the lot went down like skittles.

'Three picked themselves up and limped off howling. The fourth man—he who led—lay quite still, and had to be dragged away. I did not care about expending my ammunition or I could have scattered them also.

'It was terribly hot up there under the sun, but, ripping out the lining of my coat, I covered my head with it. If there had been no water, though, I should have been done—roasted alive.

'Now I had a spell, and took a good look at the niggers.

'They were a wild lot—five-and-twenty of 'em—naked as the day they were born, tall and wiry, with woolly hair and long, black beards. One side of their faces was painted white, t'other red, ribs and legs to match. Half-a-dozen of 'em had some shining stone

like a lump of crystal either around their necks or tied upon their foreheads. These I took to be chiefs.

‘I had never seen any niggers quite like these, and, consequently, was rather impressed, not to say scared. They squatted under a shady tree, the only one for miles around, evidently holding a council of war, whilst I crouched and watched them, and slowly baked on top of my rock.

‘Suddenly, all springing to their feet, they ran backwards, then, wheeling together, threw their spears. But the height beat ’em. There was a strong breeze blowing, too, hot as from a furnace, right against them. Quite plainly that game wouldn’t answer, so they squatted again and started another consultation.

‘Meanwhile the day grew hotter. The rock was actually blistering my skin through the light clothes I wore.

‘Bathing my head and face brought relief.

‘Being quite a new chum with respect to blacks and their ways, I half expected that, now, seeing they couldn’t get me down, they would raise the siege and be off.

‘Nothing, it appeared, could be further from their intentions. The confab over, some lit a fire on a small, clear space close to the water, whilst others went off towards the dead heifer, shortly returning with great lumps of meat, which they roasted and devoured.

‘After this, they all got up, and coming quite close, one went a little apart from the rest and pointed at my

head, which was all he could see, with outstretched arm.

‘Then his fellows formed a circle and danced and yelled, patting their bellies, and going through the motions of eating and drinking. Presently the gaunt, black semaphore was altered, pointing towards the sun. The dancing and shouting ceased, and, sitting down, the party began to display symptoms of the utmost distress.

‘Once more the arm shifted, this time towards the water, whereupon the whole crowd stiffened themselves out as if dead.

‘Another dance round and a song, and the semaphore put himself in position again and pointed in the direction of the homestead.

‘Instantly all but two sneaked off into the tall grass. The pair left behind lay down beside each other, feigning sleep. Suddenly, with terrific yells, the rest sprung upon them and went very realistically through the motions of beating the sleepers’ brains out and thrusting spears into their bodies.

‘The first portion of the pantomime I took to mean that they were determined to stay and see how long I could withstand the combined effects of heat, hunger, and want of water.

‘The second was only too intelligible, and for the first time made me feel a sharp pang of anxiety for those at home, totally unwarned, and off their guard.

‘How, as I watched the brutes, did I wish and long

for that rifle, hidden away back there, or—best of all—that newly-imported breech-loader hanging over my stretcher at the station.

‘ It was getting late in the afternoon. The rock was casting a long shadow, and my dripping body beginning to feel a little cooler as the sun lowered. Slight though the scratch upon my leg was, it smarted terribly. I was also very hungry, and altogether in anything but a happy frame of mind.

‘ Foreseeing a night of it, I carried and rolled big stones to the edge, placing them so that at a touch they would go crashing down.

‘ Darkness fell at last, and with it came the moon, nearly at her full.

‘ Lying along the incline, I watched the niggers, and tried to work out some plan of giving them the slip.

‘ Gorged to repletion, they were stretched about their fire : but two upright black forms, motionless as if cut from marble, watched steadfastly the pathway, on which the moonbeams fell full of light.

‘ Although I had promised to return for dinner, I had no expectation, on account of my failure, that the others would come and look for me. We were all nothing if not irregular in our habits. Of the blacks we had almost ceased to think, so little had we seen of them. Indeed, though generally going armed, we carried rifles more for the purpose of shooting an odd bull or so than from any other motive. The place, you should remember, had been formed now over a couple of

years, during all which time nothing suspicious had occurred.

‘The two at home would merely think that I had extended my ride as far as one of the out-stations, and feel no surprise if I did not turn up till the next day.

‘As for them, I knew not what to think. That the blacks were nearly all inveterate liars I was aware ; but this sudden, strange raid, together with their expressive pantomimes and determined attitude towards myself, made me fear the worst.

‘If there had been no moon I should certainly have made an effort to get away. But it was as bright as day—so bright that I fancied I could at times see the glitter in the eyes of the sentinels.

‘I must have been cat-napping, for I awoke with a start to the sound of an awful chorus of yells.

‘The moon was low, but still gave enough light to enable me to make out that more niggers had arrived.

‘After what appeared to be an enthusiastic greeting of the new-comers, the whole mob—about fifty—came up and began to dance at the foot of the rock. Presently, to my horror, I caught sight of objects that I recognised only too well.

‘One fellow had on a broad-brimmed straw hat belonging to Carstairs ; another flourished a hunting-knife of my own ; yet another waved a gaily-striped rug that I had last seen covering poor Neville’s stretcher.

‘Evidently the station had been sacked.

‘Neither hearing nor seeing anything, they perhaps imagined me asleep, and, just as the dawn was breaking redly, some of them began to ascend.

‘A leaping, rattling, boulder, however, soon undeceived and sent them to the right-about.

‘Knowing that another day would probably see the end, they were in no particular hurry now.

‘The sun rose hot and angry-looking. By its better light I made out a whole heap of our traps under the tree, jumbled up anyhow.

‘But, lest I should, by any means, fail to comprehend what had happened, they had recourse once more to dumb show.

‘A nigger came forward and arranged three spears, tripod fashion. To their apex he hung a nullah-nullah. All the weapons were red with blood. Then, pointing alternately to the homestead, myself, and the heap of plunder, he made a long speech, beginning quietly enough, but working himself into such a rage at the finish that his big black beard was speckled with foam.

‘Of course, I didn’t understand a word. There was little need that I should — everything was plain enough.

‘But worse was to come!

‘Seeing that I made no sign, and thinking, perhaps, that I was difficult to convince, the orator went off to the pile of stuff, and, in a minute, returned with some object in a net, which, amidst triumphant yells, he fastened to the trophy already erected.

‘For a moment I couldn’t make it out at all. Then, as the sun shone fuller on the thing, I saw that it was Neville’s head.

‘All gashed and disfigured though it was, I recognised it by the long golden beard which the poor old chap had been so proud of.

‘The sight turned me quite faint and sick. Then I got vicious. Slipping to the water, of which there was now very little left, to get one good, long, last drink, my eyes fell upon the powder-flask lying where I had thrown it off.

It was one of the old-fashioned kind, of solid copper, very large, and holding nearly a couple of pounds. It was quite full.

“Well,” I said to myself, taking the flask up as the idea struck me, “you’ve cornered me and killed my mates, but I’ll be hanged if I don’t try and scorch some of you before giving in.”

‘Now, sitting down, I tore a strip off my handkerchief, and, with moistened gunpowder, made a rough sort of fuse. Then unscrewing the measuring cylinder, and taking out the spring-valve, I inserted the fuse deeply into the powder, brought the twisted end well up, and replaced the long cylinder. Then, binding the flask firmly about five feet from the head of the spear that had come up with me, I shouted to the niggers, who were busily overhauling their booty.

‘They stared with surprise, and I waved my coat and beckoned to them to come nearer.

‘Chattering like anything, a couple of ’em advanced a few steps very doubtfully.

‘Stooping down and striking a match I fired the fuse, which caught at once and began to burn quietly away inside the cylinder.

‘At this moment I hove the spear well out towards them. To my delight it stuck fairly upright in the ground almost at their feet, the shock, so far as I could see, shifting nothing.

‘Starting back, they gazed inquisitively at the shining polished object it had brought with it.

‘For a minute or two they hesitated, and I despaired. But, seeing the rest moving up, curiosity or cupidity prevailed, and one running to it, seized the spear and made off back to the mob.

‘At once he was surrounded with an eager, excited, jabbering crowd, each man with his chin over his neighbour’s shoulder.

‘The seconds went by like ages. I had reckoned the fuse would last, perhaps, seven or eight minutes. They had untied the flask, and it was being passed from hand to hand.

‘Still no sound!

‘With a deep sigh of regret I gave the affair up as a failure—had even turned away—when an explosion like that of an eighteen pounder made me jump.

‘From out of a cloud of dense white smoke came shrieks and screams of agony. I could dimly see bodies—some quite still, and others rolling over and over.

‘By God! gentlemen,’ exclaimed the speaker, interrupting himself emphatically, and with a cruel gleam

in his eyes, 'although afterwards I shot the wretches down in dozens, and always with joy in my heart, yet never with such a complete sense of satisfaction and pleasure as I felt at that moment.

'As I looked a sharp blaze curled up, spreading broadly, and almost instantly, into a curtain of flame and smoke.

'The grass was on fire!

'Never a thought had I given to that. For miles and miles the country was covered with herbage, tall, and dry as tinder.

'The top of the Grand Stand was about the only safe place now, bar the water, in all that neighbourhood. For a long time I couldn't see a foot for smoke; but, as with the fire, it rolled away before the wind. I looked towards the Black Waterhole, thinking, of course, that the niggers would have taken to it. To my surprise not one was to be seen. There was the blackened ground, smoking yet, bare, and affording not the slightest cover.

'The erstwhile shady and graceful tree was a gnarled and withered skeleton.

'Underneath it, as the haze cleared, I made out four motionless bodies, blacker than the burnt black ashes on which they lay.

'I waited a bit longer before coming down. But at last, pretty certain that the niggers had cleared out, or better still, been caught in the fire, I crept down the pathway, stiff, sore, and hungry, but with that feeling of vengeful joy in my heart trebly intensified as I passed

by the poor, scorched, singed head lying on the ground.

‘ Poking about the heap of blankets, clothing, etc., still smouldering, I dropped across a tin of preserved meat—a four pounder.

‘ This was luck, if you like. Taking it to the water I finished it to the last scrap, and made the most appreciated meal of a life.

‘ I hadn’t gone near the bodies. They were charred, and I was certain they were dead.

‘ But, as I finished eating, to my astonishment one fellow got up and staggered straight for me. Snatching up a heavy stick, which happened to be handy, I stood ready to receive him.

‘ As he came nearer his face frightened me.

‘ It wasn’t a face at all, properly speaking; nor, for the matter of that, a head even. It was simply a mass of grass-ashes and blood—every scrap of hair had been burnt off. From his open mouth protruded a blackened tongue. I dropped my stick, for I saw he was stone-blind—in fact, he was eyeless altogether.

‘ Groping along, in a minute or two he felt the water at his feet, when, instead of splashing into it, as you’d naturally think a fellow in such an awful predicament would do, he gave a sort of screech, very bad to hear, and made out again at a great pace, tripped over a stone, and fell headlong.

‘ When I got up to him he was as dead as Julius Cæsar, and a great lump of jagged copper was sticking out of the back of his skull.

'Presently I started off towards the homestead, but hadn't got more than half-way before I met our two white stockmen—the black boys had cleared on the back track.

'The buildings, such as they were, and all our things were gone. But we didn't trouble much about that just then.

'Taking Neville's head to him, we buried him and Carstairs, who had been literally chopped to pieces, and then, getting the outside men together, we followed the niggers.

'They had made for a patch of red ground six miles away. There we found 'em—fifty of 'em ; and there we left 'em. How they must have travelled to have beaten the fire! Must have been touch and go, for some of 'em were pretty badly scorched.

'Well, gentlemen, that's the story of the Grand Stand, and the first settling of Boorookoorora. "Stone house and garden, and splendid orchard," eh? Well, well, I suppose it's only natural. Yet it sounds curiously to me. No ; I won't invest. Shouldn't care about going back to live there now. That's the dinner gong, isn't it? Good old Kamilaroi! Come along.'

TOO FAR SOUTH.

THE captain of the *Boadicea*—regular London and Australian trader—had long been the owner of a crotchet, or perhaps it would be nearer the mark to call it a theory. He was a comparatively young man, and after a few trips of eighty-nine, ninety, and ninety-six days respectively, he grew impatient; and at last, seeing an opportunity of putting his idea to the test, he determined to make the attempt.

It was by no means a new theory; simply an expansion of an old one. Years ago the masters of the *Lightning*, *Red Jacket*, and other clipper ships of renown, had successfully demonstrated that, instead of turning round the Cape of Good Hope as if it were a corner, in the old style, vessels bound to the Australian colonies would, if they kept on southward, be very likely to pick up a current of strong westerly winds which, although twice the distance might have to be sailed over, yet would take them to their destination far more quickly than by the usual route.

But the master of the *Boadicea* contended that none of these early exponents of 'Great Circular sailing' had

as yet gone far enough south, and that, at a still more distant point, a regular westerly wind-current, strong as a good-sized gale and as steady as a trade, without its fickleness, was to be met with which would shorten the average passage by at least ten days.

Older shipmasters laughed, and, saying that they found the Roaring Forties quite strong enough for them, stuck to the regular merchantman track, not so old yet, they thought, nor so worn by the marks of their keels, as to require a fresh one. However, Captain Stewart had, by dint of long persuasion and perseverance, obtained permission from his owners to test practically his pet idea; and this was the reason that, on the thirty-fifth day out, the *Boadicea*, in place of running her easting down amongst the Forties like a Christian ship, with half a gale singing in the bellies of her topsails, and mountains of dark-blue water roaring rhythmically astern, found herself poking about close hauled, with, on every hand as far as vision extended, icebergs, varying in size and shape, from a respectable many-peaked island to a spireless dissenting chapel.

We were very far indeed to the southward.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold;
And ice, mast high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

Still our commander's faith in his strong wind-streak was unshaken; albeit, for a week or more, light baffling airs, scarce sufficing to fill the stiffened canvas, had been our portion. It was, too, indeed, 'wondrous cold,' and the

necessity for keeping a close and unwearied look-out became every hour more apparent. Already we had had narrow escapes of coming into collision with bergs wandering aimlessly about, which, although wonderfully beautiful objects in the daytime, and at a distance, with the bright sunlight reflecting a thousand prismatic hues from their glistening surfaces, yet of a dark night were liable, with a touch almost, to send us in a twinkling to Davy Jones.

The crew growled and shivered, and shivered and growled, making the while sarcastic inquiries as to the near vicinity of the South Pole, wishing in undertones that their skipper had been perched on the top of it before leading them into such cold quarters. As for myself, although rated as third mate, I was little more than a lad at the time, and thought the whole thing simply magnificent, hoping that we might penetrate still further into the unknown 'regions of thick-ribbed ice' ahead of us, whilst visions of a Southern Continent, bears, seals and walruses, floated through my imagination. To be sure I was well clothed and comfortably housed, which, perhaps, made all the difference. We are very apt to look at things one-sidedly, and with regard only to the character of our own particular surroundings. Man born of a woman is a more or less selfish animal. Every day the 'wandering pearls of the sea,' as someone has called them, seemed to become more plentiful, whilst, to add to our dilemma, a thick Antarctic fog, through which the *Boadicea*, with look-outs aloft and aloft, crept like some great blind monster feeling its

way across the ocean, arose and hid everything from view.

The only one on board with any experience of such latitudes was our chief officer, a rough New Englander, who had taken a couple of voyages to the Northern fisheries in a Nantucket whaler. Far, however, from giving himself airs on that account, he was probably the most anxious man in the ship's company. He had not a particle of faith in the great theory; moreover, he had seen a vessel 'ripped' in Davis Sound, which none of his companions had.

One evening, as if drawn up by some mighty hand, the fog lifted, disclosing the sun, cold, red, and angry-looking, glaring at us out of a sombre sky, and flushing the water and the bergs round about with a flood of purple light, on which our masts and rigging cast tremulous, long, black shadows, crossing and recrossing in a quivering maze, with big, shapeless blotches here and there for the sails. Suddenly a deeper, darker shadow fell athwart us; and there, not two oars' lengths away, between ship and sun, rose an island.

Men rubbed their eyes, and rubbed and looked again, but there it was, every stern outline standing in bold relief, a rough, ragged mass of barren, desolate rock, its summit covered with snow—still, indisputably land. Even as we gazed eagerly, wonderingly, the *mirage* faded away in a moment, as it had appeared, and the mist descended like a grey, heavy curtain, enveloping all things in its damp folds.

Presently it came on to snow. The standing rigging and running gear alike were coated with ice, whilst the canvas took the consistency of sheet-iron, and rang like glass when touched.

Roaring fires were lit in oil drums, fore and aft, in fore-castle and cuddy. Soon the smoke in both places was as thick as the fog on deck; a kind of damp, unwholesome warmth was engendered as the impromptu stoves grew red-hot; great half-frozen cockroaches, thinking that the tropics were at hand, crawled out of nooks and crannies; and it seemed at times a toss up whether our end should come by ice or fire.

Most of our crew were Danes or Swedes, hardy and obedient men. If they had been British they would probably have attempted to compel the captain to alter his course. As it was, they simply put on all their available clothing and growled quietly. No matter what their nationality, all seamen growl; only some growl and work also.

Now, all the watches and clocks on board stopped, and, refusing to start again, they were placed in the cook's oven with a view to warming the works. But, in the excitement consequent upon fending off a huge berg, which threatened to crush us, they were done brown, and completely ruined. About this time the captain, thinking, perhaps, that his experiment had gone far enough, gave the order to square the yards. On going to the braces we found that the sheaves of the blocks were frozen to their pins and would not travel. Taking them to the winch, with much heaving, the yards at last swung,

creaking and groaning, round, whilst showers of icy fragments fell rattling on deck.

It was almost a calm, the ship having barely steerage way upon her ; but the barometer was falling, and it was judged prudent to shorten sail by putting the *Boadicea* under a couple of lower top-sails and fore and mizzen stay-sails.

To stow each of the upper top-sails it took twenty-four men and two boys—nearly, in fact, the ship's company ; and, if the courses had not already been furled, I do not think we could ever have managed them. The foot-ropes were like glass, the reef-points as rigid as bar iron, and one's hands, after a minute aloft, had no more feeling in them than the icy canvas they tried to grasp. Through the fog, as we slowly descended the slippery ratlines, we imagined we could see great bergs looming indistinctly ; and in our strained ears echoed the ever-impending crash as the wind gradually freshened.

It was a trying experience, even for the best prepared amongst us, this comparatively sudden transit from the tropics to twenty degrees below freezing point ; and I firmly believe that, but for the unlimited supply of hot cocoa available day and night, at all hours, some of us would have given in. Spirits could be had for the asking, but no one seemed to care about them, even those known to be inveterate toppers declining rum with something akin to disgust ; perhaps the reason was that it became quite thick, and, when taken into the mouth, burned and excoriated both tongue and palate.

The night of the day on which we had snugged the

Boadicea down was dark as pitch, and you could feel the fog as it hung low and clingingly to everything. Some time in the middle watch the breeze died away, giving place to light, unsteady airs—catspaws almost—and occasional falls of snow.

Imagine, if you can, the big ship creeping timorously and uncertainly through the thick Polar darkness and mist, a shapeless mass of yet thicker darkness, emitting here and there ruddy flashes of light, reflected momentarily back from snow-covered deck or coil of frozen rope. No sound breaks the silence except a gentle lap-lapping of water under her fore-foot as the canvas just fills enough to draw. Now snow falls, not deliberately, but with a soft, fleecy, rushing motion, which speedily fills up any inequalities about the decks, and would fill them from rail to rail if it lasted long. Presently a dozen bulky spectres move noiselessly around the galley door, which, being withdrawn, a warm glow streams out upon the watch come for hot cocoa.

Imagine, too, just as the tired men are about to drag their half-frozen limbs below, a sudden deeper silence, and a strange feeling of warmth and calm pervading the ship; the sails giving one mighty creaking flap up there in the gloom; the crash and rattle of ice falling from their frozen folds, and a cluster of awe-struck, up-turned faces, shining pallidly in the glow of the galley fire, as the *Boadicea*, but for a slight roll, lies idle and at rest.

Everyone knows and feels that something unusual has taken place, but no man there can say what it is. A

muttered order is heard, and in a minute a flood of vivid blue fire pours out into the darkness from the ship's quarter, and a great subdued 'Ah!' runs fore and aft her, as, by its glare, we see tall, jagged cliffs, weird and ghastly in the strange light, towering far on high above our mast-heads, which appear to touch them.

'Get the deep-sea lead overboard!' shouts the captain.

'Watch, there, watch!' needlessly cry the men, as the line slips from their hands; and no bottom at one hundred fathoms.

'Taint land at all,' says the mate quietly. 'I kin smell ice; an' ef we don't mind we may calculate to winter 'mongst it 'stead o' makin' tracks for the Antipodes. Lower the quarter-boat,' he goes on, 'an' tie the ship up for the night, as, ef I ain't mistook, we're pooty nigh surrounded.'

More bluelights are burned, and by their help and those of lanterns, the *Boadicea*, in a somewhat unnatural plight, is warped alongside a kind of ice jetty which stretches out from the main mass, and which, as if to save us the trouble of carrying out anchors, also to complete the resemblance to a pier, is furnished here and there with great knobs, to which we make fast our lines.

If you will try and picture to yourself the scene I have described, you will, I think, be willing to admit that ship seldom entered stranger harbour in a stranger manner, or that the 'sweet little cherub, sitting up aloft,' who is supposed to keep a special look-out for

poor Jack,' and who on the present occasion—all the more honour to him—must have felt colder even than the proverbial upper hank of a Greenlandman's gib, seldom performed his duty better.

Perhaps the all-pervading stillness was the thing that struck us most. The fenders, even, between the ship's side and her novel pier scarcely gave a creak. And yet we were conscious that, somewhere, not very far away, it was beginning to blow freshly, although the sound fell on our ears but as a subdued, faint murmur, serving only to intensify the surrounding silence and hush.

'There's a fire up there!' exclaimed one of the men, presently. And, sure enough, a tiny, sickly flame appeared far away above us. It grew gradually larger and larger, till at length a long, broad streak of silver shot down the ice-mountains and fell athwart our decks, as a three-quarters-full moon, pale, washed-out and sickly-looking, shone for a minute through the low, black clouds hurrying swiftly across her face.

A dull, grey dawn, at last, giving us just enough light to see what had happened. Ice everywhere!

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around;

and on every side rose huge bergs from one hundred feet to two hundred feet in height, and enclosing a space of barely a mile in circumference; an ice-bound lake, in fact; and, what struck a chill of terror to our hearts as we gazed, a lake without any exit. Look as we might, there

was not the least sign of an opening. Unwittingly we had sailed or drifted into a girdle of conjoined bergs. During the night the passage through which we entered had closed, and a cruel and stupendous barrier, hard as granite, slippery as glass, lay betwixt us and the outer ocean.

Within, the water was as smooth as a mill-pond, the air was quite warm, and after breakfast all hands went 'ashore' to stretch their legs, look wonderingly up at our prison walls, and speculate on the chances of getting out.

As I gazed around me at the strange scene—the snow-clad, towering peaks, glittering coldly in the yet feeble sun rays, the deep, shadow-laden valleys at their bases, and the perpendicular curtains of naked, steely-blue ice connecting one berg with the other—there came to my mind some long-forgotten lines of Montgomery's, in which he depicts the awful fate of an ice-bound vessel:—

There lies a vessel in that realm of frost,
 Not wrecked, not stranded, but for ever lost ;
 Its keel embedded in the solid mass ;
 Its glistening sails appear expanded glass ;
 The transverse ropes with pearls enormous strung.

Morn shall return, and noon, and eve, and night
 Meet here with interchanging shade and light ;
 But from that barque no timber shall decay ;
 Of these cold forms no feature pass away.

I had rather enjoyed the first days of our Antarctic experiences, but the pleasure began decidedly to pall with such a horrible contingency in view, and I was now

fully as anxious as anyone for clear water and a straight course.

After a while, the gig was manned, and, with the captain and chief mate, we pulled round our harbour to a spot where, from the ship, a part of the ice-curtain seemed low and pretty accessible. So it had appeared; but when we reached it we found fifty feet of perpendicular slippery wall between our boat's gunwale and the summit of the ridge we had hoped to mount.

'We're in a pooty nice kind o' a fix,' said our mate, as we returned. 'An', glancing at the lowering sky, 'I reckon it's going to blow some, presently. Mebbe it'll blow us out o' these chunks of ice.'

The captain made no reply, but he was evidently not in a very cheerful state of mind.

That evening it did begin to blow very hard. Not that we felt it much, but we could hear the storm howling and roaring outside, and the thunderous breakers which dashed themselves against our sheltering bergs, causing them to tremble and pitch now and again as the mighty seas struck their bases. We had shifted the *Boadicea* out to the extreme end of the jetty, double-banked our fenders, and taken every other precaution we could think of, in addition to standing-by through the night to cast off and sheet home at a minute's notice.

There was no more silence now; for, although we were all drifting away together about E. half S. before the wind, the bergs forming our enclosure ground against each other with an incessant rending, tearing

sound, which now, although seeming to foretell an early dissolution of partnership, filled us with terror lest some of them should topple over on the ship.

The ship herself, no longer steady, was hove violently up and down with every motion of the bergs; whilst the great wooden fenders, cut from spare spars, were torn to splinters, and the hawsers surged round their icy mooring posts with a curious, screaming, intermittent noise, making us think that every moment they were about to part.

Four bells in the morning watch had just struck when we heard a terrific crash rising high above the surrounding din, and the next instant a great wave came rushing over the *Boadicea*, filling her decks, nearly lifting her on to the ice, and then slamming her down with such force as to snap the hawsers like threads and smash the bulwarks to matchwood the whole length of the port side. Drifting away from our friendly jetty, we at once felt that our prison was broken up; for, now, the gale from which we had been so long sheltered howled and tore through the rigging, whilst cataracts of bitter cold water rushed in quick succession over the decks, and lumps of ice bumped up against the *Boadicea's* bows and sides.

‘Set the lower fore-top-sail and mizzen-stay-sail!’

And now the slatting and banging of canvas, the rattle of iron sheets and hanks, the hoarse cries of the men as they staggered about the wet, slippery planking, together with the rending and smashing of

ice all around, made up a scene that defies description ; whilst to lend it an additional weirdness, a 'flare-up' of oakum and tar, which had been run up to a lower-stuns'l boom-end, blazed wildly overhead like a great fierce eye looking down upon us out of the thick darkness. So closely were we beset, however, that, spite of the canvas, we soon found that we were simply drifting aimlessly about amidst immense fragments of capsized bergs, which threatened every moment to crush us. Indeed, we did get one squeeze that made the ship crack again, and whose after effect was seen by the fact that the cabin doors for the rest of the passage refused to close by a good six inches. Presently, grinding and scraping up alongside a small berg—or portion of a larger one, we cannot tell which—we make fast to it as well as we are able, and direct all our efforts to fending off its companions. As daylight approaches, we notice that the ice becomes rarer, and sails by at longer intervals ; and as it breaks more fully out of a lowering yellowish sky a wild sight meets our eyes.

The sea is dotted with bergs—small ones nodding and bobbing along, big ones gliding majestically before the wind, till, a pair of these latter colliding, down crumble spires and minarets, towers and pinnacles, suddenly as a child's card-built house, sending up tall columns of water as they fall.

It is not this spectacle, however, that brings forth a simultaneous shout from everyone on board, but

the appearance, as one berg gives a half-turn, of an object, hardly two hundred yards from our jibboom end, standing there, amidst all the wild commotion, steadfast, rugged and grim, with tall breakers curling up against its ice-surrounded, dark red cliffs, and falling back in showers of foam, showing milky-white in the morning gloom.

It is land, surely! And, surely, we have seen those forbidding, snow-capped precipices before. It is the island of the *mirage*, substantial enough this time, and in another ten minutes we shall be dashed to atoms against its surf-encircled base.

The sight had a wondrous effect, and men who seemed incapable a minute before of stirring their stiffened limbs now hopped up the rigging like goats, and scampered along the deck with the top-sail halliards as if racing for a wager, in obedience to the order to cast off and make sail.

'Hard a port!' and the *Boadicea's* poop is splashed with spray from rocks and ice as she turns slowly from a jagged, honeycombed promontory, whilst her late consort goes headlong to destruction on its iron teeth.

It is still blowing hard; but our captain is more than satisfied; and, under everything she can carry, the *Boadicea* rushes, like a frightened stag, fast away, northwards and eastwards, out of those dismal seas of ice and fog, snow, and unknown islands, a very nightmare of navigation, into which one merchant skipper, at least, will never willingly venture again.

However, we, after all, perhaps, set our course on a higher parallel than anyone had done since Ross in '41, followed the outline of a southern continent, whose volcanoes flamed to heaven from a lifeless, desolate land of ice and snow. And, as some compensation for our trouble and dangers, till we sighted the south end of Tasmania, we never had occasion to touch a rope, so steadily and strongly blew the fair wind.

'Seventy-five days—a rattlin' good passage!' exclaimed our Port Jackson pilot; and when he asked what had become of our bulwarks, and why the cuddy doors wouldn't shut, we simply told him we had been 'Too far south.'

THE MISSION TO DINGO CREEK.

AN APOSTOLICAL SKETCH.

'BAD work, this!' exclaimed the Bishop of B—— to one of a recent consignment of curates. 'Bad work this, in the North!' That part of the diocese evidently wants looking to again. Nice trip for you, Greenwell. Give you some idea of the country, too,' continued the Bishop. 'Yes, decidedly; the very man! Let me see; steamer to R——, then overland. Of course, you may have to rough it a little; but that will only add a zest to the change.'

The 'bad work' that his lordship alluded to was the substance of some reports that had just arrived from one of the new gold rushes, situated in the extreme north of his immense diocese, reports of a terrible state of immorality, drunkenness, and general godlessness existing there amongst far-off members of his flock—to wit, rough diggers and bushmen, together with a sprinkling of nondescripts, characterless vagrants, defaulters, horse-thieves, and worse, who had flocked there from the neighbouring colonies as to an Alsatia, where they

could remain, at least, for the time being, secure from even the far-reaching arm of the law.

On such material as this had the good Bishop, shortly after his arrival in his new see, from his snug English vicarage, essayed the power of his eloquence on his only visit to that part of his charge : a visit, be it whispered, he was not in the least anxious to repeat.

The Reverend Spicer Greenwell fairly shuddered at the thought of trusting his precious person amongst such a set of savages as his imagination at once conjured up. But all his excuses and demurrings were without avail, his superior having, by some curious mischance, got it into his head that his senior curate was the very man qualified for such a mission to the heathen.

Though getting well on towards middle age, Mr Greenwell was a failure. He had completely mistaken his vocation ; but he did not think so, and nobody had, as yet, been rude enough to tell him so.

Mrs Jellyby's mission was, if we remember aright, to cultivate coffee and the natives of Borioboola-Gha. Mr Greenwell's was to cultivate teas—afternoon ones—and at the same time to, if possible, capture a fair 'Native,' rich in those goods of this world, in which he himself was so unhappily deficient.

For the rest, he was a gaunt, waxen-visaged man, who always wore the highest waistcoats, longest coats, and whitest neckties obtainable ; was never seen without a large diamond ring on his little finger ; and seldom deigned to consort or even converse with the other clergymen of the district, unless brought into direct

communication with them by his position—into which he had partly thrust himself, partly had conferred upon him through home influence—of the Bishop's *chargé d'affaires*. He had, he flattered himself, before this untoward affair happened, been making rapid progress with the damsels of the Banana city; and, indeed, amongst some of the more elderly spinsters of the congregation of St Jude's, he was voted as 'quite too nice.'

Imagine then, if you can, the horror and disgust of such a man at being chosen for such an errand. But the Bishop was adamant; and I have many a time thought since that he purposely hardened his heart, and that, whilst dilating on his curate's especial fitness for the work, his energy and push—as already illustrated in parish matters—his suave and polished manners, alone a vast handicap in his favour amongst the rude and illiterate people he was about to visit, the good prelate privately hoped within himself that if the shepherd he was sending forth did little benefit to the flock, yet, that the latter might possibly succeed in some unforeseen way in toning down the self-sufficiency, egoism and vanity of the pastor.

Seeing, at length, that there was no help for it, and that go he must, the luckless curate, taking a mournful and solemn farewell of his lady friends, went forth to preach the Gospel to the heathen of the Dingo Creek diggings.

Things went well enough with our traveller till he reached R——, the nearest township of any size to Dingo Creek, which last place lay still further ahead

nearly ninety miles through rough and lonely country. At intervals on his route he had held services and preached sermons—little marrowless exhortations that he had long known by heart, and that, if they did no harm, assuredly did little good. From R——, whence he set out on horseback, a road led sixty miles to a bush public-house, where he was told he could be accommodated with a buggy, and, perhaps, a guide to his destination.

Duly arriving, sore and jaded, at the sign of the 'Jolly Bushman,' he found the host an obliging sort of a fellow enough, who said he would himself have driven the gentleman to Dingo Creek, but that his wife was ill. However, his buggy should be at his disposal the next morning; and also the publican promised Cooronga Billy should go as guide, and, if necessary, bring both buggy and parson back again. Early on the following morning the buggy and a pair of good-looking ponies put in an appearance at the door of the 'Jolly Bushman'; so did Cooronga Billy.

But now we must for a while drop the thread of the story, and go back to the time when, as a baby, Billy lay sound asleep in his black mother's arms under the shadow of the far-away Cooronga ranges—back to that fearful morning whose earliest dawn heralded the pitiless swoop of the native troopers on to the quiet camp. His tribe 'dispersed,' baby Billy, the sole survivor, was brought to B——, sent, in due course, to the best schools, and received a special education, with a view to fitting him for the ministry, and a sphere of what, it was fervently hoped by many good men, would

prove congenial and profitable labour amongst his own benighted countrymen.

As he grew towards man's estate, Billy became quite one of the lions of B——, and was proudly exhibited and put through his paces before distinguished strangers, as a splendid specimen of 'what can be done with our aborigines.'

Suddenly, and just when all this gratulation was at its height, William Cooronga Morris—he was indebted to the white officer who had commanded the 'dispersers' of his tribe for the first and last of these names, duly received at the font of St Jude's—disappeared totally, turning up months afterwards, clad in his native skins, armed with his native weapons, at one of the far-out townships; and had ever since loafed around the outskirts of Northern Settlement, a degrading example of what over-civilisation can do for a black-fellow.

Periodical visits would Billy make far out in the Bush towards the wild Coorongas—for some strange instinct had led him at his first departure towards the land of his birth—and there, instead of, as had been so fondly expected, bending his energies towards the cure of souls amongst his dark brethren, it was freely reported that Mr W. C. Morris constituted himself their leader in many a fat-cattle spearing expedition, if nothing worse.

Billy, at the moment we have chosen to introduce him to the reader, had just returned from one of those forays, and a terrible figure he appeared to the Reverend Spicer.

Nearly naked, with the exception of a short 'possum cloak, his skin plentifully covered with red and white ochre, and his hair decorated with cockatoo feathers; whilst across one side of his face ran a long, gaping scar, a relic of some recent corroboree—what wonder that the reverend gentleman gazed more than doubtfully at the person introduced to him by the publican as his guide. The landlord observed his hesitation and the cause of it.

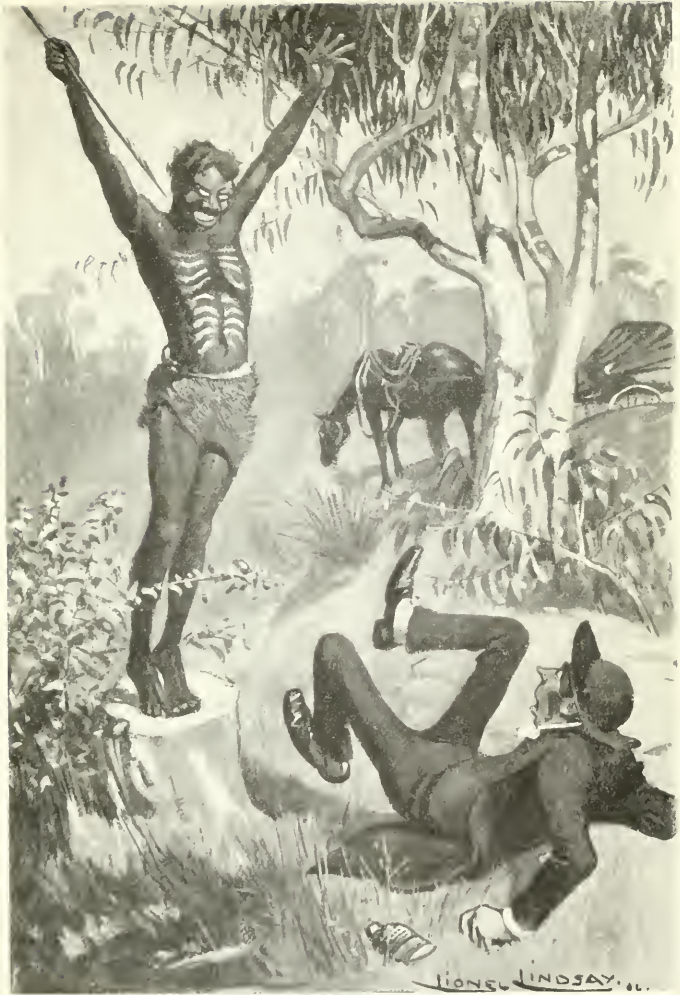
'Never mind, sir,' said he, 'he's—as quiet as a sheep. Dessay his 'ed's sore, though. Have a nobbler, Cooronga? It'll make him lively like, you see,' he concluded, addressing the curate, who evidently thought that Billy looked quite lively enough.

At length they started, Billy driving, sulky and taciturn, answering questions as shortly as possible, and in the vilest of pigeon English.

Nearly three parts of the journey was accomplished—for Billy drove like a very Jehu—when the curate began to feel hungry. So, as they came to a deep gully where the rain-water lay in pools amongst the rocks, he made his guide pull up, and prepared to comfort the inner man.

Taking no notice of his companion, he sat down by the edge of the water, and began with immense gusto to demolish a roast fowl and other materials for a very fair repast.

At R—— the reverend gentleman had provided himself with two bottles of port, a wine which he had been told was a first-class specific in cases of bush-fever and



Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions?
(Page 186.)

dysentery. The bottles were by this gone; but out of the last one he had filled a large travelling flask, which now producing, along with a tumbler, he proceeded—first qualifying his liquor with a modicum of water—to wash down his lunch.

Billy's eyes sparkled. He at once recognised the smell and colour, but would have preferred rum.

However, little of anything, solid or fluid, seemed likely to fall to his share, for the weather was hot, and our curate thirsty.

Presently, addressing Cooronga, the Reverend Spicer, who had no idea of entering the scene of his ministrations, with such a figure as Billy for his charioteer, said,—

‘How many miles did you say it was from here to Dingo Creek?’

‘Lebn,’ grunted Billy.

‘Is the road as plain all the way as it is here?’

‘Ess,’ again grunted the tantalised Cooronga.

‘Very well, then,’ replied the curate, you can walk on. I will follow with the buggy when it gets a little cooler.’

But this was out of Billy's programme altogether. Pointing to the capacious flask, to which the thirsty divine was paying repeated attention, he said abruptly,—

‘You gib it Cooronga. Him dry too!’

‘That is medicine, my friend,’ was the reply, ‘and it would do you no good. If, as you seem to imply, you are thirsty, there lies water in abundance.’

Billy's first impulse was to drive his spear through the curate. But, restraining himself with a sigh, another idea entered into his mischievous head. A large stump stood close by, overlooking the unsuspecting Spicer and the *débris* of his meal. Upon this stump, with a bound, Billy sprung, and, letting fall his cloak, disclosing to view his whole body, hideously chalked, skeleton-wise, he began, in a tone and with an enunciation far superior to that of the reverend gentleman himself, to declaim, with pointed spear,—

'Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes?'

'They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.'

'Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.'

'At the last—'

But here, poor Spicer, who had risen to his feet, and stood horror-stricken at hearing himself, as he imagined, reproved and threatened for his bibbing propensities through the mouth of a fiend, or even, as his staring eyes took in Billy's *tout ensemble*, it might be the Arch Enemy of mankind himself, uttered a shriek and fled, terror lending unwonted speed to his legs, down the gully; whilst Billy, with a wild whoop, descending from his perch, took the flask and what remained of the provisions to the buggy, and drove off into the Bush.

Late that night, a weary, footsore traveller entered the principal public-house in Dingo Creek, and began to ask incoherent questions about a buggy and a black-fellow, the latter, he averred, an emissary of Satan, who had led him into the wilderness, and there deserted him—a story that the rough host and his equally rough customers could make neither head nor tail of.

‘It’s a rum go altogether,’ said the former to one of his digger friends, after poor Spicer had retired, nearly dead beat, to his rough-slabbed room, whence he could hear all that went on in the bar.

‘The rummest thing I’ve heard on for some time,’ assented the other. ‘He looks somethin’ like as a parson should look, right enough. But either he’s just off of a rather heavy spree, or else he’s more’n a shingle short. Sez he seen Ole Nick back there in the Bush, an’ the old ’un shook his buggy.’

‘Bin on the bust, down at the “Jolly Bushman’s,” I ’spects,’ put in another. ‘You fellers knows as some *do* see the old chap arter a ’ard bust. As for me, I takes it out in snakes mostly. But there’s my mate, Bill, he allus has cats. I seen him one time a-huntin’ ’em round the tent all night long, arter bein’ on the spree for a week.’

Confidence in the Reverend Spicer was, however, a little restored, when, next morning, the buggy was found intact in the public-house yard; and his confused appearance and rambling statements of the previous night were

charitably ascribed by the majority to 'a touch of the sun.'

During the day it was announced throughout the place that the Reverend gentleman would address the inhabitants in the 'dance-room' of the public-house, as being the only one available for such a purpose. Figure to yourself a long, low room, on the earthen floor of which tree stumps still stood. At the far end, behind a sort of bar formed by sheets of galvanised iron, supported on trestles, waits, manuscript in hand, still in a rather unsettled state of mind, the Reverend Spicer. The place is dimly lit by flaring candles and slush lamps, and is crowded by an assembly of as mixed nationalities, customs and creeds, as could be found out of, say, Alexandria or Singapore. A strong smell of stale spirits and tobacco smoke pervades everything. All the men, as our curate sees, are armed with a sheath-knife and revolver; and, as he looks, he trembles and handles the address as gingerly as if it were a parcel of dynamite, and liable to explode at any moment, for it is not one of his own pithless compositions, but the work of the Bishop himself, a powerful and emphatic remonstrance—penned in his quiet study at Bishopstowe—against the sinful and dissolute lives of the Dingo Creekers. But, had the frightened curate only known it, the mob, mixed and uncontrolled as it was, would have as soon thought of ill-treating a grasshopper as himself. And, all roughened and uncivilised as were the best of them, there were still men amongst them in whom the mere sight of a clergyman awoke memories long forgotten and buried

under the combats and toils of life—men who had once ‘looked on better days,’ and whom Sabbath-bells had once ‘knoll’d to church,’ and this portion it was who, after awhile, obtained silence, and set the example of doffing their hats and putting away their pipes.

Very picturesque was the scene, with the lights flickering—now on the bronzed features of some stalwart European, now on the dark face of a negro, or the yellow expressionless countenance of a Chinaman—as the motley audience stood or squatted silent and attentive, whilst our curate quavered and stammered through the opening sentences of the address. And favourable, beyond all hope, would have seemed the opportunity to a true soldier of the Cross for softening the hearts of the poor heathen of Dingo Creek.

But never, perhaps, since the days when William C. Morris, arrayed in black broadcloth, was qualifying as an evangelist, has anyone felt himself more of a square peg in a round hole than did poor Spicer Greenwell, as he droned away, presently, amidst exclamations of disgust and disapproval from his curious congregation.

‘Give it lip, man!’ shouted a gigantic digger, whose beard reached almost to his waist. ‘Give it lip, an’ let’s hear what it’s all about.’ Then, turning to the publican: ‘Give him a nobbler, Jimmy; it’ll keep his pecker up. He’s mighty scared o’ somethin’.’ Declining the offered half-tumblerful of rum with a gesture of disgust, the curate, intent only on getting to the end of his task, resumed his reading.

At this moment Cooronga Billy, who had passed the day in the adjacent black's camp, entered, and was at once warmly greeted by the crowd, to all of whom he was well known, and to whom he proceeded, amidst shouts of laughter, to relate the story of his escapade at the gully.

The curate, disturbed by the noise, lifted up his head, and, seeing Billy now standing just in front of him, he dropped his papers, and pointing to the grinning black fellow, shouted,—

‘Men! men! Satan himself is amongst you!’

The truth of the affair, helped out by Billy's story, now broke on all hands, and roars of unrestrained laughter, accompanied by wild impromptu dancing and cheers for ‘Cooronga,’ put an end, for the time at least, to any hopes that the Reverend Spicer might have once entertained as to his being instrumental to even a slight degree in the regeneration of Dingo Creek, the dust of which, a sadder and a wiser man, he shook without the least delay from off his feet.

Cooronga Billy has long since rejoined his tribe in the happy hunting grounds; but stories, many and wonderful, of the effect produced by the exercise of his perverted abilities are still told by the pioneers of the region in which he flourished.

The Reverend Spicer Greenwell still exists; but, should the reader feel inclined to seek him, his quest must lie well within the precincts of the highest civilisation to be found in our colonies, and he must be careful that no reference, be it ever so remote, to the

adventure herein described, pass his lips ; for, though his life has 'fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf,' still is the reverend gentleman strangely susceptible to any allusion to that episode of his earlier Australian experience.

BOOKS AT BARRACABOO.

A SKETCH.

PART I.

THEY were all very sore at Barracaboo station. From manager to horse-boy, from jackaroo to boundary-rider, they felt aggrieved and vengeful. First it had been 'Around the World by Sea and Land,' copiously illustrated, and in monthly parts. This was dull—utterably dull—and each instalment turned out duller and heavier than the last. Also, the pictures resembled those on the specimen sheets as nearly as a mule does a grindstone.

After this came 'Diseases of All Known Domestic Animals,' with gorgeously coloured pictures. As nothing could be found in the whole work relating to horses or cattle or dogs, except the illustrations, this was also voted a fraud. However, they cut out the plates, and stuck them upon the walls of the huts and cottages, so that it was not clear loss altogether.

But the last straw was 'The Universal Biography of Eminent Men—Dead and Alive,' with splendid portraits.



Started back to Atlanta, pursued for half the distance with thunderous whip-crackings. (Page 194.)

When they discovered that the notices they had been led to expect of their own 'Boss,' 'Hungry' Parkes of Humpalong, the Mayor of Atlanta, etc., etc., were absent, and their places filled by paragraphs and woodcuts relating to Nelson, Julius Cæsar, Pompey, Scipio Africanus, and such-like characters, they one and all bucked, and refused to pay on delivery. Then they were hauled to Quarter Sessions, confronted with their signatures, and made to pay.

In vain they swore that the thing had never been ordered; that it wasn't up to specification; that their handwriting was a palpable forgery. In vain they related how they had never touched it, but had left their copies lying on verandahs, stockyard posts, in mud, in dust, wherever, in fact, the agent had chanced to bail them up. All in vain; they had to pay—costs and all.

Therefore was it that Barracaboo had forsworn literature by sample, or in uncertain instalments, and vowed vengeance upon all shabby men with indelible pencils, and printed agreements with a space left for signature. More especially had they a 'down' on people who wore goatees and snuffled when they talked.

'If you see one of 'em at the station,' said the manager—a rough, tough old customer, and disappointed at being ousted by Julius Cæsar—'set the dogs on him. I'll pay damages. If he don't take that hint, touch him up with stockwhips. It'll only be justifiable homicide at the worst. I know the law: an' I don't mind a fiver in such a case!'

'Let us only get a chance, sorr,' said the sheep-overseer, 'an' we'll learn 'em betther manners wid our whups. Doggin's too good for the thrash!'

This state of affairs was pretty well known at Atlanta, the neighbouring township; and book-fiends, warned, generally gave Barracaboo a wide berth. Once, certainly, a new hand at the game, and one who fancied himself too much to bother about collecting local information, came boldly into the station-yard just as the bell was ringing for dinner, and produced the advance sheets of a sweet and lively work, entitled, 'Hermits, Ancient and Modern: Illustrated with Forty-seven Choice Engravings.'

He had got to 'Now, gentlemen,' when, hearing the howl of execration that went up, he suddenly took in the situation and started back to Atlanta, pursued for half the distance with thunderous whip-crackings by the sheep-overseer and the butcher, who were the only two who happened to have their horses ready.

Chancing to have a capital mount, he distanced them and galloped into town, and up the main street, reins on his horse's neck, and trousers over his knees, half dead with fright, only to be promptly summoned and fined for furious riding within the municipality.

For weeks afterwards sheets of 'Hermits' strewed the cleared line,' and he received a merciless chaffing from his fellow-fiends, who could have warned him what to expect had he confided his destination to them.

About this time came to Atlanta a small, 'cute-looking, clean-shaven, elderly man. He was unknown to any

present, but modestly admitted that he was in the book trade, and had a consignment with him. And he listened with interest to the conversation in the 'Commercial Room.'

'The district's petered out,' remarked a tall American gentleman, with the goatee and nasal voice abhorred of Barracaboo. 'Clean petered out since that last "Universal Biography" business. They're kickin' everywhere. Darned if a feller didn't draw a bead on me yesterday afore I'd time almost to explain business. Then he got so mad that I left, not wantin' to become a lead mine.'

'Been here a week and haven't cleared exes,' said another mournfully. 'Off to-morrow. No use trying to work such a desert as this now.'

'Big place, this station with the funny name, you're talkin' about?' asked the newcomer, who had introduced himself as 'Mr Potts, from London.'

'Over a hundred men of one sort or another all the year round,' was the reply. 'Capital shop for us, once too. But it's sudden death to venture there now. I did real good biz at Barracaboo for the Shuffle Litho. Company. It wouldn't pay, though, to chance back again.'

'Ah, that was the "Around the World" thing, wasn't it? Didn't come up to guarantee, eh?'

'Well, hardly,' replied the other. 'However, that wasn't my fault, you know. All I had to do was to get the orders, which I did to the tune of a couple of hundred or thereabout.'

‘That’s the worst of those things,’ said Mr Potts. ‘Instalments always make a mess of it. Then the agent loses his character, if nothing else. I was out delivering in the Western District for Shuffle Litho., and was glad to get away by the skin of my teeth. But’s it’s not only the personal danger I object to,’ continued Mr Potts, after a pause. ‘It is the, ahem, the moral degradation involved in such a pursuit—you know what I mean, sir?’

‘Just so, just so,’ answered the other vaguely, with a hard stare at the round, red face looming through cigar smoke.

‘That’s what made me throw the line up,’ went on Mr Potts, ‘more than anything else. The money’s not clean, sir! I’d rather carry about a ton of print, and risk selling for cash at a fractional advance upon cost price.’

‘That’s all right,’ replied his companion with a grin. ‘Only take my advice, and don’t trouble Barracaboo with your ton of print, or you’ll be very apt to leave it there. They won’t give you time to open your mouth. Ask “The Hermit,” if you don’t believe me.’

For a whole day Mr Potts drove around and about with a selection from his stock.

But he never was allowed even a chance to exhibit a sample. Farmers, selectors, squatters, townfolk, had all apparently quite made up their minds.

Times out of number he was threatened with personal violence, and greeted with language quite unprintable here. Once sticks were thrown at him; and once an

old copy of the 'Biography' was hurled into the buggy, whilst cattle-dogs were heeling his horses. Clearly it was useless to persist. The district was fairly demoralised; and with a sigh, Mr Potts drove home to receive the 'What did I tell you's' of the other 'gents.'

But he was a resourceful man was Mr Potts, and he determined, before leaving the district for ever, to have one more attempt under conditions which should, at all events, give him an opportunity of displaying a specimen of his goods. Besides, he thirsted for vengeance on the community, and knew that if he could but get an opening it was his, full and complete.

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'No objection to my camping here to-night, I s'pose?' asked a rather forlorn-looking traveller of the cook at Barracaboo, shortly after the events related above.

'Chop that heap o' wood up, an' you gets your supper an' breakfus,' said the cook, laconically.

The traveller worked hard for an hour, and finished his task, handling the axe as if born to it, and provoking the cook's admiration to such an extent that he went one better than his promise, and proffered a pint of tea and a lump of 'brownie.'

Presently, lighting his pipe, and undoing his swag, the new-comer, remarking that there was nothing like a read for passing the time away, took out a gorgeously bound volume, sat down at the table, and was soon so interested that he let his pipe go out. Save for the cook, the long kitchen was empty, all the men being away on the run.

For a time, busy with a batch of bread, the former took no notice of the stranger. Then, his work done, he came and looked over his shoulder, saying, 'What you got there, mate?'

'Finest thing ever you read,' said the other, carelessly turning over some vivid pictures. "The Life and Adventures of Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and Other Eminent Outlaws." Something like a book this is,' he continued. 'Six hundred pages full of love and murder; and that excitin' you can't bear to put it down!'

This was charming; and the cook, and the butcher, and a couple of boundary riders dropped in for a yarn, at once became inquisitive, and anxious to have a look.

'See here,' said the owner of the wonderful volume, pointing to an outrageous effort in coloured process, 'this is the bold Dick Turpin on his wonderful mare, Black Bess, taking the ten-foot gate on the road to York. See, he's got the reins in his teeth and a pistol in each hand.'

'By gum, she's a flyer!' 'Twig the long-necked spurs.' 'No knee-pads to the saddle either!' 'Ten foot! there ain't a horse in Hostralia as could do it!'—exclaimed his audience, becoming excited.

'And here you have,' went on the traveller, the gentle highwayman, Claude Duval, stickin' up the Duke of York's coach on 'Oundslow 'Eath. And here he is again, dancing under the moon with the Duchess.' And so he continued, setting forth in tempting sequence the

glories of the work, pausing at intervals to read aloud thrilling bits, and comment upon them.

‘Where did you get it, mate?’ at length asked the cook.

‘Bought it in Atlanta,’ replied the other. ‘Fellow there’s got lots of ’em, and only thirty bob apiece. Cheap at double the price, I reckon, considerin’ the amoun’ of readin’ in it.’

‘Ain’t no deliv’rin’ numbers, or signin’ ’greements, or any o’ that game?’ asked one suspiciously. ‘’Cause if there is, we’re full.’

‘Nò,’ was the reply; ‘you pays your money and you takes your bargain. But I don’t think you fellows ’ll ever get the chance. I heard him say he’d as soon face a mad bull as come to this station.’

The men, of whom the hut was now full, laughed; and said one,—

‘The chap as sells, out an’ out, an honest article like that un needn’t be scared. It’s them coves as gets you to sign things, and keeps sendin’ a lot o’ rotten trash, not a bit like what you seen furst; an’ then comes, as flash as you please, summonsin’ of you an’ a-gettin’ of you bullyragged in Court—them’s the coves as we’ve got a derry on. Let’s have another squint at that pitcher o’ Dick Turpin an’ Black Bess, mates.’

‘Give you five bob on your bargain!’ shouted a tall stockman, presently, from the outer edge of the circle, where he had been impatiently waiting for a look.

‘Couldn’t part with it,’ said the owner decidedly.

'But I'll tell you what I will do. I'm going back to the township to-morrow. If the chap ain't gone, I'll let him know he can sell a few here. He might venture if you'll all give your word not to go for him when he does come. He's got lots of others, too. There's "The Bloody Robber of the Blue Mountains," and "The Pirate's Bride," and "The Boundin' Outlaws of the Backwoods," and plenty more—all same price, and all pictures and covers same as this one is.'

'Right! Tell him to come! It was pay-day yesterday,' yelled the crowd unanimously.

'Not a bad night's work, I do believe,' muttered the traveller to himself, as he reluctantly stretched out on the hard bunk-boards. 'I hope, though, this confounded beard and moustache won't come off while I'm asleep, if I ever do get any on such a bed.'

PART II.

'Is your life insured?' 'You'll get sudden notice to vamose the ranche, sir!' 'Mind the dogs!' 'Look out for whips!' 'You'll lose your stock!'

Such were some of the warnings and admonitions dealt out to Mr Potts by his friends, as he heavily

loaded his buggy preparatory to starting for Barracaboo.

'I'll chance it!' said he. 'Haven't sold a cent's worth yet; and it's the only place I haven't tried. They can't very well kill a fellow, anyhow. I'll chance it; faint heart never won fair lady!'

'Give you five pounds to one you don't deal!' cried one.

'Give you five pounds to one you're hunted!' shouted 'The Hermit.'

'Bet you slap-up feed for the crowd to-night, and wine thrown in, that somethin's broke afore you come back,' said the American gentleman.

'Done, and done, and done,' replied Mr Potts placidly, as he carefully booked the wagers and drove off; whilst the bystanders, to a man, agreed to delay their departure for the sake of not only eating a cheap dinner, but witnessing a return which they were all convinced would be 'as good as a play.'

But they were mistaken. Mr Potts was received at Barracaboo with open arms, no one recognising in the clean-shaven features those of the bearded, dilapidated swagman who had the other night spied out the lay of the land and the leanings of its people. The manager was absent; but the overseer, who had already by personal inspection satisfied himself of the merits of 'Bold Dick Turpin,' etc., was amongst the earliest purchasers.

'Everything went like wildfire. Mr Potts could hardly hand them out fast enough. Those present

bought for others away on the run, and in a very short time there were only three volumes left.

These were of a different calibre to the rest of the rubbish, being nothing less than 'The Adventures of Don Quixote de la Mancha,' with illustrations by Gustave Doré. However, as no one would even look at them at the price—five pounds—the dealer, having pretty well cleaned out 'the Hut,' determined to try his luck at 'the House.'

Now, it happened that Mrs Morris, the manager's wife, wished just at this time to buy something for her eldest boy, whose birthday was approaching. Recognising, as a reading woman, that the work was genuine, and not more than a pound or two over price, she bought it. It was so much less trouble than sending to the capital, with a chance of disappointment.

'It'll do very nicely for Master Reginald,' quoth she; 'I'm sure he'll be pleased with it. And I'm glad to see that you people are at last beginning to carry something better than the usual lot of trash. I hope you did well amongst the men with these standard works?'

'Very nicely indeed, thank you, ma'am,' replied Mr Potts, smiling, as he bowed and withdrew.

.

John, the waiter, had twice informed the 'commercial gents' that dinner was ready, before the anxious watchers saw the man who was expected to pay for it drive into the yard of the hotel.

'He looks kinder spry,' remarked the American gentleman disappointedly. 'Guess he's got clear off with a caution this once.'

'Buggy seems to run light,' chimed in another. 'Shouldn't wonder if they'd unloaded it into the river.'

'Never had such a haul since I've been in the business, gentlemen!' exclaimed Mr Potts, as he presently entered the dining-room with a big roll of paper in his hand. 'There must have been some mistake about the place. Why, they're the mildest crowd you'd see in a day's march. Sellin' 'em books is like tea-drinkin'. It actually kept me goin' as fast as I could to change their stuff for 'em. Here, you know the Barracaboo cheques. Look at this, and count em', one of you. Blessed if I've had time! I hope dinner's ready. Never let me hear a word against Barracaboo after this!'

There was a long silence of utter astonishment, during which the American rapidly thumbed strips of green paper, and made mental calculations.

'Eight hundred dollars!' exclaimed he, at last, in tones of unalloyed admiration. 'Mister Potts, sir, you're a gifted genius! I ante-up, Colonel, to once, an' allow I'll take a back seat.'

And so, in their several fashions, said the rest; whilst the lion of the evening ate his dinner, sipped his porphyry, and kept his own counsel.

'Cost me four bob, landed in Sydney, averaging the lot,' said Mr Potts confidentially to a friend that evening, as they enjoyed their coffee and cigars

on the balcony. 'I'm on my own hook, too, now. I seen that the specimen-sheet-monthly-delivery-collection-per-agent game was blown—not that I guessed it was near as bad as it really is. So I sends straight away to New York for this consignment, specially got up and prepared for the Bush. It was a regular bobby-dazzler! You see, the boards are only stuck on with glue, type and paper's as rough as they make 'em, and the picturin's done by a cheap colour patent. I've got another lot nearly due by this—not for here, though. You fellows have ruined this district. Of course the Dorees was genuine. I bought the three of 'em a job lot in town for a song. They're the only books I've got left now. If I'd had a score more of Turpins and such, I could have sold 'em at the station.'

.
'There's old Morris, of Barracaboo, just come in,' remarked someone the next morning. 'He's on his way home from Larras Show, I expect.'

'Which is him?' asked Mr Potts eagerly (all literary people are not necessarily purists).

'Sorry to disturb you at lunch, sir,' said Mr Potts presently, as he entered, bearing a large book. 'But Mrs Morris was kind enough to say that this would do nicely for Master Reginald's birthday. 'Don Quixote,' sir, the most startling work of that celebrated author, Gustavus Do-ree, sir. Splendidly illustrated, sir. Your good lady was very much pleased with it.'

'Umph, umph,' growled the manager. 'Been out at the station, eh? Didn't they run you, eh? No whips, no dogs! Eh! eh! What?'

'I am not an advance agent for books I know nothing about, sir,' returned the other with dignity, as he took the volume up again. 'I sell a genuine article, sir, for cash on the nail. In transactions of that kind there can be no mistake, sir.'

'Umph!' growled the squatter doubtfully. 'Well, as long as the missus says it's all right, I s'pose it is. How much?'

He paid without a murmur. Mrs M. was a lady who stood no trifling.

'Wrap the thing up and put it in the buggy,' said he. 'Gad, it's as big as the station ledger! Look sharp, now, I'm in a hurry!'

'So am I,' quoth Mr Potts, as he returned. 'John, what time does the next train start?'

.
When the manager reached home that afternoon with 'Don Quixote,' and compared notes and books, there was a row, the upshot of which was that he received orders to hurry off at once in pursuit, and avenge the trick played upon them.

'You're a J.P.,' stormed the lady, 'and if you can't give that oily villain three months, what's the use of you? Besides, isn't five pounds worth recovering?'

Mr Morris would much sooner have let the matter drop quietly. No man likes to publicly advertise

the fact of his having been duped, least of all by a book-fiend.

‘Well, well, my dear,’ said he at last, ‘never mind. I’ll go directly. I’ve got some letters to write first. But I’ll send M’Fadyen into town to see the fellow doesn’t get away.’

‘Tell him,’ said the manager, as the overseer was preparing to start, ‘tell him I’m coming in presently, about—um—er—about a book. Oh, and if he gives you anything, perhaps you’d better take it. No use,’ he muttered to himself, with a side glance to where his wife sat, ‘letting all hands and the cook know one’s business. The beggar ’ll only be too glad to stump up when he finds I’m in earnest. Thought, I suppose, that I wouldn’t bother about it, eh, what!’

Inquiring at the ‘Royal,’ the overseer was told that Mr Potts had left; although, perhaps, if he hastened, he might yet see him, as the train hadn’t started. Sure enough, galloping up to the station and searching along the carriages, he found his man just making himself comfortable in smoking-cap and slippers.

‘Be jakers, mister,’ he gasped breathlessly, ‘the Boss wants to see ye badly! Have ye got anythin’ for him? It’s of a book he was spakin’. Tould me to tell ye that he’d be in himself directly.’

‘Too late! Can’t stop! Time’s up!’ replied Mr Potts. ‘But’—rising to the occasion, and taking the last copy of ‘Do-ree’ out of his portmanteau—‘this

is it. It's for Master Reginald's birthday. Your Boss wouldn't miss having it for three times the money. Six pounds—quick!

In a desperate flurry, the overseer ransacked his pockets. No; he could only muster four.

'All right, guard, wait a minute!' he yelled as, borrowing the balance, he clutched the book, whilst the train, giving a screech, moved away, with Mr Potts nodding and grinning a friendly farewell.

'Be kicked now!' exclaimed the overseer, 'if that wasn't a close shave! The Boss oughter think himself lucky, so he ought!'

So, carrying the book carefully under his arm, he jogged Barracaboowards.

Half way he met Mr Morris coming in at full speed.

'No hurry in loife, sorr!' cried the overseer, beamingly, and showing 'Don Quixote.' 'I ped six notes for it, an' had to borrow two. It was just touch an' go, though, so it was!'

‘BARTON’S JACKAROO.’

‘BOTHER!’ exclaimed Mr Barton, the Manager of Tarn-pirr, as he finished reading one of his letters on a certain evening.

‘What’s the matter, papa?’ asked his daughter, Daisy, pausing with the teapot in her hand.

‘Oh, nothing much, my dear,’ he replied; only we are to have company. The firm is sending up the 444th cousin of an Irish Earl to learn sheep-farming, and I suppose I’ve got the contract to break him in. That’s all.’

‘I wish your mother could be at home, Daisy,’ he continued. ‘I never did care much about these colonial-experience fellows. They generally give a lot of trouble, especially when they’re well connected. There, read the precious letter for yourself. Pity we couldn’t put him into the hut, instead of making him one of ourselves—eh, Daisy?’

The girl laughed as she read aloud,—

‘Mr Fortescue is highly connected; and as he not only brings introductions from the London office, but

also possesses an interest in several properties out here, we hope you will do your best to make him comfortable, and to give him that insight into the business that he seems desirous of acquiring at first hand.'

'Why, daddy!' she exclaimed, 'you ought to think yourself honoured — "highly connected," not merely "well," remember—by such a charge! As for myself, I am all anxiety to see him.'

'I don't think anything of the sort, then, Daisy, said her father. 'And if I could afford to do so, I should like to tell them that I consider it a piece of impertinence on their part to ask me to receive a perfect stranger, knowing how I am situated alone with you, how small the place is, and how roughly we live. But one can't ride the high horse on a hundred and fifty pounds a year!'

And the Manager of Tarnpirr sighed, and stared thoughtfully into his cup.

In the general sense of the word, Daisy Barton was not a pretty girl, inasmuch as she possessed not one regular feature. But it was such a calm, quiet, pleasant face, out of which dark blue eyes looked so tenderly and honestly at you, that one forgot to search for details in the charm of the whole. Add to this, one of the neatest, trimmest, most loveable little figures imaginable, and you may have some faint idea of the pleasant picture she made as she sat thinking which of the two spare rooms should be got ready for the new inmate. Mrs Barton was never at the station.

She was a confirmed invalid, and resided permanently in a far southern town. Daisy and an old Irishwoman kept house.

In due course the 'highly connected' one arrived, bringing with him as much luggage as sufficed to fill the extra room.

He was a tall, good-looking Englishman, and he gazed around at the small bare house with its strip of burnt-up, dusty garden, and background of sombre eucalypti; at the squalid 'hut;' the sluggish, dirty river; and the barren forlornness of everything, with a look on his face that caused Mr Barton to chuckle, and think to himself that the new-comer's stay would be short. The manager had expected a youngster, not a grown man of five or six and twenty, and he was rather puzzled.

This self-possessed, languid sort of gentleman, with well-cut features, long moustache, and slow, pleasant-sounding, if rather drawling, speech, wasn't by any means the sort of creature that Mr Barton was accustomed to associate with the term 'jackaroo,' and its natural corollary, 'licking into shape.'

'A fellow with lots of money, I expect,' he said to Daisy that night after their guest, pleading fatigue, had retired. 'One of those chaps who just come out to have a look around, and then off home again with wonderful stories about the wild Australian Bush.'

'Yaas; shouldn't wondah, now, Mistah Barton, if you ah not qaite correct,' laughed Daisy, mischievously.

'Oh, papa, do all the folk in England talk as if they were clean knocked up?'

'Only the highly-connected ones, my dear,' replied her father, smiling. 'It's considered quite fashionable, too, amongst our own upper ten. He'll lose it after he's been bushed a few times. I shouldn't imagine from his looks, however, that he's got much backbone. He'll be away again presently—too rough a life.'

And, in fact, poor Fortescue at first often did get bushed.

Luckily for him, perhaps, a camp of blacks settled at Tarnpirr shortly after his arrival, and these made a regular income by hunting for and bringing him back. And he was very considerate.

Once, when he had been missing for three days, and Mr Barton and Daisy were half out of their minds with fright, he made the blacks who were bearing him home, tattered and hungry, and faint from exposure, go ahead for clean clothes and soap and water before he would put in an appearance. This incident only confirmed Mr Barton the more in his idea that he had to do with a man lacking strength of character—a dandy willing to sacrifice everything to personal outward show. His daughter thought quite otherwise.

However, in time, 'Barton's Jackaroo,' as he was called throughout the district of the lower rivers, became a favourite, not only at Tarnpirr, but on the neighbouring runs. Even old Bridget admitted that

'he was a good sort ov a cratur, barrin' the want ov a bit more life wid him.'

But he was always calm and self-possessed; and the Manager was accustomed to swear that a bush fire at his heels wouldn't make him quicken his pace by a step.

And once Daisy, in a moment of irritation, confided to her father that she felt inclined to stick a needle into his jackaroo for the sake of discovering whether that provoking air of leisurely languor was natural or assumed.

'He's got no backbone, my dear,' said the Manager, laughing. 'But try him by all means. I'll bet you ten to one he only says what he did last week, when that old ram made a drive at him in the yard, and knocked him down and jumped on him.'

'And what did he say to that?' asked Daisy eagerly.

'Well,' replied Mr Barton, laughing again, 'when he'd cleaned the mud out of his eyes and mouth, he looked surprised and said "Haw!"'

'Oh,' said Daisy, disappointedly. 'But what ought he to have said to show that he had a backbone, papa?'

'Well,' replied her father vaguely, 'you know, Daisy—er—um—well, that is—um—a great many people, my dear, your father amongst them, perhaps, would be apt to say a good deal on such an occasion.'

'I have a better opinion than ever of Mr Fortescue,' cried Daisy indignantly at this. 'Because he keeps his

temper, and doesn't go on like Long Jim or Ben the Bullocky when any little thing happens, he's got no pluck or resolution! I own he exasperates one sometimes with his calm, dawdling ways. But if he were pushed, I shouldn't be surprised to find more in him than he gets credit for after all!

'Umph!' said Mr Barton glancing kindly, but with rather a troubled face, at the flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes upturned to his own. And as he rode over the run that day the burden of his thoughts was that the sooner his serene-tempered jackaroo got tired of the Bush the better it would be for all of them.

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'Ned, if the river ain't a-risin', an' risin' precious quick, too, call me a Dutchman! 'Arf-an-hour ago the water warn't near them bullocks, and now it's right agin their 'eels!'

'Well,' replied his mate, glancing towards the brown stream slowly spreading over the flat, 'we're safe enough. I'll forgive it if it comes over this. Tell you what, though, you might catch the pony an' canter up to the station, an' tell ole Barton as there's some water a-comin'. He might have some stock he'd like to git out o' the road. An' you might's well git a lump o' meat while you're there.'

So Ned, of the travelling bullock team, went with the news to Tarnpirr, lower down.

But Mr Barton that very morning had been to Warrooga township, and the telegraph people had said no word of floods or heavy rain at the head of the river.

Around Tarnpirr and district the weather had been dry for weeks, so the Manager was not in the least uneasy.

'It's only a bit of a fresh, Brown,' said he. 'It'll soon go down again. Thanks all the same, though. Meat? Yes, of course. And now you'd better go over to the kitchen and get your dinner.'

'Boss reckons it's nothin',' said Ned, returning that evening. 'No rain fall'd up above.'

'We wouldn't need shift anyhow,' replied the other, preparing to cook the meat given them by Mr Barton, who little dreamt how welcome it would be to some people later on. 'We're a lot higher here than they are at the station. I saw "Barton's Jackaroo" just now, out ridin' with Miss Daisy. He's a rum stick, he is.'

'But ain't she a little star!' exclaimed Ned enthusiastically.

'She are; all that!' replied his mate. 'Finest gall on the rivers. Too good by sights for any new-chum.'

And so the pair sat and yarned and watched the treacherous water of what was to become the biggest flood since '64 stealthily eating its way up amongst the long grass of the sandridge, sneaking quietly into little hollows, then pretending to creep back again, then with a rush advancing a miniature wave further than ever. Sat and talked and watched the brown expanse broaden until the tall oaks that bordered the banks were whipping the fierce current with their slender tops, sole mark now to show where lay mid-stream.

'It's a darned big lump of a fresh!' quoth Ned doubtfully.

'It'll be down afore mornin',' replied his mate. 'And anyhow it can't do us real bad, seein' what we've got in the loadin'. But there's no danger 'ere on this ridge.'

So they turned in under their tarpaulins, and never heard how the water hissed at midnight as it crept, little by little, advancing, receding, but always gaining, into their carefully covered-up fire.

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In the snug sitting-room at Tarnpirr, with lamps burning brightly, and curtains drawn against the lowering dusk, sat Herbert Fortescue and Daisy Barton, their heads pretty close together over a chessboard.

'I'm going across to the Back Ridge out-station this afternoon,' had said Mr Barton. 'I sha'n't be home before to-morrow; I want to see how Macpherson's getting on with those weaners. Needn't bother about the river. It's only a fresh, or Warrooga would have sent us word.'

Alas for dependence on Warrooga with its absent trooper, and absent-minded operator, who was warned, just after Manager Barton left him, that masses of water were coming down three rivers towards Tarnpirr!

Had he but taken horse and galloped out the few miles, or sent, things might have happened very differently, and this story would never have been written. But as it was—

'There!' exclaimed Daisy, 'my king is in trouble

again. I feel out of sorts to-night. It's very close. Shall we go on to the verandah?'

'With pleasure,' said the young man rising. 'But it's as dark as pitch outside. Give me your hand, please, for fear you stumble.'

Hesitating for a moment, their eyes met, and with deepening colour she placed her hand in his, and they went out through the long window into the night. It was very quiet, and the darkness felt woolly and warm. No light glimmered anywhere, and the only sound was the cry of a solitary mopoke coming from amongst the spectral boles of the box trees.

'The men are in bed, I suppose,' said Daisy, glancing towards their hut.

'They are away on the run, replied Fortescue, 'drawing fencing stuff for the new line. But it's a wonder we don't see the blacks' fire.'

As they stood leaning against the garden fence a soft continuous ripple, mingled with a sound like the sighing of wind through tall belars fell on their ears.

'It's only the river,' said Daisy, 'I've often heard it making that mournful noise when it's rising over its banks. Shall we walk as far as the camp?'

It was a rough track, and more than once, but for the sustaining arm of her companion, Daisy would have come to grief over log or tussock.

But they got there at last, guided by a few dim sparks from expiring fires.

'Why, it's deserted,' exclaimed Daisy, as they found

themselves amongst the empty gunyahs. 'They're gone, dogs and all.'

'Off on some hunting expedition, I expect,' replied Fortescue, laughing. 'They look at me in a comically disgusted manner of late since I left off getting bushed so regularly.'

It was too dark to see the water, but they stood for a long time listening to the swish of it as it ran full-lipped from one steep high bank to the other, telling with eerie mutterings and whisperings, and curious little complaining noises, and low hoarse threatenings of what it would presently do, and the mischief it would work, but in language all untranslatable by its hearers.

'What a sweet little lady it is,' said Fortescue to himself as, later, he sat on the edge of his bed staring straight before him into a pair of tender, steadfast eyes conjured out of the darkness. I wonder if she does? I'm nearly sure of it, thank heaven! Why, she is worth coming here and roughing it like this, and being called "Barton's Jackaroo" twenty times over for!' and he laughed gently. 'Fancy a prize like that hidden away amongst these solitudes. I wonder what her father will say? Anyhow, I won't put it off any longer. I'll ask him to-morrow.'

With which resolution he laid down and went to sleep, still thinking on Daisy Barton.

He awoke with a start, and lay listening to noises in his room, the remnants, as he imagined, of some grotesque dream.

Gurglings there were, and agonised squeakings and

scrapings, with, now and then, ploppings and splashings as of many small swimmers. Then something cold, wet and hairy, crawled over his hand.

Shaking it off with an exclamation, he jumped out of bed, and with the shock of it, stood stock still for two minutes up to his knees in water.

Then, striking a match, he saw that his room was awash, and that all sorts of articles were floating about it, drawn hither and thither by the current which swelled and eddied between the old slabs. Up a corner of blanket, touching the water, swarmed a great host of ants, tarantulas, beetles and crickets, whilst drowning mice, lizards, and heaven knows what else, swam wildly round and round and gratefully hailed his bare legs as a harbour of refuge. Hastily rubbing them off, and getting into some wet clothes, he opened the window and looked out. A wan moon shed a feeble light upon one vast sea of turgid water. Nothing in sight but water—water, and the tops of the trees quivering above the flood! No wonder the river talked to itself last night! The scene was enough to make even a man with a backbone quail and feel a bit nervous.

As for Barton's Jackaroo, his first astonishment over, he forgot himself so far as first to whistle, and then to swear, but very softly and tentatively, as one trying an experiment.

You see, this was a different matter altogether to being butted of rams, or even being badly bushed without a drink for three days and three nights.

Brushing off his sleeve the head of a column of sugar-ants that had effected a lodgment *via* the window-sill, he waded into the sitting-room and lit the lamp. Then, making for Daisy's room, he called and tapped until she answered.

'It's me—Fortescue. Don't be alarmed, Daisy—Miss Barton,' said he. 'The water's in the house. Get up and dress, and come out as quickly as possible.'

As he finished speaking a wild yell rang through the place, and Bridget's voice from near by exclaimed, punctuated by screams,—

'Howly Mother av Moses! Ow! Blessid Vargin an' all the saints purtect us! Ow! the divvle be wid me! but it's drowned I am this minnit! an' the wather up me legs, an' niver a soul comin' next anigh me! Och! wirras-thru! it's a lost woman I am, wid all the mices and bastes atin' away at me! Ow! ow! ow!'

With difficulty suppressing a desire to laugh, Fortescue shouted to her to get her clothes on and join him. One little cry of dismay he heard from Daisy as she lit her candle, and then he returned to the dining-room.

Here he was startled to notice a burst of dull moonlight coming in through the front of the house where already were gaps caused by the slabs being displaced and carried away by the water.

Clearly the building, old and rotten, was going to pieces.

Presently Daisy, pale, but silent and composed, entered. Taking her in his arms, he placed her on a

sideboard, grieving the while to see how the water poured from her clothes.

'I am afraid the whole house will go, Daisy,' he said. 'It's shaky and decayed. I was thinking of making a stage on the wall-plates up there. But I'm sure now that our only hope is in a raft of some kind.'

At this moment in floundered Bridget, clasping a large bottle to her breast, and muttering at every stride objurgations, entreaties, and fag-ends of prayers.

'Ochone!' she cried, 'may the saints an' the Howly Mother av all hould us in their kapin' this night!' Then, uncorking the bottle, 'Sure, Misthur Fortyskeu, sorr, if ye *are* a haythen, ye might have a thry for purgathory itself. It's better nor the other place, so it is. Here's the howly wather, avick, that Father Dennis give me lasht chapel at Warrooga—if ye'll let me sprinkle a weeshy dhrop—'

'Come, come, Bridget; stop that nonsense!' exclaimed Fortescue sternly, as he knocked down slabs and pulled them inside. 'Isn't there water enough about, without any more. Take the candle and get me some ropes—clothes-lines, saddlestraps, anything you can find!'

Bridget opened her mouth with astonishment. She had never been spoken to in such manner before. Then putting down her precious bottle, she waddled off.

Presently Daisy slipped into the water, saying,—

'I can't sit there and watch you working away by yourself,' and she helped to hold the slabs, whilst he and Bridget secured them with lashings.

Four, ten feet long, tied at the ends, and upon them cross-pieces, and upon these the long dining-room table. This was the raft; and while Fortescue tied and knotted and fastened, he talked of how he had once been cast away in a yacht, and had then learned many things. And the pair, listening to his cheery voice, took courage, albeit the water now was waist high.

The seasoned pine timber floated like a cork, and to his satisfaction Fortescue found that with their combined weight it was still well out of the water. He was just considering whether it might be possible to secure a few valuables and important papers, when an ominous creaking caught his ear, and the house began to quiver bodily.

Hurriedly jumping on board and seizing a long thin slab, he pushed off. And what a wild sight it was outside, as the frail craft shot clear of everything into the flood!

The water ran like brown oil, swift but waveless, bearing with it logs, great trees, posts and rails, planks, heaps of straw, *debris* of every description, whilst into the still, warm air ascended a stern hum like the sound of some mighty engine. It was like the sound of the river purring with satisfaction at the fulfilling of its last night's promises.

Looking back, they saw through the open front the lamp, like some welcoming beacon, burning steadily across the waters. Even as they gazed, there was a faint crash heard, and the light disappeared. The house had gone, and in another moment its fragments drifted by

them. Round and round they swept, now threatened by some huge upturn tree whose bristling roots came nigh transfixing them, now nearly dashed against the topmost limbs of a standing one, taking all Fortescue's strength and skill to avoid a collision.

Presently they saw, on either hand, long strings of sheep swimming down the current with plaintive bleatings to their death; heard, too, shrill neighings and bellowings of drowning cattle and horses.

Round and round they swept, although they knew it not, towards the raging central current, where disaster was inevitable; whilst Daisy sat with white face, mute, and almost hopeless, and Bridget crouched, one arm around a table leg, mumbling over her beads; and Barton's Jackaroo, the man without a backbone, toiled steadily and watchfully, still finding time, at intervals, to throw a word of cheer to his helpless companions.

Crash! and a log overtaking them and hitting them end-on, sent the raft spinning; whilst to his dismay Fortescue felt the slabs begin to loose and spread. Decidedly, a few more knocks like that, and they would all find themselves in the water.

'I'm afraid, Herbert, it's going to pieces,' whispered Daisy, who had crept close to where he knelt.

It was the first time she had ever used that name when addressing him, and her voice sounded so inexpressibly sweet that, without even glancing at Bridget, he turned and took the girl in his arms and kissed her, a caress which she, thinking her end at hand, and loving him, returned.

Smash! and they are amongst the stout upper branches of what must be a giant tree. But, in place of pushing off, Fortescue hugs and pulls, and calls upon the women to help him, which they do until the raft is moored, so to speak, hard and fast between forks and branches, the only ones visible now over all that brown, bare waste of water with silver patches of moonlight here and there upon it.

It was a grateful thing to be at rest, even so precariously, after all the twisting and twirling they had come through; and Bridget, rising stiffly and shaking herself, with the fear of present death gone out of her soul, said,—

'Praise the saints! Sure, Mither Fortyskeu, sorr, we oughter to be thankful for gettin' this far wid clane shkins, so we ought! Sorra a one ov me 'll go any furdur if I can help it! Is the wather raisin' yet, does ye think, sorr?'

'I'm afraid it is, Bridget,' said Fortescue, as he sat on a stout limb supporting Daisy beside him. 'I hope, though, it won't rise over the top of this tree.' But, disquieted by the idea, he presently got into the water and tightened the lashings of the raft as well as he was able.

It was a long, dreary night, especially after the moon went down. Fortunately it was warm and fine. Indeed, throughout that trying time of flood, curiously enough, not a single point of rain fell in that region. They talked of many things, these two, nestling snugly in a great fork of the giant apple-tree, but their chief

subject was the old, old story; whilst Bridget, just below them, alternately invoked heavenly succour and lamented earthly losses.

'Twinty wan poun' notes undther me head in the bolsther, an' me too hurried an' flurried to remimber 'em! Sure, it's clane roond I am aafter this noight, bad cess to it! But for Father Dennis's wather—may glory be his bed whin his toime comes—it's at the bottom wid the sheep and craturs I'd be afore now, so it is! May the saints above sind the blessed light an' the master wid a ship to us! Ochone! Miss Daisy, me darlin', I knows it's hard on ye too. An' for ye too, sorr—God forgive me thinkin' ye wasn't quite so smart as ye moight be!'

And so she rambled on, unheeded by the lovers perched in the big fork above her.

Dawn at last, bright and clear, with presently a brilliant sun.

To his relief, Fortescue saw by the marks on the tree that the water was falling. By noon the raft was suspended high and dry. But still a lamentable procession of sheep and household *débris*, with an occasional horse or bullock, hurried along the swift central stream, at whose very verge a merciful Providence had arrested the raft. Presently Fortescue was lucky enough to secure a pumpkin out of the dozens floating about, and the three divided and ate it with an appetite. Slowly the shadows lengthened. Other tree tops, dishevelled and dirty with driftage, began to appear around them. The water was falling rapidly. But were they to pass

another night there? Fortescue began to fear so, and was even setting about the construction of a platform out of the raft, when a loud '*Coo-ee-e-e!*' made him start. '*Coo-ee-e-e!*' in answer; and then a small boat pulled by two men came through the branches of the big tree.

'Hoorar!' shouted one. 'We was afraid it was all up with yees! But where's the Boss?'

'My father went to the out-station yesterday,' replied Daisy.

'Oh, then he's right enough,' said the man. 'Bet your life, miss, he ain't very far away this minute! He's seed, afore now, what the "bit of a fresh" turned to. Hand us down the lady fust, guv'nor.'

But old Bridget, being lowest, and in a hurry, suddenly let herself drop fairly on the speaker's shoulders, fetching him down, and nearly capsizing the boat. Then, to his infinite astonishment, she got her arms round his neck and hugged him, and would have served his mate the same way, but he sprang into the tree and avoided her.

'Where are your waggons?' asked Fortescue, as at last they pulled off.

'Ten foot under water, by this, replied the carrier, 'seein' it was up to the naves afore we left. We knowed nothin' till we feels it in our blankets. Then up we jumps, and, behold you, we're on a hiland about twenty foot round, an' the flood a-roarin' like billyho. As luck 'll 'ave it, Tom, there, has this boat in his loadin', takin' her to a storekeeper at Overflow—I

expect he's a-thinkin' on her just now. So we hiked her out, paddles an' all, gits some tucker, an' steers for Tarnpirr, knowin' as you was a lot lower 'n we, an' no boat. Well, when we sees nothin' but water where the house shud ha' been, we reckoned you'd all been swep' away, so comes along on chance, cooeyin' pretty often. By jakers, guv'nor, if you hadn't 'appened to have savee enough to chuck that thing together, you'd all a' been gone goosers sure enough! I don't b'lieve there's one single solitary 'oof left on the run, not exceptin' our bullocks an' saddle 'orses.'

The castaways now made a much-needed meal off damper and some of the Tarnpirr mutton, and voted it a wonderful improvement on raw pumpkin, even with love for its sauce.

Before they had pulled a mile towards Warrooga, they met Mr Barton with some residents in the police boat. He had been nearly frantic with anxiety since, on returning home, he encountered the water, and, galloping back, had with great difficulty reached the township.

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 'What's the use?' replied Mr Barton despondently, when, that same evening, Fortescue asked him for Daisy. 'I'm a ruined man, and, like most such, selfish, and I want to keep my little girl. So far as I can gather, there's not an animal of any description left alive on Tarnpirr. Pastoral firms make no allowances; they'll say I ought to have cleared everything off before the flood came, and they'll sack me at a minute's notice.

Of course, if the people here had done as they should, I might have saved most of the sheep, if not all. No ; I don't like to disappoint you, after having behaved so nobly and pluckily—and I must say now that I never did you justice—but I think, Mr Fortescue, you'd better choose a wife elsewhere ; I do, indeed.'

Seeing that Barton was irritable, and rather inclined to hug his misfortune, Fortescue, perhaps wisely, said no more just then, and apparently took his dismissal with a good grace.

But later, before starting for the capital, Daisy and he had a long talk, during which a conspiracy was hatched.

Mr Barton bade his jackaroo a kindly good-bye ; and if he felt any surprise at the non-renewal of his suit, he never showed it.

He was expecting, with almost feverish impatience, a letter from the firm in answer to his own report, with details of the disaster at Tarnpirr. And when at length it arrived, after what seemed a long delay, and he found that, instead of the reproaches and curt dismissal he was prepared for, it contained sympathy and an appointment to a large station on the Darling Downs, words were wanting to express his utter astonishment, and his deep contrition for the bad opinion he had formed of his employers.

'Never mind, Daisy,' he cried. 'They say the owner will be there himself to receive us on our arrival. I can thank him then in person.'

'Dear me, how nice that will be !' replied Daisy, demurely.

'And, only fancy,' he went on, 'they request us to take our servant—that's Bridget, of course—with us! I'm to find out, too, if those carriers lost much, and, if so, to compensate them.'

'How very good and thoughtful they must be,' answered Daisy—but this time with moist eyes.

I will not insult the reader's penetration by asking him to guess who the owner of that Downs station was.

It will be sufficient to remark that Mr and Mrs Fortescue have only just returned from their wedding trip to the Continent; and that it will be very long indeed ere they forget that memorable night in '90 upon which the waters came to Tarnpirr, and caused 'Barton's Jackaroo' to show what he was made of.

TOLD IN THE 'CORONA'S' CABIN.

ON THREE EVENINGS.

THE FIRST EVENING.

IN the south-east trades, and the big ship moving steadily through the water with every sail full. Not a quiver of the tightly-strained canvas, not the rattle of a reef-point, broke the stillness aloft.

A glorious evening in the South Atlantic, with the sun setting, as is often his wont in those latitudes, in a bed of crimson, gold and amethyst. The passengers, who had been watching the many-hued passing of the day-king, went below as the cool night breeze began to whistle with a shriller note through the top-hamper and the water to swish more loudly along the sides, and fall back with a louder plop. Very comfortable, snug, and home-like the *Corona's* cabin looked. It was a cabin, remember, not a 'saloon.'

There was nothing of the modern curse of varnish and veneer about it. Everything was handsome, also substantial, from the dark mahogany casing of

the mizzen-mast to the highly polished, solid panneling of rosewood, relieved with only a narrow gold beading. The cabin might aptly have been termed a study in brown and gold, so predominant was this combination. Even the curtains in front of each berth door were of brown damask, with gold fringe. The general effect, if a little sombre, was good.

Especially good it seemed this evening to the passengers as they came trooping in with talk and laughter; especially snug and home-like, with its three big swinging moderator lamps, its long table covered with odds and ends of female work, books, papers, etc., etc., its piano, and its comfortable couches scattered here and there.

The *Corona's* great beam had been utilised to some purpose, and, thus, her cabin was not, like the saloons of so many sailing ships, a sort of stage drawing-room, all white paint, gilding, glass, spindle-shanked chairs, and turn-over-at-a-touch tables.

The company suited the cabin. There were only a dozen or so of them, mostly middle-aged married folk, who had left their grown-up families in Australia whilst they took a trip 'Home,' and were now returning to their adopted country. Amongst them, however, were two or three single ladies of uncertain ages, bound to the Land of the Golden Fleece in search of fortune, even if it should only come in the shape of a husband. There was, also, Miss Amy Hillier, an Australian heiress in her own right, returning to

her native land with an uncle and an aunt. This is another man's story; so that I am not going to take up space by a description of Amy Hillier's charms; suffice it to say here that she was young and pretty, and as good as she was young and pretty.

Wonderful to relate, the company of passengers fitted each other. Each seemed to have discovered in another his or her affinity, and, up to this, there had been none of the usual backbitings, heart-burnings, and malicious tittle-tattle usually so inseparable from a sea voyage in a sailing ship.

Miss Hillier had seated herself at the piano, and was playing something from *Lohengrin*, when a remarkable-looking man, entering the cabin, doffed his gold-banded cap, and made his way to her side.

Strongly, yet gracefully built, upright as the royal pole, active in all his movements, one would have taken him to be scarce arrived at middle-age, but for the fact that his thick, closely-cropped hair shone a dead white under the lamplight. His features were regular and good, albeit they wore, in general, a rather serious expression. Altogether, it was a strong, pleasant face, full of energy, confidence, and the power to command.

As he rested one hand on the corner of the instrument, it might be noticed that, from wrist to finger tips, it was covered by the white cicatrices of long-healed scars. In spite, however, of his grey hair and disfigured hands, Captain Marion, of the *Corona*,

Australian liner, was called by many people a handsome man.

'Sing me my favourite, please,' asked the Captain presently.

'On condition,' was the reply, 'that you will tell us a story in return.'

'It's a bargain,' said the Captain. 'I'll relate the legend of Vanderdecken, the Flying Dutchman. Thoroughly appropriate it will be, too, as we are just entering his domains.'

'We don't want to hear about the Flying Dutchman,' answered the girl promptly.

'Well, then,' continued the Captain, 'what do you say if I tell you how I was cast away in '69, on the coast of—'

'No, no, Captain Marion,' interrupted she, smiling shyly up at him, 'we don't want that either.'

'Ah, I see!' exclaimed the Captain, after a pause, 'a conspiracy! Well,' he went on, after a still longer hesitation, 'I don't care much about it. The telling, I mean, of how I got this' (touching his hair) 'and these' (spreading out his hands), 'for, of course, that is what you wish to hear. It reminds me of a time I would rather not recall.'

'No, Miss Hillier'—for the girl had risen in dismay and almost tears at her thoughtlessness, and was attempting to apologise incoherently enough—'it doesn't matter a bit. Besides, I somehow feel in the vein for story-telling this evening; and as well that as anything else. With some passengers, I find that I

have to put a stopper on their curiosity rather abruptly. But' (with a grave smile and a bow to the group) 'it being a rare thing, indeed, to meet so well-assorted and pleasant a party as we are this trip, I'll spin you the yarn, such as it is. And now, Miss Hillier, my song.'

'What would you like—the same as usual, I suppose —“The Silent Land?”'

'Yes,' answered the Captain; 'your rendering puts a new interpretation on Salis' words for me, and I seem to bear with me more strongly than ever the promise, as I listen, that he

Who in life's battle firm doth stand
Shall bear Hope's tender blossoms
Into the Silent Land !'

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'It is,' commenced Captain Marion, the song finished, and taking his accustomed seat, whilst the others gathered round him—'It is nearly fourteen years ago that the strange, and what many may deem improbable, adventure happened which I am about to relate. I was then about twenty-two years of age, an able-bodied seaman on board a ship called the *Bucephalus*, belonging to Liverpool. It was my first voyage before the mast, for, although I had duly served my apprenticeship with the firm who owned her, and also passed my exam. as second mate, there was no vacancy just then open. They, indeed, offered me a post as third; but, knowing that I should be none the worse for a month or two in the fok's'le, I

preferred to ship as an A.B. The *Bucephalus* was an Eastern trader, and on this trip was bound for Singapore and China. All went well with us until we entered the Straits of Sunda. Then, one afternoon, the ship lying in a dead calm off one of the many lovely islands which abound in those narrow seas, the passengers, chiefly military officers with their families, asked the captain to let them have a boat and a run ashore.

'He was a good-natured man, and consented. Luckily for me, as it afterwards proved, the gig, a very old boat, was full of lumber, fruit, fowls, etc., procured at Anjer, and so the life-boat, a stanch, nearly new craft, was put into the water instead.

'At the last moment some one suggested that a cup of tea might be acceptable on the island. Not tea alone, but provisions for an ample meal were at once handed in, together with a keg of fresh water. This also was, as you will discover presently, another lucky or—ought I not to say?—providential, chance for me.

'With myself, three more seamen, and eight or nine ladies and gentlemen, we pushed off towards the verdant, cone-shaped island. Landing without any difficulty on a shell-strewn beach which ran up between two lofty and abrupt headlands, all hands, except myself and an elderly seaman known as Tom, jumped ashore and went climbing and scampering about like so many schoolboys out for a holiday. For my part, I had been on scores of similar islands, or imagined I had, and felt no particular wish to explore this one. Neither, apparently, did my companion. So, hauling

off a little from the shore, we threw the grapnel overboard and prepared to take things easy, each in his own fashion, he with a pipe, and I with a book lent me by one of the cabin passengers.

'We made a rough sort of awning with the boat's sail, and I lay in the stern-sheets, my companion between the midship thwarts, under its grateful shelter. It was a drowsy afternoon and a very hot one. To our ears the shouts and laughter of those ashore came at intervals, gradually growing fainter as they made their way towards the summit of the mountain, for such one might say the island was.

'Presently, looking up from my book, I saw that old Tom was fast asleep, his pipe still in his mouth. Very shortly afterwards I dozed, and heard the book drop from my hand on to the grating without making any effort to recover it. I fell asleep in the broad sunlit day, between ship and land, in the motionless boat, with the voices of my kind still in my ears, and awoke in thickest darkness, moving swiftly along in utter silence, save for, at times, an oily gurgle of water under the bows. Not that I realised even so much all at once. It took me some time. I thought I must be still dreaming, and lay there staring into the blackness with unbelieving eyes. Then I pinched myself and struck my hands sharply against the thwarts. But it was of no use. I could not convince myself that I was not the victim of some ghastly nightmare. Then the idea came into my mind that, although awake, I had suddenly become blind; that Tom had gone ashore

for a stroll, and that the boat, drifting, had been carried out to sea by some current. Under the influence of this notion, I leaped to my feet, only to be at once struck down again, as if by a hand of iron. Although not completely stunned, I was, for a few minutes, quite bewildered. I could feel, too, that my head was bleeding freely. Sitting cautiously up, I called "Tom!" I listened intently, but nothing was audible save the faint gurgling sound of the water. I called repeatedly, but there was no answer. Suddenly I recollected that in my pocket was a large metal box full of matches—long wax vestas.

'Striking one, I held it aloft and gazed eagerly about me. I thanked God that I was not blind. But, so far as I could see, I was alone.

'On each side, and a foot or so above my head, barely visible in the feeble glimmer, were swiftly passing walls of dripping rock, covered, in many places, with hugh clusters of shiny weeds. So amazed was I at my perfectly inexplicable situation that I stared until the match burned my fingers and dropped into the water, whilst I fell back quite overcome by astonishment and fright.

'Then, after a bit, I struck more matches. But things were just the same. Always the rocky weed-grown sides, sometimes within touch, at others seeming to widen out; always the rocky, dripping roof, sometimes at my head, at others out of sight; always the darkness, the hurrying boat, and the water like liquid pitch.

'Unable to see thoroughly over the boat, I presently crawled for'ard, feeling, as I went, under the sail which had fallen over the thwarts. As I feared, I found no one.

'Groping about, I picked up Tom's pipe. And then I feared the worst for him.

'The darkness was horrible. It was so thick that one seemed to swallow mouthfuls of it. The atmosphere was close and muggy, with a smell reminding me strongly of a tannery. Although lightly clad, I was bathed in perspiration as I half sat, half crouched, at the boat's stern, straining my eyes ahead, and now and again lighting one of my matches. Time nor distance had any meaning for me, now; and I have no idea how long I had been voyaging in this unnatural fashion, when there fell on my ears the loud threatening roar of many waters. Commending my soul to God, I laid myself in the boat's bottom. The next minute she seemed to stand nearly upright and then shoot downward like a flash, whilst thick spray flew in showers over me, and the imprisoned waters roared and howled with deafening clamour adown the narrow chasm, so narrow that more than once, in her headlong course, I heard splinters fly from the boat's timbers, whilst masses of dank weeds detached by the blows fell upon me.

'I now,' continued the Captain, after a pause, during which he glanced from the 'tell-tale' compass overhead to the attentive, wondering faces of

his audience—'I now gave myself up for lost, or, at least, imagined that I did so. But the love of life is strong indeed within us; so that when after shooting this subterranean cataract, or whatever it might have been, I found my boat once more steadily gliding along, ever with the same dull gurgle of cleft water at her bows, a faint ray of hope took the place of despairing calm. I was young, remember; healthy, too, powerful and agile beyond the common, and I felt it would be hard indeed to die like a rat in that black hole. What accentuated the hope I speak of was the fact that the lessening roar of the torrent I had just passed sounded as if directly overhead. In vain I told myself that it was but a deceptive echo. Hope would have her say, and buoyed me up, though ever so little, with the idea, incredible as it seemed, that this horrible underground river had doubled back beneath itself, and was making for the sea once more. It has well been said that drowning men will clutch at straws! This one, indeed, was soon to fail me; for presently, to my utter despair, the noise of tumultuous waters ahead gave warning of another cataract—another, or the same one, for, what with the din and the darkness, I became quite confused. The passage was a repetition of the last one, only, if anything, rougher; and, crushed in spirit, all courage flown, I sank back, listening to the rush of the falling water dying away overhead again. Was I, I wondered, descending to even

lower depths of earth's bowels in this fashion, or merely driven to and fro at the caprice of some remorseless current in what was to prove my tomb! I believe that, for a time, under the stress of ideas like this, my mind wandered; for I have a vague remembrance of singing comic songs, of shouting defiance to fate, the darkness, and things generally; behaving, in fact, like the lunatic I must have become. Whether I descended any more rapids or not I cannot say. I have no recollection whatever of the last part of my strange journey. When, however, I came to my sober senses again I was at the end of it. The boat was motionless, and I was standing upright in her.'

At this point in the Captain's story, and while the interest of his hearers was at its height, the chief officer came quietly in, and, catching his superior's eye, as quietly made his way out again.

Now, four bells struck, and the Captain exclaimed, 'What, ten o'clock already! My yarn has somewhat spun itself out, and I'm afraid the rest must keep for another evening.'

At this there was quite a chorus of remonstrance. 'It was cruel to have excited their curiosity and leave it unsatisfied,' was the general verdict.

'No sleep for me to-night,' said Miss Hillier; 'I shall be wandering through that horrid place in my thoughts, and puzzling my brain to discover how you got out, unless I know the sequel.'

'It grieves me to think of your disturbed rest,'

replied the Captain, with a bow and a quizzical smile, 'although honoured by the cause of it. I am afraid, however, I must refuse even you. I saw heavy weather just now in Mr Santley's eye; and the ship, you know, before all.'

Then the sound of ropes thrown heavily on deck was heard, together with tramp of feet and shouting, the ship heeled over, and the Captain went out, and was not again seen that night by his passengers.

THE SECOND EVENING.

CLOSE-REEFED top-sails, with a wild, high sea, met on 'rounding the corner,' did not prevent the *Corona's* passengers from putting in an appearance the next evening to hear the continuation of the Captain's story.

'Well,' he remarked, as he took his seat, 'this yarn of mine seems to bring us luck, judging by the way we exchanged our trades last night for this rattling westerly breeze that is now taking us round the Cape so nicely. I think I left off my story,' continued the Captain, 'as the boat came to a stop in her travels, through the darkness.'

'I had recovered from my temporary fit of madness, and was standing up. I was trembling violently, and my limbs felt cramped and stiff. I fancy I must have been a long time on the journey, for I was sick and

faint, principally from want of food. The air, though still heavy and warm, was not so oppressive as it had been. But the former silence was broken by the most unearthly noises imaginable, sobbings, deep cavernous groans, and hoarse whistlings resounded on every side. For a long time I did not stir. I just stood listening with all my ears, and expecting every moment that something awful was going to take place.

'After a while, slightly reassured, and feeling the boat's bows scraping some hard substance, I crept into them, and putting out my hand, and groping about alongside, felt a mass of smooth honeycombed stone. Striking a match, the possession of which, in my confused state of mind, I had almost forgotten, I got hold of the painter and took a couple of turns around a projecting ledge of rock.

'Then I scooped up a handful of water and tasted it. It was as bitter as gall, also quite lukewarm. Happily that in the breaker was unspoiled. Rummaging about, I found the case of eatables also intact; and, sitting there in profound darkness, made a meal of cheese and white biscuits, listening between the mouthfuls to the mysterious noises, whose origin, however, I was now enabled pretty well to guess at.

'It was very warm, and the tannery smell more powerful than ever. A sensation of surrounding vastness and space, however, was with me as opposed to the confined cramped feeling of being in a narrow channel, such as I suppose myself to have emerged from. Now, I could stand upright and thrust an oar

out and upwards without touching anything; and, shouting aloud, the sound went echoing and thundering away over the surface of the water with reverberations lasting for minutes.

'I can take you into that place,' continued the Captain impressively, 'and tell you about it as far as my poor words will serve. But I cannot tell you my feelings. At times I almost imagined that I was in Hades, and that the ceaseless noises about me were the cries and groans of lost souls therein. At others, a wild, forlorn hope would seize me, that it might all turn out to be only a horrible dream, and that I should presently awake to see God's dear sun shining brightly on the gallant ship and the green island once more. It had all happened with such startling rapidity, the transformation had been so utter and complete, that to this day I wonder I did not become a raving madman, and so perish miserably down there in the depths. But God in His infinite mercy took pity upon me, and brought me at the last out of such a prison as it is given to few men to see, much less escape from.

'Like the majority of seafarers, I, in those days, seldom troubled my head about what is vaguely called "religion."

'The careful and pious teachings of my childhood had been forgotten almost wholly. But, in that awesome place, in solitude and misery, bound with darkness of Scripture, "that might be felt," many things came back to me; and, kneeling down, I clasped my hands and

prayed fervently that I might be saved out of the valley of the shadow of death which encompassed me. Feeling better and stronger, I took my sheath-knife, and with it cut away at one of the oars until I had quite a respectable pile of chips. Placing this on the rock alongside, I set it on fire, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing it blaze cheerfully up and, for a few yards, dispel the darkness. I kept adding fuel from the same source, with the addition of a couple of stretchers, until I had a really good-sized fire. By its light I saw that I was on a flat rock some twenty feet in circumference. Round about were other islets, shaped most fantastically. One, close to, resembled a gigantic horseshoe; another towered up, the perfect similitude of a church spire, into the darkness. At their bases were holes, into and through which the water, flowing and ebbing, produced the sounds that at first had so alarmed me. Look as I might, I could not distinguish the way I had come in, although I thought I could hear the steady pouring of a volume of water not far away. Breaking off a lump of the stone on which I sat, I examined it closely, and felt pretty certain that it was lava. I had seen such before at Mauna Loa, in the Sandwich Islands.

'Was I then in the womb of a volcano, extinct just at present, doubtless; but, perhaps, even now, taking in water preparatory to generating steam and becoming active? Somewhere in my reading I had dropped across an article on seismology, and one of the theories put forward came to mind as above.

'The idea made my flesh creep!

'I seemed to feel the air, the water, and my lump of lava getting hotter and hotter.

'Hopeless as my case appeared, and almost resigned to face the end as I had become, even so, I did by no means relish a private view of the preliminaries to a volcanic eruption.

'Strangely inconsistent, you will say, but so it was. When face to face, even with the last scene of all, it seems there can yet be something of which one may be afraid.

'Meanwhile, my beacon blazed up brightly, and, peering around, I presently made out a pile of stuff apparently floating against the base of one of the nearest islets.

'Taking a flaring fire-stick, I got into the boat and sculled over to it. It was a heap of driftwood. Lowering my torch to examine the stuff more closely, I nearly pitched overboard, as, out of the reddish-black water within the ragged patch of light, a white, dead face gazed up at me with wide-open, staring eyes. I recognised it at once as that of my old shipmate. Tom, on awaking, had evidently been knocked out of the boat and drowned, as so nearly happened to myself. The current had as evidently carried him here with me.

'I leaned over the gunwale as if fascinated. What would I not have given for his living companionship now!

'Lifting, at last, one of the stiff arms, I shook the unresponsive hand in silent farewell, and paddled back

towards the flame that marked my islet, actually feeling envious of the quiet corpse. Misfortune makes us sadly selfish, and so little had my thoughts ran on the fate of my comrade that the shock of his appearance thus was a heavy one.

'I took it as a bad omen, and what spirit I had nearly left me.

'After sitting motionless on my rock for a very long time, with my head bowed on my knees, and nearly letting my fire go out, I shook myself together a little, threw more chips on, and examined my stores.

'All told, with cheese, biscuits, several tins of potted meat and preserves, I reckoned there was enough, on meagre allowance, to last me for a week. Water about the same.

'More than once I felt tempted to throw the lot overboard and follow it.

'But youth and health and strength are indeed wondrous things, and a man possessed of them will do and dare much before giving up entirely, no matter how drear the outlook, how sharp the arrows of fate which transfix him!

'Feeling weary and fagged, I lay down in the boat and slept, I suppose, for hours very soundly.

'The awaking was bad—worse even than the first time.

'One thing comforted me somewhat. I found that by the constant endeavour to use my eyes in the darkness I was becoming able to discern at least the dim outlines of objects.

'Renewing the fire with a lot of driftwood I picked up at the further side of my islet, I proceeded to carry out a plan I had formed. Taking the gratings out of the stern-sheets, I arranged them firmly in the bows. Then, breaking off projecting lumps and knobs of lava, I beat them smaller with an iron pin, which I fortunately found in the boat, and spread them thickly over the gratings, thus forming a sort of stage. Upon this I built a substantial fire. I was, you see, bound on a voyage of exploration.

'There might, possibly, be some avenue to freedom out of this subterranean sea other than the one I had entered it from, exit by which was, of course, hopeless.

'It was, I argued, useless to stay on the rock. I could not be much worse off, no matter where I got to.

'How I yearned and hungered for light no tongue could tell. It seemed so hard to wander in the gloom for a brief night of existence. And then, the end! Do you, any of you, wonder at my hair turning grey?

'As I scraped the last embers off the islet on to the tin dish used as a baler, in order to throw them on the new fire, the light fell full upon the corpse, which, to all appearance, had just floated alongside.

'My nerves were evidently getting unstrung by what I had gone through, for, letting the dish fall, I shouted with terror, and, jumping into the boat, pushed wildly away from the poor body. To my unutterable dismay

it followed me, with one arm extended and raised slightly, as if in deprecation of my desertion of it.

'I have thought at times,' remarked the Captain parenthetically, 'of what a picture the scene would make—the boat floating in a patch of crimson water, with the fire flaring into the blackness on her bows, myself standing up grasping an oar, and gazing intently at the nearly nude body as it came closer and closer, and everywhere around the thick darkness.

'I think that in another moment I should have leapt overboard, so great was my fright, but that I happened to catch sight of a piece of rope leading from the boat to the body.

'Getting hold of it, I pulled, and the corpse came also. Then I understood. On my leaving it the first time a portion of the sail halliards, which had been towing overhead, had got foul of the body, and, unperceived, I had brought it back to my islet with me.

'My presence of mind returned, and, not caring to run the risk of more surprises of the sort, I again landed, and pulled the body on to the islet.

'There must have been some preserving agent in that water, for, despite the heat, there was no sign of decomposition, and the features were as fresh as in life.

'Sculling gently along, with my fire blazing bravely and comfortingly at the bow, I set off into the unknown.

'For a time my attention was thoroughly taken up in trying to avoid the numerous lava islets, whose presence I could scarcely detect until right upon them. Indeed, once or twice we bumped heavily enough to send showers of hot ashes hissing into the water.

'At last, after a long spell of this kind of blind navigation, I seemed to get clearer of these provoking islets. The noises also, to which I was becoming quite accustomed, nearly ceased.

'As I sculled warily along, I listened with all my ears for some indication of a return current. It was my one hope, and it kept every sense on the alert.

'But the water within the radius of my so limited vision was quiet and still as in a covered reservoir—much more so, now, indeed, than at my old resting-place. This fact I accounted for by the emptying near there of the underground, possibly under-sea river, which had brought me into such an awful fix.

'Presently the boat bumped more violently than ever, and by the flame-light which shot up from the disturbed fire, I saw, rising far aloft, a solid wall of rock. No lava islet this, but the end of all—the boundary, in this direction, of my prison.

'To right and left stretched the same grim barrier, dropping sheer down into the still black water. With a sinking heart I turned the boat's head along the wall to my right hand, keeping a little distance out, moving very slowly, with just a turn or two of the oar, sufficient only to keep way on her.



The light fell full upon the corpse. (Page 246.)

'It may have been minutes, or it may have been hours, when, straight ahead, over the somewhat feeble light of my fire, which had proved, after all, more help by way of company than use, I imagined the darkness looked thinner. Inspired by the mere idea, I sculled vigorously along, at the risk of complete wreck from some sunken rock, and in a short time the boat shot into an oblong-shaped streak of light—light, that is, comparatively, for it was as dim as starlight; although, so acclimatised, if I may use the term, had my eyes become to the denser medium, that by its aid I could see clearly every article in the boat.

'I will not trouble you with a description of my feelings, nor of all the extravagancies I committed in the first flush of delighted hope that had visited me. I seemed to be once more in touch with the upper world through that column of dim greyness ascending through the darkness, and so weak as hardly to be able to conquer it.'

Here the Captain paused. He had told his story well; seldom at a loss for a word, and with now and again, but rarely, an appropriate gesture.

So successful had he been in gaining the attention of his listeners, that, when he ceased, they sat quite silent, gazing at him fixedly, and for some minutes no one spoke.

Then four bells, which struck on deck during a lull in the roar of the gale, came with such sudden

distinctness to their ears, as to make some of the ladies start and utter timid little ejaculations.

The spell broken, a chorus of tongues clamoured out. Miss Hillier alone was silent. Then some dear foolish female affinity said, 'Why, Amy, love, you've been crying!' This the girl, with flaming cheeks denied, only the next minute to affirm, quite inconsequently, that if she had wept (which she was certain she had not), was not such a tale enough to make one, with any heart at all, shed tears?

THE THIRD EVENING.

EAST by S- $\frac{1}{2}$ -South, under fore and main courses and upper and lower top-sails, sped the *Corona* with the wind on her quarter. Aft, rose great water-hills darkly green, with white crests, seeming, as each followed each, to hang momentarily suspended over the stern and threaten to overwhelm everything; then, as the good ship rose just in the nick of time, breaking with a long surge in sheets of milky foam away for'ard.

The sun was setting sullenly behind a dense cloud-bank. An albatross or two flew screaming from one wave-crest to another right in the wake. It was a typical evening in the Southern Ocean, the long wash of whose seas reach from the foot of Cape Leuwin to the rugged cliffs of Fuego.

'Well,' continued the Captain, without any preface, as he took his seat facing the waiting and expectant little party.

'Well, stare as I might aloft, I could not discover to where this Jacob's ladder led. You see, at its best, it was only a column of dusky twilight, and the further end, from where I stood, was lost to view. As I gazed, it appeared to be gradually fading away. I rubbed my eyes; and when I again looked, all around was blacker than the blackest midnight, except where my fire still burned. For a while, I was puzzled to account for the disappearance of the light. Then the thought struck me that it might be caused by the fall of night in the upper world. Was I, I wondered, as I turned sadly to my fire, ever again to look upon the bright day, the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the wonders of that fair earth now grown so dear to me? Truly was I one of those unhappy men who, as the Psalmist says, "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron."

'Close to the pillar of light, just on its outside edge, I had noticed a long, slender, almost perpendicular pinnacle of lava towering upwards like the spire of a church.

'At the base of this I securely moored my boat. Then, thinking that a cup of tea would cheer me up a little, I brewed one, and made a good meal. After this, lying down, I pondered many things, gazing always aloft.

'Once I imagined I saw a star; but it disappeared before I could make sure.

'The one question uppermost in my mind was whether or not the glimmer would reappear when the morning broke above, or had it been an illusion? One thing encouraged me to hope for the best. It was perceptibly cooler, a grateful change from the warm mugginess I had encountered everywhere else. I had, by this, contracted a habit of talking aloud, and I presently caught myself saying that I would climb the lava pinnacle in the morning and try to get a better look-out.

"In the morning."

'The utter vanity of the so familiar phrase as it fell on my ears struck me with all the force of some terrible shock, whilst the cold deadening thought seized upon me that, for me, in this world, there was to be no more morning. Through darkness was I to make the last journey towards that dread bourne whence no traveller returns? The slow death in the darkness, drifting about on the bitter waters of that secret sea—that was the thought that my soul revolted from. And strange thoughts, horrible thoughts, a man thinks placed as I was. At times his reason leaves him, his whole soul rises in impious revolt, and the devil rages freely therein, as if already his victim's bed were made in hell.

'But, thanks be to God!' exclaimed the Captain, fervently, 'that the recollections of that hideous time —of the fits of doubt and despair and terror and

madness, of which I have said but little to you—grow dimmer and weaker with the years, leaving only in enduring relief the memory of a great mercy!

'It pleased me, though, unproved as it was, that notion of being able to distinguish between night and daylight. The very fact, pure conjecture though it might be, of having the power to say, "Night has come," seemed to bring peace to my wearied eyes; so that I presently lay down and slept dreamlessly, and on awakening found again, to my intense joy, that mild, soft haze falling upon me.

'Scarcely giving myself time to snatch a mouthful of biscuit and a draught of cold tea, I jumped ashore and commenced the ascent of the tapering mass of rock. It was, as I have said, nearly perpendicular, and there was no lack of foot and hand-holds—projections sharp as razors, formed by the drippings of the once molten lava. Thanks to my trained vision and the help afforded by the close proximity of the light, I could see dimly. Higher up, the projecting spurs and knobs grew scarcer, and the surface more smooth and slippery. It was terrible work. At home I had had some practice as a cragsman, and this stood to me well now. As I climbed, sometimes vertically, at others spirally, wherever I could feel the firmest hold, the atmosphere grew palpably clearer, and this infused new strength into my aching limbs as I crawled upwards, now hanging by one bleeding hand over the abyss beneath me, now with both hands breathlessly embracing some sharp spur that cut into

my flesh, whilst my feet groped convulsively for precarious support.

'When just about spent, I unexpectedly came to the top. I found only room enough there to sit down and pant. A wild hope had filled my breast that this rocky ladder would lead me to liberty—a hope growing stronger with every upward step. As I looked around, these hopes fell, and the old leaden weight of despair seemed to settle once more upon my soul. Slanting away from me on every side, stretched the rugged acclivities of a vast amphitheatre, converging again towards its summit, where the blue sky was distinctly visible. Picture to yourselves an hour-glass with a long tunnel-like waist. Place a straw, the end of which rests on the bottom of the lower section of the glass and reaches up through the tunnel until just on a level with the sloping-upward portion of the top section, but touching it nowhere. Now place a minute insect on the very tip of the straw, and you have my situation as nearly as I can explain it to you. And there I crouched on my lava straw, stretching out unavailing hands to those scarred cliffs of liberty, betwixt me and which spread that dark abyss, with the mournful waters of the bitter sea at its foot. The distance between where I sat on the top of the pinnacle and the sloping walls of the crater all round must have been about twenty five feet. I think it was afterwards measured as that. A hundred plans darted swiftly into my mind for crossing this little space, which meant so much to me, only to be as quickly dismissed as impracticable.

'Although still very far from day, it was yet light enough to let me see that the sides of the crater, nearly equi-distant around my perch, were cut and ploughed into deep furrows, and that, once there, I should have comparatively little trouble in reaching upper air.

'Would it be possible, I wondered, to splice what remained of the oars together, and thus make some kind of a bridge along which to creep? But the idea of again facing such a climb with such an unwieldy burden made me shudder. Also, I doubted much if there was length enough to reach across, supposing I ever got them to where I was. This one amongst many other plans. All at once, as I sat gazing alternately at the far, far away patch of blue overhead, and the dark rocks opposite, there flashed across my thoughts the recollection of the boat's grapnel. I had seen nothing of it. But it might still be hanging under her bows. Attached to the stern-post by a short length of chain shackled to a ring-bolt, it would have taken a heavy shock to shift it. If I could but get a line across and, by help of the grapnel, firmly secured to the opposite side, I felt I was saved. Tearing up the light dungaree jumper I was wearing, and which, with the remainder of my clothing, was little else but a rag, I bound pieces around my stiff and wounded hands and feet, and commenced the descent. It was an awful journey, worse than the coming up. Then, my skin was whole, at the start, anyhow; now, the cuts and tears re-opened and bled and stung more than ever. At one

time, indeed, I felt that I must give up and let go. But the thought of the grapnel appeared to endue me with fresh strength, whilst, in my mind's eye, I kept steadfastly the memory of that dear glimpse of blue sky. At length, looking down and pausing for a moment, I saw a flicker of light. It was from the dying embers of my fire, and, in a few minutes, I was in the boat. Although nearly utterly exhausted, crawling for'ard, I felt for the chain. It was there; and pulling it rapidly in, what was my delight to find the little grapnel still at its end. Replenishing my fire, I made some tea, preparatory to having something to eat, for I knew I should want all my strength presently. In hauling at the chain my hands had got wet, and, to my surprise, the bleeding had ceased, and the pain almost departed. I immediately bathed my feet, and felt wonderfully relieved thereby. Now, I had my tea, and then considered whether it might not be wiser to pass the night where I was, and take a full day for my attempt. God knows how eager I was for the moment of trial to arrive! Still, I chose the prudent side, and sat and watched the hazy column turn first to a dull green, then to ashen grey, then go out suddenly, and so I knew, certainly now, that the day was over on the earth.

'As the darkness, thick and impenetrable, closed me in, I lay down thinking to sleep a little, but my rest was disturbed and broken. Always, as I dozed off, I was clambering painfully up that terrible rock, with bleeding hands and feet, staggering under huge burdens of rope and iron. Once I dreamt that my shipmate's

body had floated off the islet, and was, even now, with white clammy fingers, striving to lift itself into the boat, whilst the ghastly face peered at me over the side. This effectually awoke me; but so strong was the impression, that I seized a fire-stick, and, making it blaze up, searched sharply around. I had my trouble for my pains. But further attempt at sleep for me was out of the question.

'My dawn, such as it was, came at last. I had already detached the grapnel from its chain, and unrove the halliards from the mast. These last I wound round and round my body, fully thirty feet of line, small "Europe" rope, but tough and strong. The disposal of my precious grapnel, which, luckily, was one of the smallest of its kind, only used, as we had used it, for a temporary holdfast, bothered me a good deal.

'Finally, I placed my head between two of the flukes, one of which then rested on each shoulder, whilst the stock hung down my back, swinging loosely. To make sure of the flukes not slipping, I passed a piece of line from one to the other, and knotted it securely.

'It was a most uncomfortable fixture altogether, a tight fit for my neck into the bargain, but I could think of no other way.

'I'm not going to inflict upon you a detailed description of how I reached the top—I believe it must have been fully five hundred feet—carrying that half-hundred weight of iron, to say nothing of the rope.

Indeed, I hardly know myself. However, get there I did; but, as you may guess, in a very evil plight.

'I recollect, when still some thirty feet from the top, unable to bear any longer the horrible chafing of the flukes, which had broken through the skin, and were grinding against the bone, that I rested, or, rather, balanced myself on a sharp ledge, whilst casting the grapnel adrift from my shoulders, and unwinding the rope from my body. Then, making one end of the line fast to the ring in the stock, I fastened the other round my waist, the grapnel all this time resting loosely on the rock.

'Leaving it there, and paying out the line cautiously into the void below me, away I went again, bracing myself at every step to withstand the awful jerk should the grapnel slip off, and tighten the rope with the momentum of its fall. If such a thing had happened, and the chances were many, my fate was certain—a few scrambling clutches and annihilation. But where it went I had made up my mind to go also.

'It was my only and last hope, that bit of crooked four-clawed iron! Death was in every step I took, and I believe that it was in those last few feet that my hair turned its colour, so terrible was the suspense and expectation.

'But God was very good to me, and I reached the summit with a couple of feet of line to spare. Dragging the grapnel up, I crouched down on the little flat, table-like top, and fairly sobbed with pain and exhaustion.

'To my alarm, I felt myself growing weaker instead of stronger from my rest. The fact was that, with the awful cutting about I had received, I had lost a good deal of blood. Many of the deeper cuts on my hands and arms were bleeding still. Evidently there was no time to lose. Standing up, feeling sick and dizzy, I coiled down my line for a fair throw, and, grasping it some three feet or so above the grapnel, swung it to and fro until I thought impetus enough was attained, then hove with all my remaining strength.

'I shut my eyes, expecting to hear every second the sound of iron clanging far beneath against the sides of the pinnacle. When I opened them again, the line was hanging in a slack bight across the chasm. The little anchor had fallen directly into one of the deep furrows, but perilously close to the edge. With trembling fingers I hauled the line in. Tighter, tighter, tighter still, then with all the force I could command. Would it support the weight of my body, or would it come?

'Without staying to argue the question, I made it fast afresh to a round nob, the only one on the place. Then, saying a short prayer, and taking a last glance at the blue sky, I let myself slip gently off the rock, hanging with my hands on the thin, hempen line.

'It sagged terribly. I could plainly hear my heart knocking and thumping against my ribs. It sagged and "gave" still more. Imagining that I heard the noise of the grapnel scraping and dragging, I looked

upon myself as lost. But I still continued to drag myself across. It was a long, terrible agony, and, more than once, I thought I should have to let go. My hands almost refused to close upon the rope. But I still, almost as in a dream, worked myself along. Once I caught myself wondering if I should fall into or near the boat, and whether the dead man would be there to receive me. Then a horrible fancy seized me that I was making no progress, but that my hands were glued to the rope with blood—ever in the same spot. Then suddenly, in my now mechanical motions, my head hit with great violence against rock. This effectually aroused me. I was at the threshold of liberty—the edge of the crater, where it sloped quickly away below.

‘I hung there whilst one might count twenty, looking up. I was three feet beneath the rim. The rope had given that much.

‘I don’t remember in the least pulling myself up and over that overhanging ledge. When my senses returned, I was lying in the furrow alongside the grapnel, and a rush of cold water was sweeping under me. How long I had been there I have no notion. Certainly a great many hours. The rain was pouring down in tropical torrents; thunder pealed above me, and the lightning flashed and darted in vain endeavour to pierce the lower abyss.

‘After many fruitless attempts, I staggered to my feet. I felt so dreadfully weak and faint that I thought I was about to die. But a glance aloft gave me fresh

heart. The dark clouds of the thunderstorm were passing over, and full upon my nearly naked body fell the warm rays of the glorious sun. I almost at that moment, Parsee-like, worshipped him.

'Painfully, stumbling at every step, I crawled upwards, with many a rest and draught of the rain water, caught in rocky hollows, until, after a weary time, and feeling as one risen from the tomb, I emerged into the full light of day once more.

'Naked, bleeding, bruised, but free, I stood on the topmost peak of that fateful island. At first everything swam before my vision. Trees, the ocean, the far horizon, reeled and shook, advanced and receded to my dazzled eyes. The sun was low in the heavens. As things gradually assumed their natural appearance, I became conscious of a great ship lying at anchor, of a cluster of white tents not a hundred yards away from me.

'But of these things, for a space, I took no heed. Sun, air, water and sky held my regards in ecstasy. I drank the beauty and the newness of them in till my soul was saturated with the tender loveliness of that nature to which I had been for so long a stranger. Then, and not till then, I tottered towards the clump of tents lying just below me.

'Men were there, carpenters apparently, hammering at a tall wooden structure. Other men—men-o'-war seamen by their rig—were arriving and departing with burdens.

'I was close upon them before they saw me. Some

shrank back. One, I recollect, picked up a rifle and brought it to his shoulder. A man with a gold epaulette on his coat struck it up and spoke to the sailor in English.

'Presently I was taken into a tent, a doctor appeared from somewhere, and, whilst he dressed my wounds, they gave me a cordial, and I told my story with what seemed to me like the voice of a stranger. I don't remember much afterwards until I awoke, swinging in a hammock under a shady tree close to the tents.

'I was a mass of bandages, but sensible, though terribly weak.

"'You've had a narrow escape of brain fever, my lad," said the doctor. "But we've pulled you through all right. Lucky we happened to be here, though, wasn't it? A nice time you must have had down there. We found your rope; but our men didn't care about venturing any further, as steam was beginning to come up."

"'Four days," replied the doctor, in answer to my question, "it is since you appeared on the scene and scared the camp.

"'The *Bucephalus*? Yes, curiously enough, we met her just entering Singapore Harbour. That's ten days ago. She spoke us, and asked us to keep a look-out for her boat with two seamen. We have one of them, at all events. I suppose the other poor beggar will be thrown up presently."

'I looked at him. "Yes," he continued, "the old

volcano is showing every indication of renewed activity. We came here to observe the transit of Venus, but shall have probably to pack up and form another station if those symptoms don't subside. See there!"

'Looking in the direction of his outstretched finger, I saw several tall puffs of what seemed like white smoke issuing from the depths of the crater.

The observers were loth to shift their quarters; but, when some red-hot cinders from below set one of the tents on fire, they accepted the hint.

'Still in my hammock, I was presently carried down the mountain and on board H.M.S. *Hygeia*, where, with careful and skilled attention, I soon recovered.'

The Captain ceased speaking. For a time nothing was heard except the steady blast of the 'Roaring Forties' overhead.

Asked a passenger presently,—

'And did the volcano really explode after all?'

'It did, indeed,' replied Captain Marion; 'but not for a month afterwards, and then so fiercely as to scatter death and destruction throughout those narrow seas, grinding the island of Krakatoa itself into cosmic dust—visible, according to scientists, nearly all over the world.'

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Here ends the story proper as compiled from the notes taken by one of the passengers and jotted down in his cabin of a night as the Captain finished each section of his narrative.

Lower down on the last pages of these notes is

gummed, however, a printed paragraph, cut from a Sydney daily newspaper, which runs as follows:—

MARION—HILLIER.—On the 29th ultimo, at St James's Church of England, Sydney, by the Rev. R. Garnsey, George Wreford Marion, master in the British Mercantile Marine, to Amy Margaret, daughter of the late John Hillier, Esq., of Pevensey, Miller's Point, Sydney, and Eureka and Whydah stations, Riverina, N.S.W.

‘DOT’S CLAIM.’

IT was evening in the German Arms at Schwartzdorf. Great fires blazed in all the rooms of that old-fashioned hostelry, welcome enough on entering from the chill, wild weather ruling over the mountainland outside.

Tired with a heavy day’s work at inspecting the mining claims, which were beginning to attract notice to this secluded spot, it was with a feeling of satisfaction that, after tea, I drew a chair up to the fire, lit my pipe, and made myself comfortable.

Presently there was a knock at the door and, in response to my ‘Come in,’ there entered the man who told me this story.

In his hand he carried a canvas bag, whose contents he emptied on the table with the remark, ‘I thought perhaps you might like to see these.’

Very beautiful they were, without doubt—quartz, ironstone and gold, mingled in the most fantastic manner; grotesque attempts by Nature’s untrained fingers at crosses, hearts, stars, and other shapes defying name.

‘We got these the last shot knocking off to-night,’ said

the owner of the pretty things as I asked him to sit down. 'You might remember me tellin' you as I didn't think we was very far from the main reef. I believe we got it now in good earnest. Same lead as is in "Dot's Claim." Same sort o' country. Reef runnin' with the same dip. An' you knows yourself, sir, as they took forty-five pound weight o' specimens richer than them out o' "Dot's" this mornin'.'

'I beg your pardon,' I said after a hasty glance at my note-book, 'but I don't remember any such name. I thought, too, that I had seen all the most important claims.'

'Why, of course,' he replied, 'I forgot! It's only a few of us old hands as knows the story as calls it Dot's now. When the big company took it from Fairleigh they names it the "El Dorado." I reckon t'other was too short—didn't sound high enough for 'em. But if it hasn't the best right to the old name I'd like to know the reason why.'

'El Dorado,' I remarked; 'why that's the original prospector's claim.'

My visitor nodded, saying, 'An' I'm No. 2 South.'

'Ward and party?' I inquired, referring again to my memos.

'That's it. I'm Ward.'

'Well, then, Mr Ward, I want to hear that story you hinted at just now. Kindly touch that bell at your elbow. Thanks.'

It may have been only fancy, but I thought that between blooming Gretchen journeying to and fro with

hot water, tumblers, sugar, etc., etc., and my lucky reefer glances passed betokening a more than casual acquaintance.

'Yes, Gretchen, you may as well leave the kettle.'

I am trying to air my German, but fail lamentably, judging from the expression on the girl's full, fresh-coloured features as she struggles to avoid laughing. Even my visitor smiles. Everything is German here—bar, luckily, the beds. Outside the wind howled and beat against the curtained windows, and the rain fell dully on the shingled roof, and the roar of the Broken River came to our ears between the storm gusts.

Inside, the fire flickered and fell, sending deep shadows over the pine-panelled walls and the grave handsome face of my companion, the first fruits of whose labour shone sullenly under the shaded lamplight. From a distant room rose and died away faintly the chorus of some song of the Fatherland.

'Now,' said I, as Gretchen finally closed the door, 'now for the story.'

'Well,' commenced Ward, after getting his pipe into good going order, 'it's over eight years ago since I came here from the West Coast—Hokitika. I'd been diggin' there. But my luck was clean out, so I chucked it up, an', after a lot of knockin' about, settles down here—would you believe it?—farmin'!

'Now I know'd as much about farmin' as a cow does o' reefin'. Cert'nly my mate—for there was a pair of us—had been scarin' crows for a farmer in the Old Country when he was a boy. That wasn't much.

Still, on the strength o' that experience, he used to give himself airs.

'I think it was two years afore we got a crop o' anythin'. Then it was potatoes. When we tried to sell 'em we couldn't get an offer. Everybody had potatoes. So we just turned to an' lived on 'em. They're fillin', doubtless. But potatoes and fish, an' fish an' potatoes for a change, all the year round, gets tiresome in the long run.

'I often wonder now what could have possessed me an' Bill to go in for such a thing as farmin'. But there, when a chap's luck's out diggin', he's glad to tackle anythin' for a change!

'Presently one or two more, men with fam'lies, settles close to us and tries to make a livin'. It didn't amount to much. Then up comes a string o' Germans, trampin' along from the coast, carryin' furniture an' tools, beds—ay, even their old women on their backs. An' they settles, an' starts the same game—clearin', an' ploughin', an' sowin'. But I couldn't see as any of 'em was makin' a pile. They worked like bullocks, women an' all, late an' early. The harder they worked, the poorer they seemed to get. Bill an' me had a pound or two saved up for a rainy day. But they had nothin'; an' how they lived was a mystery. So, you see, takin' things all round, it was high time somethin' turned up. An' somethin' did. The next farm to us belonged to a married couple. He was a runaway sailor. She'd been a passenger

on board. They had one child, just turned four year old, an' they was both fair wrapped up in that kid.

'If Dot's—Dot was his pet name—finger only ached, the work might go to Jericho.

'An' indeed he were a most loveable little chap. With regards to him, we was all of us 'most as bad as the father an' mother, the way we played with him an' petted him. There was no denyin' Dot of anythin' once he looked at you out o' those big blue eyes o' his. And the knowledgeableness of him! No wonder Jim Fairleigh an' his missis thought the sun rose every mornin' out o' the back o' their boy's neck.'

Here Ward paused and queried,—

'Married man, sir?'

'No,' I replied.

'No more 'm I,' he continued, 'or I don't s'pose I'd be here yarning a night like this.'

'It's a wonder,' I said, 'that none of these jolly-looking *Fräuleins* about here have been able to take your fancy.'

'Well, to tell the truth,' he replied, with, however, a rather conscious expression on his face, 'I think what those poor Fairleighs went through rather scared me of marryin'.'

'But, as I was sayin', farmin' didn't seem to agree with my mate, Bill—that's him you seen at the claim to-day—spite o' his past experience, any more'n it did with me. *He* done the business, by - the - bye, quite

lately with a bouncin' gal—Lieschen Hertzog—an' now stays at home o' nights.

'We had a note or two left. We had also a crop o' potatoes an' some punkins. But no one wanted 'em—wouldn't buy 'em at any price. In fact, you couldn't give 'em away in those times.

'The Fairleighs an', I think, all of us, were pretty much in the same box. As I said before, it was time somethin' turned up.

'It was a wild night. Bill an' me was lyin' in our stretchers readin'. About ten o'clock, open flies the door, an' in bolts Fairleigh drippin' wet, no hat on, an' pale as a ghost, an' stands there like a statue, starin' at us, without a word.

"'In God's name what's the matter?'" I says at last. With that he flaps his hands about, so-fashion, an' sings out, "Dot's lost in the ranges!"

'You may bet that shook us up a bit! You've seen the Broken Ranges for yourself, an' can judge what chance a delicate little kiddy like Dot 'd have among them rocks an' scrub on a worse night than this is.

'That fool of a sailor-man, if you'll believe me, an' his wife had been out sence dark searchin' for the child, 'stead o' rousin' the settlement. Presently, to make matters worse, it appears that he'd lost the woman too—got separated in the scrub, an' couldn't find her again. Just by a fluke, while on the Black Hill yonder, he'd caught the glimper o' sparks from our chimney. He was covered with cuts and bruises an' goin' cranky fast when he got to the hut.

'Bill had gone to tell the news; an' in a very few minutes a whole crowd o' Fritzes, an' Hanses, an' Hermans, an' Gottliebs was turned out an' ready for a start.

'They didn't want no coaxing. All they says was '*Ach Gott!*' an' they was fit for anythin'. By no manner o' means a bad lot,' here commented Ward, 'when you comes to get in with 'em an' know 'em like. Honest as the light, an' as hard-workin' as a bullock. Slow, maybe, but very sure. Full o' pluck as a soger-ant. Clannish as the Scotties, an' as savin'. I've got some real good friends among 'em now. An' their women-folks, too, is amazin' handy—make you up a square feed out o' a head o' cabbage an' a bit o' greenhide, I do believe, if they was put to it.

'Cert'nly their lingo 's the dead finish at first, till you gets used to it. I can *Deutsch sprechen*, myself, now, more'n a little.

'However, that's neither here nor there.

'Bill, my mate, as I told you, as much as me, havin' got full o' farmin', we used to take a prospectin' trip now and then among the ranges. But we never rose the colour. Never found a thing, 'cept scrub turkeys' eggs. Anyhow, we knew the country better'n the Germans, an' took the lead.

'Pitch dark it were, with heavy squalls, an' the river roarin' along half a banker.

'Fairleigh, after a stiff nip o' rum, began to find his senses again sufficient to give us the right course.

'Such scramblin', an' *coo-eein'*, an' slippin', an' tearin' about the Bush in the dark never, I should think,

happened before. But we managed to keep in some sort o' line an' cover a goodish track o' country.

'We must ha' gone fully five miles into the ranges, an' Bill an' me was gettin' to the end of our tether in that direction, when we found Mrs Fairleigh. Karl Itzig nearly falls over her, lyin' stretched out on a big flat rock.

'We thought she was dead; but, after a while, she comes to, light-headed, though, and not able to tell us anythin'. So we sends her home with a couple o' the chaps carryin' her.

'Well, we searched till daylight—rainin' cats an' dogs all the time. And we searched all the next day without any luck. That evenin' it cleared-up bright at sundown. Then Fairleigh gives in complete, an' has to be carried home to his wife.

'After a camp an' a snack the moon rose, an' we at it afresh. But we 'bouted ship now; for I was sure we'd overrun ourselves. There was full fifty of us, an' we circled, takin' in all the country we could. You see, we was hopin' for fresh tracks, an' we went with our noses on the groun' like a lot of dogs on the scent of an old man kangaroo, only a sight slower.

''Bout midnight I sees somethin' shinin'. It was the steel buckle on the front o' poor Dot's shoe. Only one of 'em, an' all soaked through with rain. No tracks; so we reckoned he'd been here last night in the heaviest of it.

'That little bit o' leather put us in better heart. But it wasn't to be. The sun was just risin', when, pretty

near done up, me an' Bill an' Wilhelm Reinhardt comes out o' the scrub on to a small bald knob, an' there, on a bare patch, lies Dot, stone dead, with his blue eyes wide open, starin' at the sky, an' the long curly hair, as his mother used to be so proud of, all matted with sand and rain.

'Four crows was sittin' overright him on the limb of a tree. I don't believe the poor little fellow 'd been dead very long—in the chill o' the early hours o' that mornin' likely. In one hand he had a bit o' stick. With the other he held his pinny, gathered up tight, same as you've seen kiddies do when they're carryin' somethin'.

'A real pitiful sight it were. It was as much as Bill an' me could stand. As for Wilhelm, he just sits down aside the body an' fair blubbers out.

'Well, with our *coo-ees*, the rest comes up in twos an' threes. Most of the Germans started to keep Wilhelm company. Foreigners, I think, must be either softer-hearted than us, or ain't ashamed o' showin' what they feel. Anyhow, there wasn't a dry eye among them Germans when they gathered round little Dot.

'Presently we starts to rig a sort o' stretcher with coats and a couple o' saplin's.

'Then Bill lifts the body up, an' as he does out from the pinny drops four o' the beautifulest specimens you'd ever wish to see—them on the table ain't a patch on 'em.

'I twigs them at once. So did three or four more old digger chaps.

'Then we takes a squint around, an' there, right against our noses, as one might say, ran the reef, with bits o' gold stickin' out o' the surface-stone an' glimperin' in the sun.

'I don't believe the Germans tumbled for a while. You see they was all new chums. Most likely none of 'em hadn't ever seen a natural bit o' gold afore.

'But the others did, quick. An', presently, a rather hot sort o' argument begins to rise.

'For a short time me an' Bill stands and listens to the wranglin'. Then I looks at Bill, and he nods his head, and I shoves my spoke in.

"Look here, chaps!" I says, "this may be only a surface leader, as some of you appears to think, or it may be a pile. I don't care a damn which it is! It's Fairleigh's first say. His kid, as lies there dead, found it! An', by the Lord, his father's goin' to be first served! I'm goin' now to peg out what I considers a fair prospectin' claim for him. That 'll be seen to after. When that's done you can strike in as you likes. If you objects to that you ain't men. Bill, here, 'll back me up, an', if you don't like it, we'll do it in spite o' you. We're all poor enough, God knows! But none of us ain't just lost an only child, an' self an' wife gone half mad with the sorrow of it."

'Well, sir, the Germans, who was beginning to drop to how the thing lay, set up a big shout o' "*Hoch! Hoch!*" meanin' in their lingo, "Hooray." An' the rest, what was right enough at bottom, an' only wanted showin' like what was the fair an' square thing to do,

quick agreed. All 'cept, that is, one flash sort of a joker from the Barossa. But, while I steps the groun', Bill put such a head on him in half-a-dozen rounds that his own mother wouldn't know him again.

'It were only a couple o' miles in a straight line from the settlement, through the ranges, to that bit of a bald hill.

'Exactly, almost, where you stood to-day, lookin' at the windin' plant o' the El Dorado, was where we found Dot.

'When the field was proclaimed the Warden didn't have much alteration to make in the p.c. I'd marked off for Fairleigh.

'You see it was only one man's groun' then. An' it turned out rich from the jump. An' it's gettin' better every foot. None o' the others, as the Company's bought an' 'malgamated with it, although joinin', can touch "Dot's."

'But Fairleigh's never to say held up his head sence that night.

'A week after we buried the child we carried the mother to rest beside him.

'Fairleigh must be a rich man now. Everythin' he touches, as the sayin' is, seems to turn to gold. He can't go wrong. But he seldom comes a-nigh the place. One of the first things he done when "Dot's" turned up such trumps, was to put five thousand pounds to mine and Bill's credit in the A—— bank. But we never touched it. Ever sence that night our luck's been right in. First we sells out No. 1 North to the Company

at a pretty stiff figure. Then we buys out No. 2 South an' seemingly we've struck it again, an' rich.'

'And, now,' I remark as my friend, his yarn finished, sits gazing meditatively at the glowing logs,—'and, now, all you want is a wife. Follow your mate's example, and make a home where you're making your money.'

Ward shook his head, smiling doubtfully, and, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, rose to go.

Just then Gretchen, buxom, and smiling also, appeared bearing a huge back-log in her arms. And when I saw the way my companion sprang up and rushed to meet and relieve her of the burden, and heard the guttural whispering that took place before the lump of timber reached its destination, I thought that, ere very long, all doubts would be dissipated, and that, even then, I sat within measurable distance of the future Mrs Ward.

A CAPE HORN CHRISTMAS.

ALL hands in Yamba hut had turned in, except a couple at the end of the long rough table.

These late birds were playing euchre by the flickering light of an evil-smelling slush lamp. The cook had banked up the fire for the night, but the myall ashes still glowed redly and cast heat around. On the stone hearth stewed a bucket of tea. But for the snores of the men in the double tier of bunks ranged ship-fashion along both sides of the big hut, the frizzling of the grease in the lamp, and the muttered exclamations of the players, everything was very quiet.

‘Pass me!’

‘Make it!’

‘Hearts!’

And both men dropped their hands and sprang up in affright as a wild scream rang out from the bunk just above them.

As they gazed, a white face, wet with the sweat of fear, poked out and stared down upon them with eyes in which the late terror still lived.

‘What the dickens is up?’ asked one, recovering from his surprise, whilst the grumbles of awakened sleepers travelled around the hut.

‘My God! what a dream! what a dream!’ exclaimed the man addressed, sticking out a pair of naked legs, and softly alighting on the earthen floor, and standing there trembling.

‘Shoo!’ said the station wit, as he turned for a fresh start; ‘it’s only Jack the Sailor had the night-horse.’

But the man, crouching close to the players, and wiping his pallid face with his loose shirt sleeve, still exclaimed,—

‘What a dream! My God! What a dream!’

‘Tell us what it were all about, Jack,’ asked one of the others, handing him a pannikin of tea. ‘It oughter been bad, judgin’ by the dashed skreek as you give.’

‘It was,’ said the other—a grizzled, tanned, elderly man—as he warmed his legs, and looked rather ashamed of himself. ‘But hardly enough to make such a row over as you chaps reckons I did. I was dreamin’,’ he continued, speaking slowly, ‘as I was at sea again. It was on Christmas Day, an’ the ship was close to Cape Horn. How I knowed that, I can’t tell. But the land was in sight quite plain. Me an’ another feller—I can see his ugly face yet, and sha’n’t never forget it—was makin’ fast one of the jibs. Presen’ly we seemed to ’ave some words out there, hot an’ sharp. Then I done a thing,

the like o' which ud never come into my mind when awake—not if I lived to the age of Methyuseler—I puts my sheath-knife into him right up to the handle.

'The weather were heavy, an' the ship a-pitchin' bowsprit under into a head sea. Well, I was just watchin' his face turn sorter slate colour, an' him clingin' on to a gasket an' starin' hard, when she gives a dive fathoms deep.

'When I comes up again I was in the water, an' there was the ship half-a-mile away.

'Swimmin' an' lookin' round, I spies the other feller alongside me on top of a big 'comber, with the white spume all red about him.

'Nex' minute, down he comes, an' I feels his two hands a-grippin' me tight by the throat. I expect's it was then I sung out an' woke myself,' and the man shivered as he gazed intently into the heart of the glowing myall ashes.

'Well, Jack Ashby,' said one of his hearers, gathering up the scattered cards, 'it wasn't a nice dream. If I was you I should take it as a warnin' never to go a-sailorin' no more. Never was at the game myself, and don't want to be. There can't be much in it, though, when just the very thoughts o' what's never 'appened, an' what's never a-goin' to 'appen, is able to give a chap such a start as you got.'

'Ugh!' exclaimed the sailor, getting up and shaking himself as he climbed into his bunk. 'No, I'll never go back to sea again!'

But, in course of time, Jack Ashby became tired of station life—became tired of the everlasting drudgery of the rouseabout, the burr-cutting, lamb-catching, and all the rest of it.

He had no more dreams of the kind. But when o' nights the wind whistled around and shook the crazy old hut, he would turn restlessly in his bunk and listen for the hollow thud of the rope-coils on the deck above, the call of 'All hands,' the wild racket of the gale, and the hiss of stormy waters.

So his thoughts irresistibly wandered back again to the tall ships and the old shipmates, and all the magic and mystery of the great deep on whose bosom he had passed his life. He knew that he was infinitely better off where he was—better paid, better fed, better off in every respect than he could ever possibly hope to be at sea.

Battling with his longing, he contrasted the weevilly biscuits and salt junk of the fo'k'stle with the wholesome damper and fresh mutton and beef of the hut.

He thought of the 'all night in' of undisturbed rest, contrasting it with the 'Watch ahoy! Now then, you sleepers, turn out!' of each successive four hours.

He thought, too, of tyrannous masters and mates; of drenched decks and leaking fo'k'stles, of frozen rigging, of dark wild nights of storm, and of swaying foot-ropes and thundrous canvas slatting like iron plates about his ears; of hunger, wet, and misery.

Long and carefully he thought of all these things, and weighed the balance for and against. Then, one morn-

ing, rolling up his swag hurriedly, he went straight back to them.

Even the thought of his dream had no power to stay him.

But he made a reservation to himself. Said he,—

‘No more deep water! I’ll try the coast. I’ve heard it’s good. No more deep water; and, above all, no Cape Horn!’

He shipped on board a coaster, and went trips to Circular Head for potatoes; got bar-bound for weeks in eastern rivers looking for maize and fruit; sailed coal-laden, with pumps going clan-ketty-clank all down the land, and finally, after some months of this sort of work, found himself in Port Adelaide, penniless, and fresh from a gorgeous spree. Here he fell in with an old deep-water shipmate belonging to one of the vessels in harbour.

‘Come home with us, Jack,’ said his friend. ‘She ain’t so bad for a limejuicer—patent reefs, watch an’ watch, an’ no stun’s’ls for’ard. The mate’s a Horse. But the ole man’s right enough; an’ he wants a couple o’ A.B.’s.’

‘No,’ said Jack Ashby, firmly, ‘I’ll never go deep water again. The coast’s the ticket for this child. I’ve got reasons, Bill.’

And then he told his friend of the dream.

The latter did not appear at all surprised. Nor did he laugh. Sailors attach more importance to such things than do landsmen. All he said was,—

‘The *Dido’s* a fine big ship. She’s a-goin’ home by

Good Hope. Was it a ship or a barque, now, as you was on in that dream?’

‘Can’t say for certain,’ replied Ashby, reflectively; ‘but, by the size o’ her spars, I should reckon she’d be full-rigged. Howsomever, if ever I clap eyes on his ugly mug again—which the Lord forbid—you may bet your bottom dollar, Bill Baker, as I’ll swear to that, with its big red beard, an’ the tip o’ the nose sliced clean off.’

‘A-a-a-h!’ said the other, staring for a minute, and then hastily finishing his pint of ‘sheoak.’ And he pressed Ashby no more to go to England in the *Dido*.

But the latter found it just then anything but easy to get another berth in a coaster. Also he was in debt to his boarding-house; and, altogether, it seemed as if presently he would have to take the very first thing that offered, or be ‘chucked out.’

‘Two A.B.’s wanted for the *Dido*,’ roared the shipping master into a knot of seamen at his office door one day shortly after Jack and his old shipmate had foregathered at the ‘Lass o’ Gowrie.’ And the former, feeling very uncomfortable, and as a man between the Devil and the Deep Sea, signed articles.

His one solitary consolation was that the *Dido* was not bound round Cape Horn. He cared for none other of the world’s promontories. Also, as he cheered up a little, it came into his mind that it would be rather pleasant than otherwise once more to have a run down Ratcliffe Highway, a lark with the girls in Tiger Bay, and a look-in at the old penny gaff in Whitechapel.

But the main point was that there was no Cape Horn. Had not Bill Baker told him so? 'Falmouth and the United Kingdom,' said the Articles. Certainly there was no particular route mentioned. But who should know if Bill Baker did not?

But all too surely had the thing that men call Fate laid fast hold on the Dreamer. And the boarding-house-keeper cashed his advance note—returning nothing—and carted him to the *Dido*, and left him stretched out on the fo'k'stle floor, not knowing or caring where he was, or who he was, or where he was going, and oblivious of all things under the sun.

Nor did he show on deck again until, in the grey of next morning, a man with a great red beard and a flat nose looked into his bunk and called him obscene names, and bade him jump aloft and loose the fore-topsail, or he would let him know what shirking meant on board of the *Dido*.

'This is a bad beginning,' thought Jack Ashby, as, with trembling body and splitting head, he unsteadily climbed the rigging, listening as one but yet half awake to the clank of the windlass pawls and the roaring chorus of the men at the brakes. 'That's the feller, sure enough!' he gasped, as, winded, he dragged himself into the fore-top. 'I'd swear to him anywhere. Thank the Lord we ain't goin' round the Horn! I wonder if he knowed *me*? He's the mate. An' Bill was right; he *is* a Horse. Damn deep water!'

'Now then, fore-top, there, shift your pins or I'll *haze* you,' came up in a bellow from the deck, making poor

Jack jump again as he stared ruefully down at the fierce upturned face, its red beard forking out like a new swab.

'Thank the Lord, we ain't goin' round the Horn!' said Jack Ashby, as, with tremulous fingers, he loosened the gaskets and let the stiff folds of canvas fall, and sang out to sheet home.

Down the Gulf with a fair wind rattled the *Dido*, through Investigator Straits and out into the Southern Ocean, whilst Jack cast a regretful look at the lessening line of distant blue, and exclaimed once more,—

'Damn deep water!'

That evening the officers spin a coin, and proceed to pick their respective watches.

To his disgust, Jack is the very first man chosen by the fierce chief mate, who has won the toss, and who at once says,—

'Go below the port watch!'—his own.

It is blowing a fresh breeze when he comes on deck again at eight bells. It is his wheel. He finds his friend Bill Baker there.

'East by sowthe,' says Bill emphatically, giving him a pitying look, and walking for'ard.

'East by sowthe it is,' replies Jack, mechanically.

Then, as he somewhat nervously, after the long absence, eyes the white bobbing disc in the binnacle, and squints aloft at the dark piles of canvas, it suddenly bursts upon him. Whilst he has been asleep the wind has shifted into the west. It blows now as if it meant to stay there. They are bound round Cape Horn after all.

Mind your hellum, you booby,' roars the mate, just

come on deck. 'Where are you going to with the ship—back to Adelaide? I'll keep an eye on you, my lad,' lurching aft, and glancing first at Jack's face and then at the compass.

Truth to tell, the latter had been so flustered that he had let the *Dido* come up two or three points off her course. But he soon got her nose straight again, with, for the first time, a feeling of hot satisfaction at his heart that, upon a day not far distant, he and the man with the red beard, and tip off his nose might, if there was any truth in dreams, be quits. Be sure that, by this Jack's story was well known for'ard of the foremast. Bill Baker's tongue had not been idle, and, although a few scoffed, more believed, and waited expectantly.

'There's more in dreams than most people thinks for,' remarked an old sailor in the starboard watch, shaking his head sagely. 'The first part o' Jack's has comed true. If I was Mister Horse I'd go a bit easy, an' not haze the chap about the way he's a-doing of.'

But the chief officer seemed to have taken an unaccountable dislike to Ashby from the moment he had first seen him. And this dislike he showed in every conceivable way until he nearly drove the poor chap frantic.

At sea an evil-minded man in authority can do things of this sort with impunity. The process is called 'hazing.' The sufferer gets all the dirtiest and most disagreeable of the many such jobs to be found on shipboard. He is singled out from his fellows of the watch and sent aloft with tarry wads to hang on to a stay by his eye-

lashes. Or he is set to scraping masts, or greasing down, or slung outboard on a stage scrubbing paintwork, where every roll submerges him neck high, whilst his more fortunate companions are loafing about the decks.

If the hazed one openly rebels, and gives his persecutor a good thrashing, he is promptly 'logged,' perhaps ironed, and at the end of the passage loses his pay, holding himself lucky not to have got six months in gaol for 'mutiny on the high seas.' There is another thing that may and does happen; and every day the crew of the *Dido* watched placidly for the heavy iron-clad block, or marlingspike, sharp-pointed and massive, that by pure accident should descend from some lofty nook and brain or transfix their first officer—the Horse, as unmindful of the qualities of that noble animal, they had named him. But Jack Ashby never thought of such a thing. Nor did he take any notice of friendly hints from his mates—also sufferers, but in a less degree—that the best of spike lanyards would wear out by constant use, and that the best-fitted block-strops would at times fail to hold.

Jack's mind was far too much occupied by the approaching test to which his dream was to be subjected to bother about compassing a lesser revenge that might only end in maiming.

He, by this, fully believed things were going to turn out exactly as he had seen them that night in Yamba men's hut in the far-away Australian Bush. Therefore he looked upon himself and his tyrant as lost men.

At times, even, he caught himself regarding the first

officer with an emotion of curious pity, as one whose doom was so near and yet so unexpected. And, by degrees, the men, recognising this attitude of his, and sympathising heartily with it in different fashions, and different degrees of credulity, forbore further advice, and waited with what patience they might.

It was getting well on towards Christmas.

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I no more wished to go to London *viâ* Cape Horn than did John Ashby. But my reasons were altogether different.

When I had engaged a saloon passage on the *Dido* it was an understood thing that she would take the other Cape for it. But a short four hours' fight against a westerly wind so sickened the captain that he put his helm up, and squared his yards, and shaped a course that would bring him closer to Staten Island than to Simon's Bay.

It was some time before I had any conception of how things stood for'ard, with respect at least to the subject of this story.

I saw, of course, that the chief officer was a bully, and that he was heartily disliked by the men. But of Jack Ashby and his dream I knew nothing. Nor, until my attention was especially drawn to it, did I perceive that he was undergoing the hazing process.

As the only passenger, and one who had paid his footing liberally, I was often on the fo'k'stle and in other parts of the ship supposed to belong peculiarly to the men.

Thus, one night, happening to be having a smoke on the top-gallant fo'k'stle, underneath which lay the quarters of the crew, I sat down on the anchor stock, and watched the cold-looking seas rolling up from the Antarctic Circle, and exchanging at intervals a word with the look-out man as he stumped across from rail to rail.

Close beside me was a small scuttle, with the sliding-lid of it pushed back.

I had scarcely lit my pipe when up through this, making me nearly drop it from my mouth, came a long, sharp scream as one in dire agony.

'What's the matter down there?' shouted my companion, falling on his knees and craning his head over the coamings of the hatch.

Without waiting for an answer, we both bolted on to the main deck and into the fo'k'stle, where could be heard broken murmurs and growlings from the sleepy watch who filled the double tier of open bunks running with the sheer of the ship right into the eyes of her.

And on one of these, as I struck a match and lit the swinging slush lamp, and glanced around me, I saw a man sitting, his bare legs dangling over the side. Down his pale face ran great drops of sweat, and his eyes were staring, glassy, and fixed. One or two of his mates tumbled out; others poked their heads over the bunk-boards and swore that it couldn't be eight bells already. But the man still gazed over and beyond us with that horrible stare in his dilated eyes, and when I laid my hand on him

he was rigid. Then one who, in place of drinking his 'tot' of rum that night, had treasured it up for another time, produced it; and, laying the man back, and forcing open the clenched teeth, we got some of it down his throat; and presently he came to himself and sat up.

His first words were,—

'I've had it again! Just the same—the mate an me!' Then, with a look around, 'I'm sorry to have roused ye up, mates. I'm all right now.' Then, to myself, 'How long afore we're off the Horn, sir?'

'About a week if the wind holds. Why?'

'Because,' replied he, lying back and rolling over in his blankets, 'I've got a week longer to live.'

'That was Jack Ashby, an' he's had his dream again,' said the lookout man in an awed voice as we hurried on deck, fearful of wandering bergs.

Then (his name was Baker) he told me the whole story, and, in spite of my utter incredulity, I became interested, and, having little to do, watched closely the progress of the expected drama.

Also, after that night, I had many a talk with Ashby. I found him a man rather above the average run of his class, and one open to reason and argument; nor, on the whole, very superstitious. But on the subject of his vision he was immovable.

'You saw the land in your dreams, did you not?' I once asked.

'Yes, sir,' replied he. 'Big cliffs, not more 'n a mile

away,' and he described its appearance, and the position of the vessel.

'Well, then,' I said, 'it may interest you to know that the skipper intends to keep well to the south'ard, and that we're more likely to sight the Shetlands than the Horn.'

But he only shook his head and smiled faintly as he replied,—

'He was goin' home by Good Hope, sir. But he didn't. What the skipper means to do, an' what the Lord wills is two very different things. My time's gettin' short; but we'll both go together—*him* an' me. I don't reckon as there 'll be any hazin' to speak of in the next world. P'r'aps it's best as it is. If I wasn't sure an' certain o' what's comin', I'd have killed him long ago. But,' he concluded, 'I'm ready. I've been showed how it's ordained to happen; an', so long as I've the company I want, I don't care.'

During these days, impressed, somehow, by the feeling of intense expectation that pervaded all hands for'ard, I took more notice of Mr Harris, the mate, than I had hitherto done.

'He was no favourite of mine, and, beyond passing the time of day, we had found very little to say to each other.

And now, although scouting the idea of anything being about to happen to the man, I watched him and listened to him with curiosity.

Certainly he was an ill-favoured customer. Besides being plentifully pitted with smallpox over what of his

face was visible through the red tangle of hair and beard, the fleshy tip of his nose had been sliced clean off, leaving a nasty-looking, flat, red scar.

This, he said, was the work of a Malay kreese, whilst ashore at Samarang on a drunken spree. But the captain once told me confidentially that common report around Limehouse and the Docks attributed the mishap to Mrs Harris and a carving-knife.

Be this as it may, he was a bad-tempered, overbearing brute, although, I believe, a good seaman.

At meal times he rarely spoke, but, gulping his food down, left the table as quickly as possible.

The captain, who occupied the whole of his time in making models of a new style of condenser, for which he had taken out a patent, but by no means could get to work properly, never interfered with his first officer, but left the ship entirely in his charge.

No thought of approaching evil appeared to trouble Mr Harris, and he became, if possible, more tyrannical in his behaviour towards the crew, Ashby in particular. Truly wonderful is it how much hazing Mercantile Jack will stand before having recourse to the limited amount of comparatively safe reprisal that a heavy object and a high altitude endows him with !

But the Jacks of the *Dido* were waiting, with more or less of faith, the fulfilment of their shipmate's dream.

It was on the 23d of December—which, by the way, was also the extra day we gained—that the strong westerlies, after serving us so well, began to haul to the south'ard.

'You'll see the Horn after all,' remarked the captain to me that morning. 'Two years ago I was becalmed close to it. But I scarcely think that such a thing will happen this time,' and off he went to his condenser.

It was bitterly cold, and the sharp wind from the ice-fields cut like a knife. The water was like green glass for the colour and clearness of it, the sky speckless, and as bitter looking as the water. Gradually freshening, and hauling still to the south, the wind at length made it necessary to shorten some of the plain sail the *Dido* had carried right across. On the 24th land was sighted, and the captain, coming on deck with his pockets full of tools and little tin things, told us that it was Cape Horn.

The fo'k'stle-head was crowded with men, one minute all gazing at the land, the next staring aft.

'What the deuce are those fellows garping at?' growled the mate, walking for'ard.

Whereupon the watchers scattered.

Looking behind me, I saw that Jack Ashby was at the wheel.

He smiled as his eye caught mine, and pointed one mittened hand at the chief officer's back. I looked at the land, and began for the first time, to feel doubtful.

Coming on deck that Christmas morning, I rubbed my eyes before being able to take in the desolation of the scene, and make sure that I was indeed on board the *Dido*.

The ship looked as if she had been storm-driven across the whole Southern Ocean, and then mopped all over with a heavy rain-squall.

The wet decks, the naked spars, the two top-sails tucked up to a treble reef, and seeming mere strips of canvas, grey with damp, the raffle of gear lying about, with here and there a man over his knees in water slowly coiling it up, hanging on meanwhile by one hand, combined, with the lowering sky and leaden sea, to make up a gloomy picture indeed. The ship was nearly close-hauled, and a big lump of a head-sea on, with which she was doing her level, or rather, most unlevel, best to fill her decks fore and aft.

Broad on the port bow loomed the land—great cliffs, stern and ragged—at whose base, through the thin mist that was softly drizzling, could be seen a broad white belt of broken water.

‘Cape Horn weather!’ quoth the captain at my elbow.

He was swathed in oilskins, and squinting rather anxiously at the sky.

‘The glass is falling,’ he continued; ‘but there’s more southing in the wind. Might give us a slant presently through the Straits of Le Maire.’

And with that, pulling out a bit of the condenser, and looking lovingly at it, he went below. The mate was standing near, staring hard at the land. It might have been the shadow of the sou’-wester on his face, but I thought he appeared even more surly and forbidding than ever.

Of course it was a holiday. During the last four hours both watches had been on deck shortening sail. After clearing up the washing raffle of ropes, and leaving a man at the wheel and another on the lookout, they were free to go into the fo'k'stle, and smoke or sleep, as they pleased.

Dinner—a curious acrobatic feat that Christmas day in the *Dido's* cabin—over, I donned waterproofs and sea-boots, and, putting four bottles of rum in a handbag, which I slung over my shoulder, I stepped across the washboards and made for the fo'k'stle.

Creeping from hold to hold along the weather bulwarks, at times up to my waist in water, I wondered how any ship could pitch as the *Dido* was doing and yet live.

One moment, looking aft, you would imagine that the man at the wheel was about to fall on your head; the next that the jibbooms were a fourth mast; whilst incessantly poured such foaming torrents over her fo'k'stle that, as I slowly approached, I seriously doubted of getting in safely with my precious freight. Luckily, the men were watching me, and a couple, running out, caught hold of my hands, roaring in my ear,—

‘Run, sir, when she lifts again!’

And, making a dash for it, we got through the doorless entrance just in time to escape another avalanche.

I found the fo'k'stle awash, chests and bags lashed into lower bunks, and the greater part of both watches sitting on the upper ones, smoking, and eyeing the

cold sparking water as it rushed to and fro their habitation.

My arrival, or rather, perhaps, my cargo, was hailed with acclamation.

The captain certainly had sent them a couple of dozen of porter. But, as one explained,—

‘What’s the good of sich rubbishin’ swankey as that when a feller wants somethin’ as ’ll warm ’is innards this weather?’

‘Where’s Ashby?’ I asked, hoisting on to a bunk amongst the crowd.

‘Here I am, sir,’ replied a voice close to in the dimness.

‘Well,’ I said, cheerily, ‘what did I tell you? Here’s Christmas Day well on for through, everything snug—if damp—and nothing happening. Give him a stiff nip, one of you, and let us drink to better times, and no more nonsense. Once we’re round the corner, yonder, this trip will soon be over.’

‘Thank you kindly, sir,’ replied Ashby, as he emptied the pannikin, which was being so carefully passed around by the one appointed, who, holding on like grim death, after every poured-out portion, held the bottle up to the light to see how the contents were faring. ‘Thank you kindly, sir,’ said he. ‘But Christmas Day isn’t done yet.’

Even as he spoke, a form clad in glistening oilskins came through the water-curtain that was roaring over the break of the fo’k’stle, and, leaning upon the windlass, sang out,—

‘You there, Ashby?’

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ replied the seaman.

‘Lie out, then,’ continued the mate, for he it was, ‘and put another gasket around that inner jib! It’s coming adrift! Bear a hand, now!’

The ship for a minute seemed to stand quite still, as if waiting to hear the answer, and each man turned to look at his neighbour.

Then Ashby, jumping down, with a curious set expression on his face, walked up to the mate and said very loud,—

‘Don’t send a man where you’d be frightened to go yourself.’

‘You infernal soger!’ shouted the other, enraged beyond measure at this first sign of rebellion in his victim. ‘Come out here and I’ll show you all about that! Come out and crawl after me, and I’ll learn you how to do your work!’

He disappeared, and Ashby followed him like a flash. In a trice every soul was outside—some clinging to the running gear around the foremast, others on the galley, others in the fore rigging.

I could see no sign of any of the head sails being adrift. All, except the set fore-topmast stay-sail, lay on their booms, masses of sodden canvas, off which poured green cataracts as the *Dido* lifted her nose from a mighty plunge.

For a minute or two, so dense was the smother for’ard of the windlass bits, that nothing was visible but foam. But, presently, as the *Dido* paused, weaving her head

backwards and forwards as if choosing a good spot for her next dive, we saw, clear of everything, and high in air fronting us, the two men.

One was on the boom, the other on the foot-rope. The topmost man seemed to be hitting rapidly at the one below him, who strove with uplifted arm to shield himself.

Perhaps for half a minute this lasted. Then the ship gave her headlong plunge, the crest of a great wave met the descending bows, and when the bitter spray cleared out of our eyes again the lower figure was missing.

From the other, overhanging us, a black streak against the sullen sky, came what sounded like a faint cheer. There was a rapid throwing motion of the arm released from the supporting stay, followed by a clink of steel on the roof of the galley. Then came once more the roaring plunge, and slow upheaval as of a creature mortally wounded.

But, this time, the booms were vacant, and a man beside me was curiously examining a sheath-knife, bloody from point of blade to tip of wooden handle.

Louder shrieked the gale through the strained rigging, and more heavily beat the thundrous seas against the *Dido's* sides, as, breathless, drenched and horrified, I staggered into the captain's state-room.

'I think I've got it now,' said he, smiling, and holding up a thing like a tin saucepan.

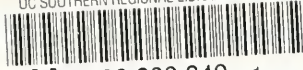
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